

J.E. DAELMAN

AMAZON #1 BESTSELLING INTERNATIONAL AUTHOR



It's not easy to
break with tradition
and boundaries.

KINGDOM OF WOLVES

BOOK 2: BLACKSHADOW



Book Two – Blackshadow

J.E Daelman

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Therefore, although some words/terms you may think are incorrect are correct in one or more states.

No AI programme has been used in the writing of this book, the cover images or design.



Kingdom Of Wolves is best read in book order as book one is world building and helps the understanding in the books that follow.



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Chapter 1



CONNELL

Striding through the pack house, I watch every member who passes by me, because I have to choose a Beta and whomever I choose to fill the position has to have determination, honesty, reliability, and honor. As it's an important position I can't and won't settle for anything less.

Bladrick is one of my inner circle, but he gossips far too much to be a good Beta, and keeping lips firmly sealed is something that I will insist upon. He is, however, good at following any orders that are thrown his way.

Don't think he will be a good one either, I hear Knight my wolf say to me. I'm not surprised to hear his opinion, and now that we are Alpha, he is much more active in his communications with me.

Noah was a high possibility, but his fighting skills are not as good as required. He can remain silent, and is trustworthy, but the Beta has to have my back and, if he cannot fight strongly, then he is not worthy of the status.

Teach him to fight better, he'll be good then. I can't help but agree with Knight; Noah is a good pack member and is ranking higher with being a part of the inner circle.

William has no ambition to be more than a reliable pack member. He is of warrior status but prefers to assist around the pack wherever his help is needed.

Should be Omega, Knight chuckles in that wolfish way he has.

Caleb, now he's the one that could be a second Beta. It's not unknown for a pack to have two Betas and it may be good to

have Caleb close. He is calm and rational, keeps to the inner circle but never causes drama of any kind.

Caleb good. Make good second Beta.

'Yeah, I think so too, Knight. It's a shame we lost Gabriel to Tatiana and the Wolfsfoot Town, well it's a pack now. He was ideal, but let's be honest, he's a great Alpha and Tatiana deserves the happiness she is having.' I can hear Knight mumbling agreement and he is the same, as I feel shame at what happened to Tatiana in the pack and our part in it.

Lost Carter Goldman too. But going with his son was to be expected.

Nodding, although Knight cannot see me doing that, I mumble agreement because losing Beta Goldman was a hard knock for the Blackshadow Pack.

Although the Blackshadow Pack has never had a she-wolf as Beta, I'm not averse to that if it's the right person. Iona Whiteclaw is a top warrior in our pack, she plays around my thoughts along with Declan O'Hara.

Sighing to myself, I continue making my way to my office. I have some reorganizing to do for the pack's benefit and I want to check in the pack records when the whipping post punishments were started.

Maybe I could hold Beta challenges? That could easily bring out the strongest of the pack that has any interest in climbing into the higher ranks. But I only want pack members who can tick the boxes to have all the qualities I want and need.

I come to a halt in the office doorway when I see Zoella placing paperwork on my desk. She's mumbling to herself under her breath. I can't help but think that she must talk in her sleep, because I'm not sure I've ever seen her be quiet.

"What are you saying?" I ask as I approach the desk. Now I can't help the smirk that crosses my face when Zoella jumps a mile high and squeaks with fright.

“Nothing Alpha Connell. I was just reminding myself of all the things I have to do this morning.”

“Okay. Let’s get on and get things done then, shall we?” I quirk an eyebrow as I watch her scurry out of the office.

Although she is a gossip, she is good at her job. Keeping everything in its place, office tidy and the filing up to date. Those things I cannot complain about, but she has been warned if she gossips about anything she hears within the office she would be in serious trouble.

Checking the paperwork on my desk, none urgently needs my attention. My mind wanders back to the challenge I’m thinking of holding and making sure the option is open for everyone.

Walking over to the wall safe, I punch in the code and take out the journal that covers the pack’s history, and where, as Alpha, I will now add anything significant for future generations of Alpha leaders.

Placing the journal on the desk, I sit and take a deep breath before I open and search for anything regarding the whipping post. I have a bad feeling my father introduced it, and with that in mind I find the reference to Alpha Torrance and read the things he introduced to the pack and the things he abolished.

Here we are, whipping post, comments being:

As the Alpha of this pack, I need to teach them obedience. It is the way forward, and fear, of course, as a healthy dose of fear is good to get an Alpha’s wishes done without question. As future Alphas, you cannot afford to be squeamish. Take the pack in hand and bend them to your will. Whipping post introduced and used to quieten any of the pack who question my authority. Follow my lead in the future.

Knight speaks in the front of my mind, and on the verge of pushing me to shift because his anger is raging. *It’s good he is dead, or we kill him.*

'He is dead. He can't hurt anybody now, Knight. Let's do what is right. Make sure the pack grows and is stronger. It's a long road, but we can do it. I'll speak to Flint and see if he can come and help with the challenge for the Beta position, or positions.'

Okay, that's good. I feel Knight move back in my mind and visualize him curling into a ball with his nose tucked under his belly.

Continuing to read the idiocy my father introduced to the pack, I flow between annoyed, angry and shocked. Picking up the pen I write my name on the first fresh blank page with a flourish, and satisfaction flows through me as I now know I can clean up the bad procedures from this pack and bring hope, kindness, and prosperity to us all like before my father took over the pack.

Placing the pen down on the desk, I pick up the journal and take it back to the safe, put it safely inside and lock the door. Turning, I stride out of the office and head to the kitchen, and I have a purpose in my stride.

Opening the kitchen door, I watch and listen to Dahlia giving out orders to Isla, Nora, and Betina. I know she's been in charge a long time, but her attitude is not what I want for this pack any longer.

"Dahlia?" I ask quietly, in a questioning way.

Dahlia spins around and I see a tint of a blush running into her cheeks. "Good morning, Alpha Connell. What can I do for you?"

"You can stop speaking to the pack members like they are trash for a start," I state while remaining quiet but having firmed my voice, lacing it with a little Alpha command. "Now, follow me."

I don't wait for Dahlia, as I expect her to follow without question. Striding back to my office I calm myself in the time it takes to return because what I feel like is ripping her attitude to pieces in front of the entire pack.

Within the pack, I have a few members that I need to adjust their attitudes, and if they cannot be rehabilitated, then I'll be forced to remove them from the pack.

Taking a seat behind the desk, I steeple my hands and watch Dahlia fidget from one foot to another uncomfortably. "Take a seat."

Keeping my eyes on Dahlia as she sits, and wrings her hands together, I inwardly smile because she's not so brave when she is confronted by someone of higher ranking than herself.

"Now, what I witnessed in the kitchen will not happen again. You will not speak that way to the members of the pack that work alongside you in the kitchen or around the pack house. They help because it's the way they provide for the pack. We cannot all be leaders, warriors, doctors or other. Each and every member of the pack is valued, and I don't care what happened before I was the Alpha. I care what happens while I am Alpha." Taking a breath, I continue, maintaining a calm outer façade, while inside I'm furious with her. "You will speak to everyone politely and calmly. You have given wonderful service to the pack, Dahlia. There is no questioning that. But, understand, treating anyone as I saw just now is not going to happen any longer."

"Yes, Alpha." Keeping her eyes on a spot in front of her, making sure she doesn't challenge me by looking into my eyes. I note she has her head slightly to the side, showing respect by opening one side of her neck to my view.

"I hope we are clear on that, because I do not want to have to revisit this conversation."

"I understand, Alpha."

"Now, the overrun garden out the back of the kitchen, I'm going to have it cleaned up. We will get the garden back to growing herbs and vegetables. I will find pack members to assist, and you will not harass them. If they ask for your opinion, you will give it politely, and with respect. I will watch how the work flows and develops."

“Silas used to run the garden until Alpha Torrance removed him and ordered him to do all the pack runs to Wolfsfoot for groceries and any odd jobs required,” Dahlia informs me, and she looks fairly annoyed telling me this too.

“I will speak to Silas about the garden project. Now you get back to work, and Dahlia, I want your attitude changed, and I want it changed from the moment you walk out of this office.” I give her a stern look that tells her I’ll brook no argument on the matter.

“Yes, Alpha.” Jumping from her seat, she scurries out of the office and I lean back smirking because putting the fear in her felt good.

Mind linking Caleb to come to the office, I wait while reading reports on the rogue issue that is hampering the Spirit Walker Pack. They are the nearest pack to the rogues and they have a lot of border they need to patrol. I cannot afford to send warriors at this time as the pack is much smaller now than before my father took over as Alpha.

The Winterstorms, Tatiana’s parents, were great pack leaders and if I could bring them back, I would. My father deserved all he got and more, if that was possible. I will do everything I can to get the pack back to the place the Winterstorms had it because it was a warm and happy pack at that time. I remember little about them, but I have spoken to many of the shifter council members and listened to the warmth they have when they speak of them.

“You need me, Alpha?” Caleb asks as he walks into the office and stands in front of my desk.

“Yes. I want you to work alongside me if you would. I need someone to follow me and make sure orders I give are fulfilled. This pack is going to have a major facelift and we are going to succeed in becoming the pack that the Winterstorms envisioned.”

Caleb looks surprised, but I see a look of respect cross his face before he gives his head a tip to the side, showing his respect

for me in the best way that he can. "Yes, Alpha."

Now I'm surprised that he's called me Alpha twice now, because as my inner circle they have always called me Connell. It seems decisions I am making are changing how I'm viewed by the pack, and that is a gift, and one I will only hold dear to my heart.

"Okay, let's get started. We have some pack members to speak to in a short while. Arrange for Shifter Council Member Flint to visit, tell him it's important and I need his input. Second, find Silas and bring him to the kitchen garden. Third, arrange all inner circle to be in my office after tonight's meal."

Walking out of the office with Caleb beside me, I feel a mixture of anticipation, nervousness, but also excitement at what is to come. The only thing I regret at this point, and will always regret, is the death of the Winterstorms and the treatment Tatiana had to endure, and of course, my part in it.

Chapter 2



CONNELL

Silas is pointing out to me where the vegetables had been grown and the herb garden that is nonexistent nowadays. I can see he has sadness about him while he's filling me in on what had been.

I grip his shoulder and look him in the eye. "Silas, are you up for getting the garden back to its former glory? Have herbs and vegetables growing once more? I can provide a greenhouse if you feel you need one, because that one is going to have to be ripped down. It's had its time and isn't safe anymore."

"I can do that, Alpha Connell."

Slapping his shoulder, I grin. Rolling up my sleeves, I stride over to the old shed and open the door, which sadly falls off its hinges but I catch it before it hits my head.

Caleb rushes over to me and grabs the door. "Did it hit you? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Get Bladrick, Noah, William and the new guy Brian here. They need to build up a covering of sweat." I give him a toothy grin.

Chuckling before I see his eyes glaze whilst contacting the others I step into the shed and pick up a spade. Throwing it over my shoulder, once I step outside, I look at Silas and lift a questioning eyebrow.

"Come on, Alpha, let's make a start," Silas growls, and grabs himself a spade. I follow him to the top of the garden where the fencing is leaning at a terrible angle and we dig.

Silas, Caleb, Bladrick, Noah, William and Brian dig, rip out, and remove overgrown sods of grass and rubble that's been thrown into the garden over the years. We are all hot, sweaty and dirty when Evangeline brings out a large jug of juice and a pile of sandwiches.

None of us pay her any mind, apart from a thank you, as we all take what we want. She was an inner circle member at one time, but no longer. Caleb snickers as Evangeline gives Noah a suggestive glance. Noah, however, scrunches his nose before turning around and finding somewhere to sit on the ground that hasn't yet been dug over. As she is stomping back to the kitchen, we all are tempted to laugh, but I give them a headshake of no, and it settles us all down.

Hearing my phone ringing from where I'd left my jacket, I walk over and take it out of the jacket pocket. Seeing its Flint, I quickly take the call. "Hello Council Member Flint."

"Hello, Alpha Connell. I've checked my calendar and can make it over to you next week, probably Wednesday, if that is good with you?"

"Yes, that is good. I will have a room ready for you. I want to speak to you regarding pack issues and an idea that I will need your advice on." I'm watching everyone digging once more and grin at the clumsy way Bladrick is holding that spade. He's going to have a lot of blisters this evening.

"Alright, then I'll see you Wednesday. It will be mid-morning before I get to you."

"Thank you, Council Member Flint."

"Just call me Flint, none of this council member nonsense. It's a damn mouthful, after all."

"Again, thank you Flint. I will see you Wednesday." Hanging up, I feel excited about his visit and hope that the challenge will be legitimate. I also want to discuss an idea I have running around the back of my mind that I'll need the shifter council's permission to execute.

Seeing William fall on his ass has me smirking. “Come on, William, no slacking. Get off your ass and get digging.”

Hearing William cursing under his breath, I chuckle and grab the spade once more, digging with even more gusto after speaking with Flint. Things are looking good, and I hope much brighter for the pack’s future.

Six hours later, we are all fairly exhausted from the digging. But the entire garden area is cleaned, dug over where needed, and the fence has been mended. Thankfully, it was only in need of the posts being repositioned.

Silas is looking like he’s three feet taller than this morning with the pride he is emitting. We can all feel his emotions flowing. Knight takes me by surprise when he speaks to me. *Good job and the garden will produce well for the pack. Silas’ wolf, Charcoal, is proud of what they are doing. I spoke to him about Silas, and he said Silas was ready to let go and had been praying to the Goddess Selene to take him home. Now Charcoal says he feels purpose and will be okay.*

‘I will watch him closely, Knight. I do not want to lose pack members because they feel they have no purpose. We need Silas to have the value he had originally as the gardener, and still has, as an important member of the pack. Nothing is more important than feeding or guarding the pack.’ I feel Knight settle back in my mind, and I watch everyone slowly packing away the equipment.

“Silas, write a list of what you need to get the garden started again. We need to be able to supply the pack with fresh vegetables. It’s not only cost effective but far healthier for us. It will hit Wolfsfoot somewhat, losing some of our custom, but we need to be more self-sufficient.”

“Yes, Alpha. I will do it this evening and bring it to the office in the morning.” Silas walks away toward his cottage, which is only a short way from the pack house. It was always the gardener’s cottage and thinking about it, I’m surprised my father didn’t throw him out of it when he was no longer gardening.

“Come on, you lot, let’s get washed up and then eat. Once we’ve eaten, I want you all in the office. Brian, I want you in the office as well.”

Brian looks shocked, but gives me a dip of his head. “Yes, Alpha I’ll be there.”

Washed up, clean clothes and feeling good about the hard work we’ve done today, I walk down to the dining room and take my seat at the head table. Noah and William walk into the room, give me a nod before picking up a jug of juice and bringing it to the table.

“All that digging has given me a raging thirst,” Noah states as he pours himself a tall glass of the juice.

“My wolf was snickering in my mind, and I blocked him out in the end,” William grins. “He’s an ornery critter.”

William’s wolf Cobalt is ornery, I have to agree, but he is a large wolf who is angry he hasn’t found his mate yet. Most of the pack is without a mate, and it’s something we need to rectify. Maybe another mating ball would be in order, even reach out to packs outside of our surrounding area.

Thinking about it, we had no matches within our pack at the last mating ball, so reaching out to other areas has to be more productive. Something else I need to speak to Flint about next week.

Later in my office, I sit behind the desk and look from one of the inner circle to another. Brian is standing near the door, looking like he’d rather be anywhere but here.

“Everyone, please take a seat. That includes you, Brian, but close the door first.” I watch him as he does as he’s asked and take a seat before I look again over everyone. “Okay, this meeting is important as I’m looking for a Beta that is strong, fights well, is capable of holding things together if I’m indisposed, and always puts the pack first. I’m looking for another Beta Goldman.”

“The nearest person we have to Beta Goldman is Caleb,” Noah states.

Noah, not so stupid after all. I hear Knight state before chuckling in his gruff manner. I ignore him as the last thing I need is a conversation with him at the same time as my inner circle.

“I agree, but I also need to know if we have anyone that we can promote to that position. I don’t want to just put Caleb in and then the pack saying I’ve overlooked someone that should have had the opportunity. I also want she-wolves to have the choice, hence, I’m going to speak to Council Member Flint next week when he comes to visit about holding a challenge, and anyone that would like to try out for the position can.”

“That’s a good idea,” Caleb says, and everyone looks over his way.

“I would have thought you’d be against the idea?” Bladrick looks at Caleb.

“I’m not against it at all. I agree, the best person for the position is required. It’s a ranked position and needs to be held by someone who, as said, is like Beta Goldman. I’ll try out for the position the same as everyone else.” Caleb looks at Bladrick as though he’s waiting for a comeback, but Bladrick shrugs his shoulders and looks over at me.

“Okay, I’ll speak to Flint about the competition. But the sooner we hold this the better because I need a Beta and until then Caleb you will act as Beta until further notice,” taking him by surprise but he gives me a small tip of the head as he responds, ‘Alpha,’ in agreement.

“Brian, would you go to the kitchen and bring a pot of coffee through, please? Then I want to speak to you about something.”

“Of course, Alpha,” Brian replies before leaving the office.

Holding my hand up to show everyone to be quiet, I link Iona and ask how Brian has worked out so far. We had made him a pack member, but I need to know what his general attitude and behavior is like.

Iona quickly replies, *'Alpha, Brian has been hardworking, reliable, honest and a first-class pack member. His fighting is outstanding, and he never uses it to cause harm, although he has put a lot of pack members and warriors on their asses.'*

'Okay, Iona, thank you.' I am more than happy with that report.

I've watched Brian when I've been out of the office and pack house, and I've seen him helping warriors develop new styles in their fighting. It's one of the reasons I think he's going to be a ranked member.

Walking back into the office, Brian places the large tray with the coffee pot and everything we need for drinks. He even has a plate of cookies, which has Noah grabbing at least four before anyone else can get to them.

Once Brian has passed out drinks and retaken his seat, I ask my question. "When you were in the Northern Parklands, were there other people that wanted out, and who would be useful to this pack? I ask because we need to grow the pack, find mates if possible and help any wolf shifter that was in your position."

Recalling our first meeting, I was informed he had been a hunter for the rogues. He also made things from the hides of the animals for some of them. When I first spoke to him, he'd had enough of the same thing, day in, day out, and was also sick of forestry management. I remember I was told his mate had died, and he was afraid he was turning feral, but he has shown no signs of that happening.

"Yes, there were others that wanted to find a pack that would take them in, allow them to join and become valuable pack members. One young lady is a skilled seamstress. She makes clothes that have been fought over. She never has found her mate, as she's never left the Parklands. Brian speaks to me with no sign of being misleading. "I can think of others that have never had opportunities too."

“Do you think if you went to speak to them, some would come here? Are there any abilities we can tap into?”

“I can speak to some of them. I won’t persuade them, but I will tell them my story, how I came here, was taken in and allowed to join. But I’ll also tell them what a good pack this is, and about the opportunities they could have. Then they can make up their own minds.” Brian is showing how highly he considers the Blackshadow Pack with this statement, and the fact he shouldn’t have to push anyone to come. They need to make up their own minds.

“Good. Take William with you, but be back before Tuesday evening. That gives you five days.”

I open the top drawer of the desk and hand a set of keys to William. “Take the truck, get to the Parklands and back before Tuesday evening. I want no excuses, as I want you both back and available if the challenges are set for the end of the week.”

Both Brian and William walk out of the office and I see Noah itching to go with them, but I point my finger at him. “You’re staying here. We have work to be doing and I need you here to help do it. Okay, that’s it for tonight. Caleb, arrange for a warrior meeting tomorrow in the ballroom. I want to speak to all the warriors about the Beta Challenge. Now, off you go and get some rest.”

After watching Bladrick, Noah, and Caleb leave the office I sigh as I stand from my desk, ready to head to my room, shower and get some sleep. But I look at my phone when it pings, letting me know I have a message.

Flint: Shifter Council Meeting and all Alphas have to attend

Connell: When?

Flint: Two weeks, on Friday I think, but I’ll confirm next week.

Connell: OK.

I know the council have meetings periodically so I’m not worried, but I hope it’s going to be at Wolfsfoot or here

because if I have to travel to the council's land it's going to be a hell of a trip and take days out of my week I can't afford at the moment.

Chapter 3



CONNELL

Sunday morning and for now, the work doesn't stop. I am determined that the pack is going to be turned around and become a place they can all be proud of.

The pack ranking is paramount to the workings of the pack, and the order that it needs. Caleb is calmly doing as I ask, and doing it competently, showing me he's a good choice of Beta or second Beta.

Walking into the ballroom I look around at the warriors that are waiting for this meeting to start. Stepping to the front of everyone, I hold my hand up in a 'quiet' gesture.

"Good morning, everyone. I know it's unusual for me to call you all for a meeting. I have the patrols covered, but I'll need you, Oscar, to fill those warriors in on what is said here this morning."

Oscar, the Head Warrior for the pack, gives me a slight nod of the head before stepping to my side.

"Okay, as you all know, I need a Beta. I don't want to select one thinking I have the best person for the position, then find I could have had a better one. I'll be speaking with Councilman Flint when he comes here on Wednesday, but regardless of his opinion, I've decided to hold a Beta Challenge."

The murmurs of excitement buzz around the room and I see Declan, Ryan and Armon fist bump each other while having huge smiles on their faces. What else I notice is Swan and Iona looking down at the ground with no outward sign of wanting to engage. Then it hits me!

“All she-wolves in the pack will also be allowed to compete for the position. A Beta wolf must possess strength, capability, and commitment to the task.”

Swan and Iona look at each other, then at me, giving me a look that says, we are going to do our best. I acknowledge that with a slight tip of my head. Then continue with the meeting.

I give an outline of what I would expect as my Beta, the hours that they would be required to work, which, let's be honest, is whenever I would call on them. But also, the way they would be expected to interact with the pack.

“I have sent William along with Brian to find anyone interested in becoming a pack member from the Northern Parklands. I know they are rogues but, as you've all seen with Brian, they are rogues because they have been dealt a bad hand. From what Brian has told Iona and then relayed to me, these people have come from other areas, not from Eclipse, Blood Pearl, or Spirit Walker Packs.”

Hallec gains my attention when he asks, “Will we put them through a trial period first?”

“Yes, I think we'd have to be watchful to start with, and give them a month to see how they settle, how they like the pack, and how we feel about them. But we all know that being a part of a pack is what our wolves need. That's why the Northern Parklands evolved to what it is today.”

“What is it today?” Weldon asks.

“It's a nameless pack of shifters that found each other wandering, and they needed companionship for their wolves. That caused them to congregate, and from a few became more. It's not a town like Wolfsfoot, it's just an area where they've thrown up dwellings the best they can. I have heard they have some skills like seamstress, hunter, and cook. These skills can be eased into the pack, giving these people the grounding that they need.”

Swan speaks, gaining everyone's attention, "We may find mates, too. I've visited every pack around our area and my mate is not here. Maybe I'll find him among the people who come from the Parklands."

Mumbles run through the ballroom at the thought of finding mates. It's something all of us would like but have never found. It's something I have yearned for, but like everyone here have had no luck as yet.

"Caleb, I want you and the warriors here to go around and speak to the pack members. Feel out how they react to the idea, and what other ideas they may have to bring new members to the pack."

"Yes, Alpha Connell." Caleb turns from where he'd been standing on the opposite side to Oscar, and speaks to the room. I turn to look at Oscar and see his eyes have an orange tinge, telling me his wolf Conan is near the surface.

'Conan, we all want our mates and I'll do everything I can to bring new people here to find them.'

Alpha, you are doing good things for the pack. I want my mate.

I hear Conan mind linking and I nod to Oscar, who is sharing the connection. Knight jumps forward and pushes power toward Conan.

We will find mates, but you and I know they are not here, and we've not encountered them yet.

I snap the connection by pushing Knight back, and seeing Conan recede to the back of Oscar's mind, I grasp his shoulder and give it a reassuring squeeze.

"Okay, everyone, that is all for today, but I will give out the rules for the challenge soon, and I'll give them to Oscar so he will be able to update you all. Make sure the patrols are covered for the borders. The threat from the east is not over, and we may need to help Spirit Walker Pack if the rogues from no-man's-land try to invade again."

We all know if they invade Lyle's pack, then we at Blackshadow, Blood Pearl and Wolfsfoot Packs will be next. We are all in the line of fire, and Eclipse is the furthest and safest, but it would not remain that way if the other packs were overrun.

Leaving the meeting, I walk over to the kitchen and open the door quietly, checking the behavior of Dahlia, because I'm not convinced she will have changed her attitude immediately. It is a bad habit she has gotten herself into, but she'll learn quickly to treat other pack members respectfully or she'll find herself in hot water.

"Get that lunch tray out before we have complaints. Hey, move it Evangeline, stop dawdling. Betina, for goodness' sake MOVE IT!" she ends shouting, which has me cringe because her voice is like nails on a chalkboard.

Walking to the back door, I give Dahlia a raised eyebrow as I pass, which has her cringing, realizing I've just heard her shouting at a pack member. Opening the door, I take a deep pull of the fresh air, and sigh as it fills my lungs. I prefer being outdoors, but it is necessary for me to be inside more than half the time.

Silas stands from where he's been digging a vegetable plot and gives me a nod. "I placed the list on your desk, Alpha Connell."

"Oh, that's good. I'll look in a while. Now, what are we up to at this point?" I ask and have a sneaky look at Bladrick and Noah, who are working further to the top of the garden.

"We are digging the plot, ready for planting. I have some plants at the cottage as I have a small garden myself. I always have something growing, so I'll check what seedlings I have that are strong enough to plant here," Silas states, and he looks more than a little excited about it all.

"You need a new greenhouse, potting shed and equipment shed by the look of it, Silas. All three of these looks like they need demolishing. If we are going to revive the garden, then

let's do it right. Let's do it the best way that we can." I look around at the garden and see where the plots are marked with posts and twine. Making my way to the shed, I take out a spade and pick a plot, then start to dig.

Three hours later, I have dug three plots ready for planting. Noah, Bladrick and Silas have the others dug over and ready. The next job is taking down the old greenhouse, but looking at the time, we've all missed lunch and I need to get back inside to cover other things.

Giving the spade to Silas, I leave Noah and Bladrick working and head to my room, where I shower and change into clean clothes. Meeting Caleb as I enter my office, he gives me a grin before taking a seat in front of my desk. "Alpha, I've spoken to most of the pack. Not the warriors on patrol, but the pack working around the house. All would be happy to have new members, but are worried that they are rogues and if they would settle and fit in."

Nodding as he speaks, because I understand where the pack is coming from. It is a worry at the back of my mind, but if we don't take the chance, we'll never know.

"All we can do is try. We'll have to watch them carefully to start with. But they will have to join the pack, then I'll be linked to them. As you know being linked, I'll feel if they have evil intent and if they do, I'll end them myself," I growl as Knight surfaces at the thought anyone would threaten the pack.

"I agree. We can have them working alongside pack members. If they have warrior potential, then we can place them as we did Brian. Kitchen help can work with Dahlia and the others. One way or another, we can keep our eye on them." Caleb leans forward in his seat as he speaks and I can see he's given it some thought.

"Let's see what Brian and William report when they get back, and I have to have the meeting with Flint on Wednesday. Now, come with me. We are going to do something I've wanted to do for a long time." I walk out of the office and

directly to the garden shed, where I find a pick and spade. Throwing the pick to Caleb, I grin as he follows me, without asking what's going on, to the whipping post.

Pointing at the post, I smirk. "Let's get this gone. I never want to see anything like this on the pack's property ever again."

Working together, we give bows and grins to the pack members who congregate to watch what we are doing. Cheers, applause and tears of joy are thrown out as the post is dragged out of the ground, leaving both myself and Caleb sweaty and dirty once more.

Turning to the pack, I shout, "NEVER AGAIN WILL WE HAVE SUCH A THING. KNOW THAT THIS ALPHA ABHORS THIS TYPE OF THING AND I WILL NEVER ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN AGAIN."

Cheers ring out and I walk inside, leaving Caleb, and anyone willing to help, to fill in the hole that removing the post has made. The laughter I'm leaving behind tells me what I've done is the right thing, even if I didn't know it already.

Another wash up and I'm back at my desk, stomach growling as I've still not eaten today. I look at the list Silas left, and I add the greenhouse, potting shed and shed to it before mind linking Zoella to come to the office.

"What can I do, Alpha Connell?" Zoella asks as she rushes into the office.

"This list needs ordering. Everything on the list. Make sure of the sizes from Silas, but don't let him scrimp on things. This is important, as it's going to be the food we will provide the pack in the future."

"Okay, Alpha." Zoella takes the list, flicks over it quickly and gives me a smile. "Yes, I'll make sure all this is ordered."

"Oh, give it here a minute." Holding out my hand to take it, before adding fruit bushes to the bottom. Raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and more. I grin because I can nearly taste the fruit pies that will be made.

Leaning back in my chair when Zoella has left the office, I smile inwardly, thinking of the headway we have made in just the last few days.

'We are going to have a good pack, Knight. I just don't know how we are going to create more income to keep everything flowing.'

It will happen. Have faith in the pack and the shifter council. Flint will give direction.

'I will Knight, and there is money going into the pack account each month. I'm not sure what that is, so I'll ask Flint about that too.'

Hearing a knock on the door, I look up when Zoella enters. "Sorry to disturb you, Alpha, but I have placed the order for everything on the list. I wanted to remind you, we have the orchard that is overrun with weeds and rubbish which has been dumped over the last few years."

"Good grief, I'd forgotten about the orchard. Good thinking Zoella." I'm out of my chair and the room before she says more, and I dash out through the kitchen and to the garden.

Through the large gate on the west side of the garden, and into the orchard, which is thigh high in grass and weeds. There is rubbish dumped on one side, showing that some pack members have been using this place for anything but a food source.

Caleb stands beside me, not sure where he came from, but he chuckles. "Noah and Bladrick are going to be very unhappy when they see this place, because I'm sure you're going to have them working in here next."

Laughing as he is perfectly correct, I'll be having them clear this orchard and prune the fruit trees. But boy, this is great and I reckon with the amount of fruit the pack will be able to harvest, we could have a shop in Wolfsfoot. Looking at Caleb from the side of my eye, I see his mind is racing, too. "Do you think we'd have enough fruit to sell some in Wolfsfoot? That

would bring in a little income and give a job to one of the pack members.”

“That’s a good idea, and Silas is going to need helpers. He can’t maintain all of this and the garden by himself.”

Rubbing my hands together, then wincing when I burst a blister on the palm of one, I can’t hold back the chuckle. “Yeah, we gotta get more pack members so we can get all this in motion. For now, I’ve had enough. Let’s go get a drink and wait for Dahlia to serve up the meal. My stomach thinks my throat’s been cut.”

Chapter 4



CONNELL

The hair on my arms rose as soon as I opened the journal this morning. It's peculiar to think that the words I write now will be read by future generations.

Placing pen to paper, I write:

First entry, Alpha Connell Torrance.

The pack property has been badly neglected by the prior Alpha, and all efforts are being made to bring the pack grounds to its former glory and use. By use, I mean the vegetable garden and orchard are being revived to produce fresh and healthy food for the pack. Any surplus fruit or vegetables we'll place for sale in the town of the Wolfsfoot Pack.

Prior mentioned 'Whipping Post' brought to the pack by Alpha Torrance [Deceased] has been removed, and I am stating here as clearly as I can, 'NEVER, reintroduce the archaic practice of whipping pack members.' If I only ever achieve the removal of the said post then I feel I've accomplished the protection of my pack.

Many years ago, Alpha Horatio Winterstorm wrote in this journal that he held a challenge for his Beta position. I will hold said challenge for mine as well. The position is vacant because of Beta Carter Goldman leaving the pack to follow his son Gabriel Goldman, now Alpha of the Wolfsfoot Pack, along with his mate, Tatiana Winterstorm.

Under consideration at this time is where to find new pack members. The pack has had many pack members

leave because of the behavior of the last Alpha, leaving the pack depleted and in need of growth. I will give more information as I know what is going to happen in the future. I am, however, looking at the Northern Parklands.

Signed—Alpha Connell

Placing the journal into the safe, I feel more than thankful my father is no longer around. It's a sad thing when you do not regret a parent's death, but he was past being feral and had been a danger to the pack for a long time.

I wish my pack to remember me as a great Alpha, and I'm starting as I mean to go on. All the crap I pulled growing up and following orders, and the Alpha-commanded orders I'm putting behind me. I'll prove to each and every one of the pack members, I'm a good man, and I'll do what is best for us all.

Picking up my phone from the corner of the desk, I scroll through my contacts and find Alpha Lyle of the Spirit Walker Pack. Pressing the call button, I lean back in my seat and wait.

"Hello, Alpha Lyle speaking."

"Hello, this is Alpha Connell. I wanted to have a quick catch-up call with you regarding the rogue issue from no-man's-land. Have you had any other problems since we last spoke?" I quickly ask, because I really am not one to hang around talking for the sake of it.

"Alpha Connell, we had one smaller altercation, but turned them back easily. I think it was them testing our patrol because they didn't push, and retreated quickly."

"Interesting. We have had no issue but if you need to call on us, we will respond quickly. The pack is smaller because of Alpha Torrance, my father and his behavior, but I've plans to bring in new members. I'm hoping I'll find more warriors and that way if you need backup, I'll have more to send."

Alpha Lyle sighs, "I hope it doesn't come to it, but I can't see these rogues stepping back long term. We all heard they had

a leader who had a mate, but I've heard rumors of them having an Alpha ruling them as a pack now. How true that is, I don't know, but it's worth us being aware."

"Shit, that's not good. But if the last leader had a mate, and now this one has taken over, it means they are dead, have taken a Beta position, or the leader was an Alpha all along and we didn't know it." Thinking aloud is what I'm doing, but I jump a little when I get a response.

"Exactly. All we can do is watch, and hope we catch some rogues to find out what the heck is going on across in no-man's-land."

"If you need us, give a shout out."

"Thanks Alpha Connell."

"Why don't you just call me Connell because all this Alpha business between us is long winded, isn't it?" chuckling as I throw that out.

"Okay Connell. You call me Lyle too." Hearing someone shout his name, he quickly speaks again, "Sorry, I have to go, but I'll see you at the council meeting."

"You will, take care." I hit the end call button and place my phone down on the desk once more. I'm relieved his pack has had no major incidences with the rogues, but something is brewing. It's just none of us know what at this point in time.

'Do you fancy a run, Knight?'

I'm always up for a run. Where do you want to go?

'How about we check the patrol warriors? Let them see we are interested enough to get out and patrol with them for a few hours?'

Good idea. Let's go.

After mind linking Caleb, I meet him out front and change into Knight, who is a large wolf, dark gray, with a white patch on his forehead. His undercoat is a darker gray, nearly black.

Knight's eyes are a darker brown than my own and have a fleck of silver if you look close enough.

Running free to the border, Knight stretches his legs and I can feel his enjoyment as it runs through our veins. Turning our head slightly, Caleb's wolf Magnum, who is a good size brown wolf, with cream paws and tip on his tail, tucks in behind us and to one side.

Reaching the first patrol, Knight gives me control and I generate clothing as I make the change. "Anything to report?" I quickly ask as I reach Armon and Weldon.

"Nothing. Everything is quiet. We've covered our patrol and have stopped in different places each time. We saw a squirrel," Armon grins.

"Come on, I'll walk with you for a while."

Weldon turns and walks toward the east border of the boundary, and I step in on the side of him. Listening and looking everywhere as we walk. The atmosphere is calm and all I'm hearing are birds and other animals scurrying around.

"I'm going to try out for the Beta position," Armon says, gaining my attention.

"Well, if you do, remember, it's not just about fighting. Once you have your name on the challenge sheet, you'll be watched, even when you don't realize, for how you act toward the pack, how you conduct yourself during any interactions or conflicts. A Beta needs to always be on his toes, making sure not only I as Alpha, but the pack on the whole is safe, and everyone's needs are being met."

Weldon adds to the conversation. "I want to say that removing that whipping post was a good thing, Alpha Connell. Many of us would have burned it to the ground but knew the last alpha would have killed us for doing it.

"I know he was your father, but he had turned evil and it was a good thing that he was removed. We have lost families and a lot of she-wolves to other packs and areas. Maybe when

packs see how you are turning things around, some will come back.”

Recognizing the desire for the pack to flourish in his tone, I grip his shoulder and give it a slight squeeze. “I’m doing everything I can to turn the pack around. But if you think of something that could help, then don’t be fearful or reluctant to come forward and speak to me.”

Weldon nods, giving me a look of respect before continuing to walk the patrol line. It’s a long walk from one end of their patrol to the other and when we get more warriors, I’m going to decrease the area each patrol has to cover. There is no way they can stop intruders from crossing the border when they have such a huge stretch to watch over.

After visiting the other patrols, letting them see I’m not unapproachable, I turn to Caleb, who has been two steps behind me all the time. Not saying a single word for hours, yet being seen at my back.

“Caleb, did you think the border patrols are stretched to the limit?” I ask.

“Been like that a long time, Alpha. We lost a few warriors after they wouldn’t do what the last Alpha wanted and he murdered them. Others left the pack and took their family with them. Most had sisters or mothers they wanted to protect.”

“We were too young to stop him, Caleb, and we had a lot of growing up to do ourselves.”

“Yeah, and that bastard had us under alpha command too, so we had no choice but to do what he said. I hated him, Connell. He was an evil man, and he deserved to die a long time before he did.”

I don’t miss the slip of my title as he’s speaking, but he’s been a friend since we were pups, and I’m not going to reprimand him for that. In fact, I like it. “When we are alone, just call me Connell. We have been friends since we were pups. Let’s not change that, Caleb.”

Back in my office, I check paperwork and see the log cabin Merry had lived in was reported as needing repairs. I know I have to do something about this because although the cabin is owned by Merry, I don't want a derelict building on the pack grounds.

Writing a letter, I give Merry the opportunity to sell the cabin to the pack or to come and have all the repairs done. Either way, I need to know and I want it done quickly. I'm sure she's not going to like this letter, but she is settled with the shifter council now and has a beautiful home that I don't think she'll ever want to leave.

'Zoella, come and get this letter sent out as urgent' I mind link and place the letter in an envelope, seal it and write Merry's name along with the address for the shifter council on the front.

Zoella rushes into the office, grabs the letter and rushes out again. Now, that was interesting I'm thinking, because she's normally talking all the time, and nosey, but nothing, just grabbed the letter and went.

Hearing my name, I look up and see Brian and William in the doorway. "Come in, take a seat. You both look worn out."

"We came back as soon as we had something to report," Brian says as he takes a seat and runs the palm of his hand down his face. "The people we spoke to were interested in what we had to say, some of course, threw every negative question they could at us, and were not willing to listen to most of what we were trying to tell them. Hence, his face."

Looking over at William, I see he has what would have been a nasty cut on his forehead. "What happened to you? When did that happen?" It had to be a nasty cut or his wolf's healing would have had it dealt with by now.

"I had a run in with one of the assholes. He was determined to knock down everything we had to say. In the end, he accused us of wanting to steal she-wolves from them. I whirled around and told him what I thought of him and his

dirty mind. One thing led to another, and I got this cut, but he got a broken nose, leg and three ribs.”

William is grinning like a fool, but I can't say I blame him for his reaction as I'm sure I would have reacted, too. “You are a day early, so what do you have to report? Something good I hope,” rubbing the back of my neck where I can feel tension building.

Brian is grinning at William before he turns back to me and gets himself under control, which he loses as he busts out laughing. “Alpha Connell, you should have seen William. He launched himself at the asshole and got four punches in before he realized what hit him. He got all those injuries, and William got a cut on the forehead from the asshole picking up a rock and smacking him with it.”

It takes a few minutes, but they both calm down and get to business. William speaks first, “We gave them a choice of coming here and seeing for themselves what the pack is like, and what you as the Alpha offer, or they can stay as they are indefinitely as this is a one-time offer.”

“I gave them the outline of my being with them, coming here and settling in as a pack member. I told them what I've seen, how you all behave, what jobs could or would be offered. I even said they could build their own cabins or cottages once they were established, but they'd have to speak to you on all issues,” Brian says as he leans forward with a serious expression. “I think there were more than a few she-wolves interested in coming over to speak with you. They are sick of being scared all the time, and it's not a pack they are living amongst, so their feeling of safety isn't high. I honestly think if we as a pack can offer them places to live, to become warriors or anything else they would like to be as a contribution to the pack, then we'll pull quite a few to us.”

“This is good to hear. So how did you leave it?” I ask.

“Anyone interested will come over on Saturday. I'll meet them at the pack border, and they will only be allowed over the border once they have been checked for weapons and have

given an oath they are here with no bad intentions,” Brian informs me and William is nodding his head in agreement.

“Okay, that’s good. You both did great. Now go eat and then sleep. We have a lot to get done this week.” I watch as they leave the office, and I feel optimistic about the future of the pack.

Chapter 5



HOPE

The table I'm sitting in front of has a chunk of wood under the broken leg to keep it level. My eyes flick around the shack I call home and I admit it is no wonder I have depression building. I am normally an optimistic person, feeling sorry for myself isn't my usual state of being.

Life has never been easy, and my momma being thrown out of her pack for sleeping with the alpha's son, and only the once, left us both without a pack, and my momma wandering the Parklands.

As I'd grown older and momma told me everything, I was grateful she had kept me safe while I was growing up. It had never been easy, and we had never had much of anything. But we had each other, and that was enough.

The alpha's son was momma's mate, but he had a chosen mate that his father had arranged. It was an alliance of two medium-sized packs, but it was more for the power that the alliance would bring than any other reason.

Momma never took a chosen mate after she accepted the rejection of her soul mate, telling me the Goddess Selene would make things right, either in this world or the next.

When momma was killed by a rogue who wasn't from the small collection of us here, I buried her deep in the ground with the help of Baildon, another who was an illegitimate child. He was like a brother to me and when his mother ran off one night and left him alone, my momma did all she could to make sure he was safe.

He lived with us in this shack until he was old enough to live by himself and he built his own shack near to ours. We still hunted, ate, and swam together, but he has now started to wander away for days at a time, leaving me to fend for myself.

This offer of going to the Blackshadow Pack has me intrigued, and I can't say that joining a pack isn't appealing, because it is. It would give me safety and a purpose, which I have lost since momma has been gone.

Light tapping on the door has me quickly walking over and opening it. Swift pushes her way into the shack and quickly closes the door behind her.

"What's going on?" I ask.

"Gamzin and his followers are having a meeting about the Blackshadow Pack. I overheard them saying they were not going to join a pack." Which has me smirking when she says the last in the growly voice of Gamzin. "Some are interested, and he's trying to stop any of them from leaving. I'm going to look at this pack. It sounded okay, and we know Brian. He lived amongst us for years. We are not safe here anymore, Hope. There are too many of us who are living in fear."

Taking a seat on the end of what is my bed, but in truth is a pile of straw covered with a blanket, I look at Swift closely. "Who else is interested in leaving here?"

"Jessie, Antica, Lorna and Clover. With you and I that is six of us, but I'm not sure of the others. Some have resigned themselves to being mates with someone here, and some have given up all hope of anything getting any better than it is." Swift drops next to me and lays the side of her face against my shoulder.

"I'll go with you. Look at how we are living, Swift, it's become hopeless. The more we try, the worse it gets. Baildon has even started leaving more often and not coming to see me when he comes back."

Swift looks at me when I tell her that because she knows how much he has meant to me and to my momma over the years.

But now that she's gone and he has grown-up, things have changed, and not for the better.

"You would be good for any pack, Hope. You are a healer, know herbs and how to use them. Me? I'm not much use to anyone, so you may get to be a pack member, me probably not," Swift sniffs and wipes her nose with the back of her hand, pretending she's not about to cry.

"Swift, you are a fighter, a natural warrior, and your momma knew that you would be, as your poppa was a warrior. That's how you got your name. Being fast and out-maneuvering others is your legacy from your poppa. Don't underestimate yourself."

"You got your name as you gave your momma hope, so hey we both have legacies to live up to. You have given us all hope when we've had injuries we thought would end us, but you've pulled us through. Remember when you were fourteen and put that splint on Stephen's leg? It was the largest damn thing I ever saw then or after, but his leg healed and he was good as new," throwing her head back laughing, "but did he call you names at the time you did it. Can you remember clunk, clunk? He couldn't sneak up on anything, and we all had to do his hunting until he could walk on it again. I don't remember why he couldn't shift at that time, mind you."

"Oh, yes, I remember that. His wolf was angry at him because he wanted to mate with Molly Goodfellow, but Stephen wouldn't, so his wolf wouldn't help heal him as punishment. It took six weeks to heal as a human would because of it." We both let out peals of laughter but neither of us would bring it up in earshot of Stephen.

We talk for another hour before Swift rushes away to hunt while I go outside to work on my small herb patch. It's not much, but it helps most of us here.

I weed around the chamomile, echinacea, garlic, turmeric, sage, and lavender. The other herbs I'll leave for another day, as these are the ones that need my immediate attention.

Picking some of the chamomile, as I need to dry the flowers ready for future use. I have infused oil already made for use, and I use pressed sunflower instead of the almond oil we've used and have never been able to replace.

Behind the shack is where I have a small fire pit with a hanging arm over for a kettle and cauldron. Over the years, I've been able to collect a few pans, trading healing oils for glass jars, spatulas, and other useful items.

By the end of the day, I have chamomile lotion cooling in small jars and I know I'll be able to trade it for food or clothing with other she-wolves, and even some of the males who have injuries for which they need the healing lotion.

Picking sunflowers that I've grown on the edge of the forest clearing, I carry an armful to my shack and lay them out to dry. The seeds are going to be good to make butter and as an oil. We sprinkle seeds on top of baked things we make when we have enough flour to do that. Lorna has been good at procuring us some foods by trading the rabbit meat she's caught. Some of the humans that live on the edge of their area are happy to trade with us. Some have even come to live among us, as they are as unhappy with their lives as much as we are with ours.

Cleaning the things away that I have used today, I make my way to the river and do my best to wash my hands and face. Boiling water for a wash takes a lot of effort when the bucket seems to take forever to fill. Once a week the six of us bathe in the river, but one of us stays out of the water at all times, watching and listening for any threats.

We have had a couple of incidences when male rogues, not from around here, have come across us bathing and we've had to fight, or be claimed unwillingly. That is something none of us want. Florrie, two years ago, killed herself when she was claimed against her will. Neither she nor her wolf wanted to remain tied to the horrendous male that had found her alone picking nuts and berries. The only good thing that came of

that was Gamzin killed the rogue male and left his body to rot or for the wild animals to eat.

After returning to my shack, I sit outside drinking a chamomile tea, listening, but hearing only murmurs as people speak quietly to each other.

Smiling as I see Swift walk towards me, handing me a plate with a nice portion of meat. "I brought down a deer. It was old, and I thanked Selene for the offering. We will all eat well tonight, Hope."

"Thank you. I've made some healing lotion today, and I'm drying out some sunflowers. We'll have enough to store some seeds for planting next year."

"How many do you think are now living around here?" Swift asks, taking me by surprise with the question.

"I don't know." I look down at her where she's sitting cross-legged beside my rickety stool.

"We'll never become a pack, and we'll always be under the orders of the likes of Gamzin. We will end up either having to take a chosen mate or being forced to mate, never having a real chance of finding our soul mates. I think we've got to give the Blackshadow Pack a chance, Hope. If it doesn't work out, we can always renounce the pack and come back to the Parklands."

Nodding because Swift is only saying what I have been thinking and worrying about. "Yes, I agree. We could end up in no-man's-land if some rogue gets hold of us. That's what happened to Dilly's daughter, if you remember. Dragged away screaming for her momma, while her momma was crawling forward badly injured trying to save her. We never saved Dilly from those injuries, and we never saw her daughter again either. That could be any of us, Swift."

"I reckon there has to be between thirty and fifty shifters or humans in this area now. But you know only one or two would try to come to our aid if anything happened."

Sighing, I reply, "Yeah, I know. Let's do this together. Let's see what it's like and if we decide to join that pack, we'll stick together watching each other's back."

"Agree," I hear from behind me and turn to see Jessie standing with Antica, Lorna and Clover and all are nodding in agreement.

"Shall we all go then, check it out, but make sure all of us stick together?" Swift asks.

One after another agrees, and I have to admit I feel lighter thinking that I'll have people I know and trust moderately well to go with me. Swift must know my thoughts as she squeezes my knee and gives me a tiny smile of encouragement.

Clover surprises me when she asks, "Shall we take what belongings we want to keep with us and not risk coming back here? If we decide not to stay we can carry it all back again."

"Okay, I'm good with that," Antica states.

"I can take some, but what about all my herbs and the equipment for making my lotions?" I ask, because my herbs, flowers and my equipment are how I earn the food I eat and provide myself with the clothes on my back.

"We will ask to come back with help to dig them up and take them. If they won't, then they are not the pack we want to be involved with. We will all stay or we will all come back. That is my promise to you all who I see as the only sisters I'll ever have." Lorna looks at me with such a serious face that I stand and grab ahold of her, hugging her until she laughs and states she can't breathe.

"Oh, can you put some cream on my leg, Hope? Because I cut it while I was in the forest and it is red," Jessie asks, and hoists up her pants leg.

I hiss as I see it is swollen and infected. Pressing on it has pus oozing, but thankfully, it's not too much. Bustling into my shack, I pick up tea tree oil and, taking a jar of boiled water, I place a few drops into the water. Picking up the chamomile lotion too, I rush back outside and cleanse the wound with

the tea tree solution until no pus is found. It looks clean now, and knowing it's ready, I place a good amount of the chamomile lotion onto the cut. Swift has found some clean strips for us to wrap it up with, and I'm pleased now that I'm always trying to think ahead for what we may need.

By the time I lay down on my bed of straw, I'm tired, but optimistic that we may at last get out of living like this. Remembering I have not blocked the door, I quickly jump up and place a chair under the handle and lodge it so it won't open easily. A hefty shove would open it, but it would at least give me time to get off the bed and even shift into my wolf, Briar.

'Are you okay with leaving here, Briar?' I mind link.

It's about time you moved your ass from here. Something bad is going to happen one of these days. I've told you we need to leave, but so far you have not listened.

'I'm sorry, Briar. I didn't want to leave momma.'

Momma is gone now. She would not want us to be here and be mated against our will, injured or murdered.

'You have been quiet for a long time Briar, are you sure you are okay?'

I'm good. I had nothing to say. But now we are going to move from here, I'll have much more to say about what happens to us.

'Good night, Briar,'

Good night, Hope.

Chapter 6



CONNELL

Wednesday came around far too quickly, but with the garden taking shape and the greenhouse delivered, we have spent the morning working out how to build the thing. It's like a puzzle, put piece A to piece B and turn piece C. Maybe I should have told Zoella to pay for the damn thing to be erected too.

"Will you stop growling under your breath!" Caleb snaps, and looking up, I can see his wolf Magnum is close to the surface.

Stepping away from everyone, I take a few calming minutes. I know that my agitation is rubbing off on the pack members working alongside me.

Silas walks over and hands me a bottle of water, which I thank him for, and as I drink, I turn to look at him as he quietly speaks to me.

"You are a good alpha to the pack. Don't try to do everything too fast, as it's impossible to change things overnight. I know you want the best for the pack, but Alpha Connell, so does the pack, plus they all see the huge effort you are making to turn things around." Squeezing my forearm Silas walks back to Caleb, Noah, Armon and Sterling who have all stepped up to help get the greenhouse, potting shed and equipment shed built.

Rubbing my forehead, I can't stop the thought that I need a Luna, my other half, the one that could calm me with a look or touch. I would dearly love to find my mate, but don't have any time to travel around the packs to see if she is in our area. If she is not, it would mean my traveling out of area and visiting

packs we've had low dealings with in the past, and ones that we've not always had good relations with.

"Are you alright?" Turning, I give a nod to Flint, who has taken me by surprise arriving before lunch.

"I'm good. Thank you for asking. Have you just arrived?"

Flint grins, "Yes, just in time I think."

"Come on, let's get to the office, and I'll tell Dahlia to bring us some lunch."

"Sounds good to me, Alpha Connell." Flint walks alongside me, and I'm aware he's watching and listening to everything as we head into the packhouse.

Once we are settled in my office with a light lunch of sandwiches, cookies and a drink, I get to the business at hand, and the reason Flint is here.

"There are various things I want to discuss with you, Councilman Flint. Advice that may help me move the pack forward, and into a better pack than it has been since before the last Alpha." I give nothing on my thoughts of my father because Flint was here and saw much of what had been happening. "I'm thinking of holding a mating ball and opening up the offer to packs outside our territory. I'll limit the number of attendees from each pack. If we get too many that accept I'll speak to the other Alphas in our area to see if they can accept any overnight visitors."

Flint leans forward in his seat, "I like that idea, and to bring other packs in from outside our area will give a chance for some you would ordinarily never encounter to come to this meeting."

"I could also contact the other kingdoms and see if they have any wolf shifters that would like to attend?"

"We haven't mixed with those in a lot of years, but I think it may be an idea for the future. Let's not do that now. Let's keep it to our kingdom and look at the others later." Flint is

rubbing his chin and I know I have him thinking about the Kingdoms of Dragons, Bears, Cats and Vampires.

“Well, we could use this as an opportunity for first contact? I think it would be a good move.”

Flint gives me a serious look. “Have you already made contact?”

“No, I haven’t. I wanted your opinion first. There may well have been a reason that we don’t have contact that I’m not aware of. I’m very ‘aware’ that, as a new Alpha, there are going to be things I don’t know, or perhaps political boundaries that I shouldn’t cross.” Watching for Flint’s reaction, I see nothing to cause me concern.

“If you feel that this could be a stepping stone to opening a line of communication between Blackshadow and the Kingdoms, then give it a shot. Just be sure that all communications are based solely on and around Blackshadow.

“Do not include any of the other packs or the shifter council, in any way, shape, or form. If you can guarantee that, I’m ok with it. Don’t be surprised though, if a pack pulls out of the mating ball when you announce that there may be representatives from the Kingdoms present at the ball.”

“I will arrange a date for the ball and let you know when that is. If you can speak to the council to get the ball approved, that would help enormously. I’ll give your input some thought before deciding.

“Meanwhile, I’m working on improving the pack grounds and giving everyone in the pack the opportunity to do something useful, and get a payment for what they do, too.”

“Yes, I will do that. It will not be a problem as we all want to find our mates, and for now this is the best way to get mates meeting in a controlled atmosphere. We all know how irate a male shifter can be when they first find their mate. I’ve seen my share of fights until they are fully marked and it’s not a pretty sight.” Flint looks at me thoughtfully then states, “In

hindsight, let me deal with invitations to the Kingdoms. There could be repercussions that you don't need to deal with if this went awry. It's a good idea you had, but I don't want you caught up in anything you're not prepared for."

"Do you know if Merry has any plans about coming back here eventually or if she's going to be staying on the shifter council land? I'm asking because of her cabin; it needs to be maintained and I don't want the pack to be financing that if nobody is going to be benefitting from living in it. It is an hour away from the packhouse and if I'm honest, Flint, it may be better to demolish it or keep it as a warrior patrol house, where they can stop and rest when needed."

"Actually, Merry told me to give you this letter," taking an envelope out of his jacket pocket which he hands to me. "Merry said she's not coming back except for council member work. She's loving living where she is and she has many people to speak with and go around the area with. She wants to gift the log cabin to the pack and you do with it what you will."

Opening the envelope, I take out the sheet of paper and read the message that the house is donated to the Blackshadow Pack and that Alpha Connell may do as he pleases with the cabin.

"I will write to Merry and thank her for her donation of the cabin, and if you would give that letter to her when you return, I would appreciate it."

Flint smiles. "Of course I will give it to her. Now you just have to decide what to do with it. But a stopping place for the patrol warriors is a good idea."

Nodding as I place the letter in the top drawer of my desk whilst thinking I'll place it in the safe when my meeting with Flint has finished.

"I am thinking of holding a Beta Challenge. It would have been good if Beta Goldman had stayed, but I understand why he went to be with Alpha Gabriel. He is Beta Goldman's son and

they have always been very close. Something I always envied, I have to admit.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea. Do you have anyone you favor for the position?” Flint enquires.

“Caleb is acting as my Beta at the moment. But I’m thinking he’d make a great second Beta. I just think there may be someone who is a little sharper, stronger and a little quicker witted.” I cringe a little as that makes Caleb sound as though I don’t think he can cut it, but I don’t mean it like that at all. “Damn, I don’t mean that in a bad way. He’s a good fit, and he’s doing one hell of a good job.”

“Don’t beat yourself up. I understand what you are saying. Caleb just needs to be told what to do and when to do it, where an ideal first Beta knows without that direction,” Flint states and I nod as he’s said what I’ve been thinking for the past few weeks.

“Have you been involved in holding challenges such as this?”

“Yes, but it’s been a long time ago. First, watch how the people who are going to compete interact with other pack members. Second, you need a strong and able fighter because your life could depend on that person. Third, they have to show they have the pack’s best interest at heart. The pack comes first, as it does to you as the Alpha. Last, they have to have respect from pack members and be able to give orders without those orders causing offense. Oh, and they have to have a high regard for the mating bond, because they would need to teach a Gamma to look after the Luna once you find her. Remember a Gamma is the male who would put the Luna’s security before anyone else in the pack, even before the Alpha.” Flint rubs his hands together and looks like he’s going to enjoy this challenge.

“Okay, I’ll make sure of all of that. I have my eye on two warriors, one being a she-wolf. I am not going to be one of those Alphas that looks down on our females. They may be smaller, but they are fierce when they are guarding

something. Look at them as mothers, they'll kill anything to protect the pups, so why not the pack?"

Nodding, and with a small lift on the corner of his mouth, Flint replies. "You are going to make one hell of an Alpha, and you have my full support. Remember, you are not your father, and his sins are not your sins. He paid with his life, and you have shown your quality with the changes you have made already, and of who you are. Oh, I notice that damn whipping post has gone. I was delighted to see that when I arrived."

"I ripped that out as I wanted the pack to see it would never be used again, and they didn't have to fear me in that way. I'm not saying I won't punish anyone, but not in that manner. If they needed to have a severe punishment, I would call the council to hand out what happens to them. I feel after what happened here, that would be a good move for the pack in general."

"I agree, and therefore you are going to be one hell of a good Alpha. Now is there anything else you want to speak to me about?" Flint asks as he leans back in his seat once more.

"Actually, yes there is. I have taken a male into the pack who was a rogue in the Northern Parklands. He has proven himself to be honest, reliable and one hell of a good person. I've sent him, along with William, to speak to others in the Parklands who would like to be a member of the pack. These are people who have been rejected and, or banned from packs. From what Brian has told me, many who were around the Parklands where he lived are younger or were born in the Parklands so have no affiliation with any packs past or present."

Standing, Flint walks over to the window and looks outside before turning around and giving me a serious look, which includes a frown. "I can see what you are saying, but you know that many of these people could be trouble?"

"Obviously, but they have been told they will be here on a trial basis before they can join the pack. They have to prove they are what we need in the pack, and if not we will cut them loose at the end of the trial period. They will be

monitored closely by the people they will work alongside. I'm going to make sure they are not wandering around on their own, or having nothing to do. If they cannot bring something to the pack, they won't be joining. It's as simple as that." I remain calm, and let Flint see I've given this a considerable amount of thought.

"Okay, I can see where you are coming from and as you've lost a few members because of one thing or another, I can understand you want to build the pack numbers. If you are careful to only take people that can add good things to the pack, like a doctor, nurse, carpenter, cook, teacher, warrior or other, then I'm going to stick my neck out and back you on this. But I'm going to be around while they are here, too. You may find other council members will be here too. Just don't make it obvious you find them annoying, because they can break this idea if you are not careful." Flint rubs his hands together. "I'm glad I came, as this is going to be very interesting."

"Now, tell me where the income is coming from?" I surprise Flint by asking.

"Oh," taking a seat once more, Flint smirks. "Well, the human realm has companies that deal with what is called stocks and shares. Years ago, a large amount was placed in one of these companies. They make money with the money, and it's created a lot over the years. The income comes to the pack on a monthly basis and the original amount is continually being re-invested, making more money which is in the bank from where you see the payments coming." Rubbing his forehead, Flint grins. "I don't know how to explain it, really. Just know that the money is safe and you have a large amount that is always being held, so even if this company stops trading you will have a large balance placed in the account while you either find another company or use it in another way."

"Can I check out this company?" I ask.

"Yes, all the details you need will be in the safe and under the name Petersfield & Border Trading Co." Flint replies, and I nod

as I've seen an envelope in the safe with that name on the front. I've just not looked at the envelope as yet.

I wind down the meeting and get us to the dining room to eat before I check on my inner circle and see what they have achieved.

Chapter 7



CONNELL

Turning to look at Flint. “I know it’s early in the morning, so hope you are fresh and will be able to keep up.” I grin, but chuckle when Flint gives me a sour look as he turns into his wolf, Bruno, who is a large brown sable with deep chocolate-colored eyes.

I change into Knight and look over at Noah’s wolf Moses, who is a dark gray with black flecks in his muzzle and chest.

Caleb, of course, is here too and is standing ready in Magnum form, quietly waiting for me to move. Knight gives a slight dip of the head to let Magnum know I’m ready and we start to run.

Knight is enjoying the run and our body is fluid, showing no effort even after an hour of constant movement. Turning, I see Bruno is keeping up without effort and I’m impressed. It seems he is keeping himself fit, although he is on the council. We all presume they sit on their butts all day reading paperwork.

You are doing well, old wolf. Knight playfully taunts Bruno.

I grin as I’m resting in the back of Knight’s mind. I always find pleasure watching through his eyes as he runs and enjoys the freedom our change gives.

Bruno responds. *One of these days, pup, I’ll show you who’s an old wolf, and what this old wolf is capable of.*

Yeah, of course you will. Knight replies before putting on an extra burst of speed.

It only takes another fifteen minutes before we arrive at Merry's log cabin, and I'm surprised to see the door open. Changing quickly, I thankfully was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt this morning. If we have to fight, at least I am in clothing where I can move easily.

Noah, Caleb, and Flint stand beside me, all fully dressed and alert. Caleb pushes past and slowly enters the cabin. I step forward to follow, but Noah steps in front of me, giving me a head shake.

Now this always annoys me because I'm a stronger, faster, and smarter fighter than Noah and Caleb. For them to put themselves in danger, when I can look after myself, always has my teeth on edge.

"Remain calm, this is your pack doing what they know is right. I know it rankles, but you are the Alpha. They will protect, whether you like it or not. Now, be calm and listen, stay alert, we'll move fast if Caleb needs us." Flint had placed his hand on my shoulder when he started to speak. Giving my shoulder a squeeze, he lets go and stands at the ready.

A few minutes later, Caleb walks out of the cabin and shrugs his shoulders. "The place has been used, as there are dirty dishes in the sink and the bed hasn't been made. But it doesn't smell like one of our pack members. The smell is female, but I don't recognize it."

Walking into the cabin, we look around, all the furniture is intact, and nothing is broken. Merry had taken everything she wanted, so there are no ornaments, trinkets, or personal items to have been stolen.

Stepping from the living area into the kitchen, I see a few dishes sitting in the sink, and they don't look like they have been there long. No mold has appeared as yet.

Flint steps into the kitchen, looks around and shrugs. "Nothing seems to have been disturbed apart from the dishes. It shows someone stopped here, ate, then moved on."

“Why didn’t the patrol warriors pick up that someone was in our territory? The cabin is an hour from the border to Wolfsfoot. That is a long way inside the territory to risk staying overnight, unless they were being hunted, or something else,” I say, but more thinking aloud.

Noah speaks out, making me jump slightly as I was so deep in thought. “The bed has been slept in, but nothing has been broken or destroyed. The bathroom is fine, nothing wrong showing there.”

“Caleb, speak to Oscar and make sure he informs all the patrol warriors of the situation. They need to be on higher alert if people are coming into the territory without our knowledge.”

“Will do Alpha Connell,” and I watch as his eyes glaze while he mind-links Oscar to fill my orders.

“Noah, lock up the cabin, and let’s move over to Dorridge Lodge. Check out if anything is amiss there.” Growling somewhat as I speak.

Moving on to Dorridge Lodge, which is on the edge of our pack land, we find nothing out of place. The Lodge has been empty and unused for years. Now and again, the patrol warriors will stay if the weather turns cruel, but otherwise it’s a derelict building which we maintain to the minimum.

The Lodge is a nice place, but it’s been left unattended for a long time. Having no furniture or anything to make it habitable. My father punished pack members by sending them here to live with nothing. I’m sure he would come and punish them in other ways also, but I never had proof of that.

Walking inside it’s a two-story building, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, living area, dining room. It has been left to waste but has weathered damn well. It needs a good clean, probably decorating and then it would be fully able to be lived in once more.

I remember hearing it was built as a retreat for pack members that went into heat, or were having a romantic break. It was a

place they had to book to use, but over the years, with my father's ineptitude, people stopped using it.

Taking a deep breath, I calm myself as I blow it out slowly, but can't help think it's good my father's dead and I just wish I'd done it myself.

Walking through the lodge it would be ideal as another stop for the patrol warriors. It is on the edge of the north and west borders, so would give two patrols the option to use it.

I'll speak to the pack regarding the place, and if they are happy for me to do that, then we'll renovate the place for the warriors' use. Otherwise, I'm going to be forced to demolish it as I don't want it to be used by anyone as a hideout from patrol.

Later in the afternoon, once I've had a shower and changed into jeans and a button up, I head out to the orchard to see how much progress has been made.

Watching pack members laugh as they work warms my soul. It's a long time since I've seen the pack this easy around each other, and they give me a small show of their neck in respect as I speak to each of them as they work.

The orchard has had all the grass mown. Ivy that was strangling some of the fruit trees has been removed, and the dead leaves have been placed in a pile. Silas walks over to me and grins. "The pack has worked hard to get the orchard cleared. It's looking good and now I can think about pruning the trees. That will bring a better crop next year."

Grabbing the handles of the wheelbarrow, I wait for Rune who is one of the warriors to fill it with dead leaves before I wheel it over to the bonfire that Silas has burning. Grabbing a garden fork, I throw the dead leaves onto the fire and watch them burn before going back to fill the wheelbarrow once more.

It takes around an hour to take all the leaves and get them burned, but it would have been quicker if the pack didn't keep stopping to throw down with each other in fun.

'Alpha, something is happening on the eastern border.'
Weldon, one of our pack warrior's mind-links.

'All pack warriors not on patrol follow me to the eastern border.' I mind-link the pack and hear all the responses to my call. Which isn't as many as I would like and one of the reasons I'm trying to increase the pack size.

Ryan, Swan, Armon and Sterling are on patrol, along with Weldon and Brian, who asked to be included only yesterday. That only leaves me with Oscar, Declan, Rune, Halleck, and Iona. But Caleb, Noah, William, and Flint join the dash to the border.

Reaching the border, Weldon and Brian are standing on the borderline, watching a fight happening inside Spirit Walker Pack. It is around thirty rogues, with only eight warriors fighting them.

Mind linking Alpha Lyle. *'Can we enter your land to help your warriors fight?'*

'Yes, thank you. We are on our way,' Alpha Lyle responds.

"Come on, let's lend a hand." I give a feral grin before throwing myself over the border to the shock of the rogues who try to run, but we soon overrun them and rip them apart.

Covered in blood, I turn to look at Flint, who has stepped to my side. "This rogue issue is becoming a major worry. The Spirit Walker Pack is getting more trouble from them and I think I need to speak to the council about having extra warriors from each pack rotating to help ease the problem."

Alpha Lyle had appeared and is throwing bodies into a pile. "Burn them all!" I hear him shout at his patrol warriors and they get to work as he walks our way.

"Thank you for coming to our aid."

"No problem, I already told you if we can help, we will. This rogue problem is growing, and you shouldn't have to shoulder it all yourself," I respond.

“How many attacks have you had lately?” Flint asks.

“We’ve had one a month for three months. Killing them doesn’t seem to make a difference. The numbers are always around thirty and we are leaving none alive. That tells us all that this pack of rogues has grown, but where are they all coming from?” Alpha Lyle looks around where his pack is burning the bodies, but all of them look sick of the situation.

“I’m going to contact the council and speak to them about getting you extra warriors. The other packs need to step up and assist. Alpha Connell, thank you for responding so fast with your help. Alpha Lyle has Alpha Aurora given you any assistance?” Flint looks worried, but I remain quiet.

“No, we have had no help from the Blood Pearl Pack. As far as I know they have had no attacks. All so far have been aimed at the Spirit Walker Pack. It’s as though they want to weaken us.”

“If they take your pack, that puts them between Blood Pearl and Blackshadow Packs, but also in front of the Wolfsfoot Pack. It’s a way in to stop us from banding together because if they take you, then we all have to protect a border of our own. I think all effort should be given in helping Spirit Walker Pack remain strong and impenetrable.” I look around and my pack members, apart from Caleb, have stepped back into our pack lands but are watching closely to what is happening.

“We will be okay for now, but any help would be appreciated.” Alpha Lyle gives a nod and walks away to speak and help his pack members. Flint, Caleb and I head back to Blackshadow Pack territory.

After a shower and clean up I hear my stomach rumble and know it’s got to be time to eat. Rushing downstairs to the dining room I can’t help but notice the few pack members here already are looking nervous. Then I hear shouting from the kitchen. Fisting my hands, I make my way over to the kitchen and push the door open. Stepping inside I watch Dahlia shouting at a young pack member who is shaking whilst standing by the counter.

“HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO CLEAN UP FASTER. YOU ARE A LAZY GOOD FOR NOTHING...” Dahlia is screaming, but I’ve had enough.

“Dahlia, you are to remove yourself from the kitchen immediately. Go to my office and wait for me.” I don’t raise my voice, but I pulse my alpha power outward so she knows she has no option but to obey.

“Are you alright?” I ask, and the young member gives me a nod but doesn’t lift her head to look at me. “Who is the next in charge of the kitchen after Dahlia?”

“Nessie.”

“Thank you. Would you find her, and ask her to come and see me in my office, please?” I keep my voice gentle because it’s easy to see this young member is cowed by whatever has been happening in the kitchen.

I watch her dash out of the kitchen. The two other pack members are trying not to look like they are gawping at what’s happened but they snap their mouths closed and continue placing food into the serving dishes.

“Can you continue alone with kitchen duties for the moment?” I ask, again keeping my voice light.

“Yes, Alpha Connell,” they both reply quickly.

“Thank you,” giving them a bright smile, which has them blushing as I walk out of the kitchen and toward my office.

‘Silas, come to my office immediately.’

‘On my way, Alpha Connell.’

Stepping into the office, I give Dahlia a foul look as I take my seat. Taking a step towards a chair before being invited, I snap. “Do not sit. You stand there and be quiet until I speak to you.”

Dahlia swallows hard and if it wasn’t so serious, I would laugh at the sound it made and the panic in her eyes.

Tapping on the office door before it slowly opens on my command, 'Enter', and Nessie steps inside along with Silas behind her.

"I've called all three of you here, as I have something serious to speak to you about. First, Dahlia will no longer work in the kitchen, or have any position of power. She is now to be known as an omega of the pack, and will work with you Silas in the garden. Put her to good use and make sure she learns the lesson of humility, hard work and patience." Silas grins and I know he'll make sure Dahlia works and learns. He has an uncanny way of knowing about all the pack members. I'm not sure if he's nosey or has a gift. "Second, Nessie, you will take over Dahlia's responsibilities, and I don't want to see or hear any reports that you treat the pack members in your charge, with anything other than respect and kindness."

Nessie's eyes fly to Dahlia before coming back to me. She gives me a big warm smile before nodding and replying. "Of course, Alpha Connell."

"Okay, Silas report to me at the end of the first week with Dahlia." I look at Dahlia, who is about ready to either throw a tantrum or cry her eyes out, but I don't let it affect me. "Dahlia, if you don't change your ways, I will banish you from the pack. The last Alpha may have allowed this type of behavior, but I will not. Now you work hard with Silas and mend your ways."

Dahlia again swallows hard before she answers, "Yes, Alpha Connell."

"Dismissed," I state and watch as Nessie, then Dahlia, leaves the office. As Silas leaves, he at the last-minute turns and gives me a dramatic wink along with the largest smirk I've ever witnessed.

Chapter 8



FLINT

Sitting with a bottle of water in one hand, I lean back on the bench and watch Silas, Dahlia, and a few other pack members in the garden. The greenhouse and the potting shed are erected. The equipment shed is being built now by two pack members I have not met before. They are working carefully and checking that it's being built right by looking at the paperwork on how to erect the thing.

Dahlia has a face on that would rival a dwarf in the stories of old, scrunched up and all frown lines. I can't help the laugh I'm holding inwardly. Alpha Connell sorted out that situation quickly and with no damn need for a whipping post.

My eyes take on a faraway look as I consider what I've witnessed in the last two days while I have been here. Alpha Connell has grown into himself, and his status is far better than I expected. He is going to be one heck of a good Alpha. I hope he finds his Luna and soon so he can settle even more into the position, and find some peace in his soul after what he witnessed from his father.

I don't think anyone will know the full extent of the cruelty Alpha Torrance handed out to his pack and his son. I've heard some things, but nothing will ever be proven now. But I will watch Alpha Connell and if he needs help, I'm more than happy to step up and give him that help.

He is nothing like his father at all, and the Alpha power which turned his father into a madman is thankfully not affecting Alpha Connell. He is truly an alpha in his own right, and the heritage he has from his mother will stand him in good stead.

Alpha Lyle is holding up well with his pack. He's a damn good leader, too. He trains hard with them all, never allows them to do anything that he doesn't, or hasn't done himself. His father, who is now a council member, taught him well and I know he is more than a little proud of his son.

He does, however, need help, and I'm going to contact the council members and get something organized, even if I must travel to every pack to get that help.

I'm sure that Spirit Walker Pack is being targeted so the rogues can make a dent in the defense of the other packs. I am surprised that Alpha Aurora hasn't offered help, but she'll be shocked when I turn up and give her a dressing down for her negligence. She should know better than sitting on her butt doing nothing and it has me wondering if something is going on with her pack she's not informing the council of.

Alpha Gabriel has his pack organized, and as it is the town for everyone around here too, he has done a good job keeping pack issues separate from the stores that are trading. Luna Tatiana is one heck of a good Luna. She supports her mate in such a way nobody would deny they are anything but in love and true mates.

I have no worries about the Wolfsfoot Pack, but I need to ask if they have pack warriors we can allow Alpha Lyle to use. I know that the two packs are more than a little friendly, and I'm sure that help will be forthcoming.

I'm looking forward to seeing what develops tomorrow when the rogues from the Northern Parklands arrive. Speaking to the other council members, they were shocked but agreed that if Alpha Connell could bring them into the Blackshadow Pack, it would be good for everyone concerned.

The Northern Parklands runs alongside the Shifter Council territory, and we have never had any issues from them. We know many are banished members or are offspring from banished members. Some of them didn't deserve the fate that was thrown at them, but thankfully the older generation of Alpha has now gone and the new generation is more

understanding and deals with issues in a more humane manner.

Last evening in my room, I spent three hours in a telephone meeting with other council members. I'm thankful I've not had to travel back and forth as we used to years ago.

Merry was happy to hear that her cabin could be used as a resting place for the patrol warriors but asked that Silas move the herbs to the kitchen garden when I informed her of the garden and orchard being restored.

Councilman Roman Walker offered to travel and speak with the pack alphas, and after agreement he will speak to them and report back to the council. We will need to know their stance on helping Spirit Walker Pack, and Alpha Lyle's position with the rogues from no-man's-land.

That saves me some time, but I will still speak to them as I know that I can throw my weight around somewhat. I can also mention invitations to the Blackshadow ball if I need to, and the fact they may not get any invitations.

I will contact the other areas and see if any wolf shifters they have living amongst them want to attend. It's an ideal time for them to find their mate, but I know it may not be something they want. It is their choice, and I can only offer the opportunity on behalf of Alpha Connell.

"Move your ass, Dahlia. I want that herb area cleared before lunchtime." Glancing over, I see that Dahlia is sitting in the middle of the patch they cleared for herbs, and she's covered in dirt, looking more than a little disheveled. I'm sure she'll lose some of her weight with all the exercise she's now doing. But I have to admit I like a she-wolf with meat on her bones, but because it's natural, and not because she's lazy.

Dahlia lost her mate quite a few years ago, and since then she's had a miserable aura about her. I can understand her loss as I lost my mate a long time ago too, but you cannot allow your life to stop because of it. Although I didn't know Dahlia's mate, I'm sure he wouldn't want her to be as she is.

Hearing my name, I turn and see Alpha Connell walking over to me. I give him a questioning look, and he smirks as he takes a seat beside me.

“Are you having a lazy moment?”

“Oh funny! I was taking stock of what I had to do, where I had to go, and who I needed to speak with.”

“Ah, well, come and have some lunch. It’s sausage with mashed potato and onion gravy. I’ll tell you, it’s better than the damn sandwich Dahlia fed us every day.”

“Lead on.” I grin and follow Alpha Connell into the dining room, which smells heavenly.

After lunch, I roll my sleeves up and work beside Alpha Connell and others to cut hedges and clean up areas around the packhouse. Each of the pack members helping are eager and more than happy to be working alongside their Alpha. I know the pack is going to survive and flourish. It’s easy to see, and it’s more than a little heartwarming.

Chapter 9



HOPE

Packing the latest batch of lotion into a cardboard box, I fasten the top and place it in a corner of the shack. I know I'll need it before anything else that I make. Soap is low and I will have to consider making more. My last experiment was chamomile shampoo with a touch of cumin, so it leaves the hair feeling softer, a type of conditioner.

The door opens and Swift rushes in, giving me a broad smile. "Hope, I know you are packing some of your things, but I came over to see if you need help. My shit of a shack is done and I'm ready to leave."

I know why she's calling her place a shit of a shack because it is pieces of wood placed against a tree, so if we are being picky you'd just call it a lean to. Last winter Swift spent more time here with me than in her own shack, but I loved the company and we kept each other warm while sleeping on the bed of straw.

"You know we are not guaranteed to be leaving yet, don't you?" I ask, because Swift is acting like it's a forgone conclusion. "I want this to work for us too, Swift, but we cannot say what it is going to be like until we've had this visit."

"I hope our mates are in this pack. It would be good to find our mate and have the support one would bring. It would be nice to be loved and protected, although we can protect ourselves." Throwing herself down on the bed, Swift looks lost in her thoughts. But me, I'm not sure I even want a mate, not after what happened with my mother and her mate.

“Have you seen Baildon?” I ask, and Swift’s head shoots at me and frowns before answering. “Last week I saw him, and he was coming out of Suella’s shack.”

“Oh, no, I hope she hasn’t got her claws in him because we all know she’s the go to when any of the males need to find a release, with no strings attached.” I rub my eyes and can’t help feeling somewhat disappointed that he would go to her, rather than look for his mate.

“I know she’s only trying to get by the same as the rest of us, but she’s just making herself into something her mate will reject. No decent male will want a she-wolf that has been with as many males as she has.” Swift stands and walks over to the small table and starts to pack things into the small box I have open and waiting.

“I heard her mate already rejected her.”

Swift looks at me with shock on her face. “That’s not nice. Why did he reject her?”

“Well, it seems her mom was lazy and wouldn’t do anything to provide for them, so she would ‘hire’ Suella out to anyone to get things. It turned out that it was usually to men, so she grew up not knowing any different. By the time her mom died, Suella was pretty much cast in her ways and no-one was there to show her any different. She’d been brought up as a rogue so had no pack to guide her or correct her. When her mate found her, he was so disgusted he rejected her immediately. I suppose it’s not entirely her fault but you can’t help thinking that she should have enough respect for herself to see that what she’s doing isn’t right.”

“She can see how other females behave, she’s not blind. Stupid, yes, but not blind. She must like the way she lives.” Swift has her nose scrunched up and her eyes squinted as she speaks, and I somehow stop myself from laughing at her.

I’m going to have to look for Baildon if he doesn’t come to see me soon. He’s not acting like the brother I always saw him as.

Maybe he has stepped away from me as a family member, and if that's true, then he should have the nerve to tell me.

We pack most of what I own and step outside to continue packing the cauldron, pans, and other equipment I use for my lotions. Carrying the boxes near to the shack, we make sure they are safely tucked as far out of view as possible.

"Done. I'll go hunt for something to eat. Do you want to see what you have to go with it?" Swift asks and I give her a nod of agreement and walk over to where I know I can pick Ramps, which are wild onions. Hunting around, I find chickweed and borage flowers. I walk back into the shack, then rinse the food before tossing together with a few sunflower seeds.

Swift returns with two rabbits and quickly cleans them before skewering them to place over the fire pit. "Come on, let's get the fire started and eat. My stomach is talking to me and it's not thrilled."

"I'm hungry myself. Are you staying with me tonight?" I ask but think I know the answer after she's already told me her shack is packed.

"Yeah, I'll stay with you and we can walk together. Do you think we should go in our wolf's form because it's a long way?"

"I don't know. How long do you think it's going to take us?"

"We are starting tomorrow and it'll take us around twenty hours, I think from what Brian said. He is getting permission for us to cross the territory of the Blood Pearl Pack, and the Wolfsfoot Pack, which is the town where we can stop and eat something, I'm sure. Do you have any money at all?" Swift asks and takes out a small pouch from her back pants pocket, shaking out a small amount of change.

"I have a little put on one side, but not much. It'll be enough to get us a meal on each journey, to and from the Blackshadow Pack."

“We cannot carry all our things that far, Hope. What the heck are we going to do about all your herbal stuff?” Swift looks at me with worry.

Stop worrying about everything. Briar cuts into my thoughts.

‘It has taken a long time to get what we have Briar, I don’t want to lose it all and have to start all over again.’

Sometimes it is what has to happen before we get better things than we have at the moment.

‘We will see what happens, but I don’t want to lose everything that we have.’ I can feel Briar’s irritation at my response, but she’s going to have to put up with how I feel.

Looking at Swift, she has the fire started and the rabbits hanging over the top. I sit cross-legged on the ground and close my eyes, allowing the sounds of the forest to wrap around me.

After we have eaten, I excuse myself from Swift and walk around looking for Baildon. I aim for Suella’s shack and, hearing the disgusting grunting and huffing noises, I know she has some male-wolf inside her shack with her.

“Oh, just there, that’s it... ohhhh... Ga..m..zi..n. Give it to me.”

Oh dear me, I’m going to have to clean my ears out with something after hearing this. But a giggle bursts out when I hear Gamzin snarl. “Will you shut up, you’re putting me off my stroke.”

“I didn’t think you were into she-wolves, Hope,” I hear behind me and whirl around to see Baildon standing, watching me with amusement in his eyes.

Slamming my hands on my hips, I squint my eyes at him and take a step toward him. “Where the heck have you been? I’ve been looking for you because I need to know what you are doing about this meeting with the Blackshadow Pack on Saturday.”

“I don’t know, and I’m not sure any of us should join a pack.”

Baildon is 6' 2", dark hair and eyes, and his wolf is all black apart from a tip of white on his forehead and tail. His wolf Jet is forceful, confident and strong. He is also loving towards me and Briar, seeing us as a sibling, the same as we both see him.

"I can't live like this forever, Baildon. The rogues of no-man's-land are getting more aggressive and although they don't bother us too much, they have pushed forward at the packs, particularly the Spirit Walker Pack. Do you honestly think they'll not come, and either kill us all, or make us join them?" Dropping my hands from my hips, I give Baildon a pleading look. I can see he is considering what I'm saying and knowing him well, I give him the time he needs to decide.

"Okay, I'll come with you, and more to protect you than anything else."

I step to him, wrap my arms around his waist, hugging him tightly. "Thank you, brother."

"You know you always call me brother when you get your own way." Baildon chuckles, returns my hug before stepping away and looking down at me. "What are you doing outside of Suella's shack?"

"I was looking for you as someone told me you've been spending time with Suella. Now, you know if your mate finds out you've been spending time with another she-wolf, she's not going to be happy and you don't want her rejecting you because of it."

"I don't think I will have a mate, Hope. Let's face it, who the heck would want a rogue like me."

"I would," I say, because Baildon is a good person and he'd be one heck of an excellent mate to have. "Don't sell yourself short brother, you are a catch for any she-wolf, and if she doesn't see that, then she's not worth having."

Gamzin steps out of Suella's shack, fastening the fly on his pants. I screw my face up in disgust, and when Suella herself steps to the doorway, I give her a look of distaste. She is standing with her dress hanging open and her breasts hardly

covered. Thankfully, she is gripping it together at her stomach level or we'd all get to see something I don't even want to imagine.

"You coming inside?" Suella asks Baildon and I whip around and give him a piercing look.

"No, thanks," Baildon responds, and I note he has a tint of pink on his cheeks with embarrassment. Good, I'm thinking, it serves him right after the conversation we just had.

Gamzin is grinning at the unease that he picks up on. "It's okay, Hope, us males have to have some fun."

"If you call sticking your dick in that, fun, you're easily pleased. That's all I can say."

"Well, at least I'm getting some, that's more than you are," Suella squeals in what I suppose is her version of sarcasm.

"If and when I want some, Suella, it'll be cleaner and in better shape than what you've just had."

"I could teach you a thing or two with it," Gamzin snarls.

"Believe me, there's nothing that you could teach me other than how to throw up." I mime throwing up and I hear Baildon laughing.

"You will be rejected if your mate finds you, and finds you are spending this time with Suella. It's a good thing as wolves we don't get diseases as the humans do or you'd be riddled with it and so would you, Suella." That has Gamzin's face setting, and he takes a step toward me, but Baildon steps forward too, making sure nothing happens to me. Suella closes the door to her shack, and if the door was strong enough, I'm sure she'd slam it.

"You need to be careful what you say, Hope, or you could find yourself in deep trouble," Gamzin snarls.

"The truth is all I've said, and if you can't understand that, then it's your problem and not mine." I snap, turn from him and walk back towards my shack, with Baildon right behind me.

“You may be right that it’s time to move on. Not sure it’s joining a pack, but it is as far as getting away from Gamzin. He will never leave here and I think Suella will stay, too. But if our guess regarding the rogues of no-man’s-land is right, then it’s not going to be safe much longer.”

Friday morning, we set out in wolf form and quickly get into an even stride. Trotting is easy for a wolf, and we can travel for hours at this speed.

Swift, Jessie, Antica, Lorna, Clover, Baildon, Chaz, Alan, Drew, Chester, Walim, and Stephen are traveling beside me. Another group is traveling behind us and I’m more than a little surprised so many are interested in checking out this pack.

We stop at a stream and take a drink, rest for twenty minutes and then continue onwards. Covering the miles, we continue throughout the day and into the night, before finding a safe area to curl up in our wolf forms, to remain warm, and at the ready for any trouble that may come to us.

Jet sleeps next to Briar and rests his head on our shoulders, making sure if he feels us move, it will wake him.

Stopping at the town of Wolfsfoot, we know it’s now a pack, and we are careful how we speak if we are spoken to. I have enough to buy a breakfast for Swift, Baildon and myself and we all three were needing it too.

Once everyone is ready, we make the last part of the journey and stop once we reach the Blackshadow Pack border. Waiting for a patrol warrior to arrive. We know it won’t take long and some shift to human form while I stay as Briar.

Baildon shifts to human form and rubs his hand over my head. “Stay as Briar and if you need to run, then run, I will meet with you back at the Northern Parklands.”

Chapter 10



CONNELL

Today we have the rogues from the Northern Parklands coming, and I'm hoping they are amenable to joining the pack. I know Flint is interested in meeting the rogues too, and is just as open-minded as I am about them becoming new pack members, and bringing skills we can incorporate.

Walking through to the kitchen, I feel the difference in the room. The atmosphere is usually heavy in here, but without Dahlia it feels light, and I pause as I hear the talking and laughter.

Evangeline is working alongside the other pack members at the counters and sinks, and to my surprise, has a smile on her face. Now this she-wolf is usually as sour as Dahlia, but maybe the change of the person in charge is going to have a positive effect on the people working in the kitchen in a big way.

Stepping further into the kitchen, the talking and laughing cease, and Nessie, Isla and Nora turn to look at what has caused Evangeline and Betina to quieten.

"Is everything okay in here, Nessie?" I ask.

"Yes, everything is wonderful, Alpha Connell. We have been cleaning cabinets, and the pantry and organizing this morning. We won't be late getting things out for the visitors later for lunch," Nessie quickly tells me, but I notice she looks nervous.

"That is great. Nothing fancy is needed. The visitors will more than likely eat whatever you put in front of them."

Giving me a dip of her head, Nessie continues speaking to me. "We are making a hearty soup, bread and an assortment of

sandwiches.”

“Good. That sounds nice. I’ll have some of the soup. I just love soup and to dip the bread.” I can see they are all trying not to react with giggles, but Isla can’t hold hers back and when the giggle bursts forth she slams her hand over her mouth. I want to maintain a lighter feeling between pack members and myself so I throw my head back and laugh along with her, which has everyone laughing.

Turning when the kitchen door opens, I smirk at Flint, who has raised eyebrows at the laughter he’s just walked in on. “What’s going on in here?” He grins.

“Well, I love my soup and dipping the bread into it, hmm mmm,” I state, rubbing my stomach to make a show of it.

“Soup you say, well I’ll have some of that too,” Flint grins.

“You’ll all get soup and whatever we place out. Now, shoo,” Nessie says with a huge smile on her face, and I’ve got to admit it has me feeling good seeing it.

Visiting the garden and orchard, I hold the smile back when I see Dahlia covered in soil, hair astray and rosy cheeks with the effort she must put into the chore she is doing.

I notice Silas walking out of the potting shed so make my way over to him. “Silas, how are things doing here?”

“Good. I have seeds planted, and the greenhouse is nearly ready. I’ve also cleaned all the equipment and have it hanging in the shed ready for use. Bladrick, Noah and William have been great. They’ve worked hard, and we have made considerable headway.”

“That is good to hear. As a pack, we need to pull together, learn to trust each other, and work for the benefit of all,” speaking more to myself than to Silas.

“I still have the herb garden to work on. I’m not sure all that would be used if I grow it, but I’ll make a list and see if I can find anyone that knows more about herbs than I do.” Silas

rubs his chin with this thumb and forefinger, frowning while deep in thought.

“We’ll work it out, Silas, don’t worry. You have a lot of work going on in the orchard still, so concentrate on that for now.” Gripping his shoulder, I give it a squeeze, then head back inside to my office, where I’ll look at the plans for the Lodge and what we are going to do with it.

Lunch came around quickly, and I place all the paperwork on my desk away in the top drawer before heading outside where Caleb has mind-linked to inform me that the Northern Parklands rogues have arrived.

At the front of the packhouse, I smile at the few shifters that are standing in front of me. Six she-wolves and seven males. Nice number, I’m thinking to myself. We could have welcomed more, but I’d rather have a few that have genuine interest than more who are just staking the pack out.

Bladrick, along with three patrol warriors have walked the rogues to the packhouse, keeping them from wandering around the territory. I give them a small nod of thanks, then quickly speak to the newcomers.

“Welcome to the Blackshadow Pack. I’m Alpha Connell. Please follow me to the tables and seating area you can see on the lawn. We’ll have something to eat while we ask and answer questions.” Leading them over to the tables where the kitchen staff are placing platters of sandwiches, bread, and the large pot of soup.

Knight is hopping about in my mind and giddy with excitement. It’s distracting, so I quickly snap at him.

‘Calm down, I can’t think with you acting like that.’ I cut the contact with Knight and block him so he doesn’t interfere with what I’m doing. But I find myself rubbing my hand over my heart while it’s beating far faster than is normal.

Two of the she-wolves have changed into their wolves, and are staying near the edge of the others. One of the males is

speaking quietly to one while squatting in front of her, stroking her head.

Taking a step towards the three of them, I'm feeling agitated that he is touching her, which makes no sense, as I don't know who she is.

Before I can get near, one of the she-wolves looks up under the male's arm, turns and runs back where they'd just come from, heading to the pack border.

"What's wrong?" I ask as I near the male, who isn't sure whether he needs to chase the she-wolf or stay where he is. But the other female turns and runs after the one that left.

"Everything is fine. I think Hope got rattled about something and bolted. Swift will catch up and either bring her back or escort her back to the Parklands." The male is stepping from one foot to the other, unsure what he should do.

I rub my chest once more, and my hand rests over my heart. I'm not sure why I feel like I'm losing something important, but when I try to work out what's going on, Caleb walks over to us and holds his hand out to the male.

"My name is Caleb, and I'm acting Beta for the pack at the moment. Come and eat, and ask your questions. Can I ask what happened to the she-wolves to run like that?"

"Spooked I think. My name is Baildon, by the way. Hope, who ran first, is my sister by choice. The other is Swift, who is a natural protector. She'll stay with Hope and I think she'll talk her into coming back."

"MATE!" we three hear and turn to see Isla running over and standing in front of Baildon, who looks rather shell-shocked before he grabs ahold of Isla, slams her against his chest and sounding shocked states, "Mate!" before slamming his mouth over hers and kissing her soundly.

I can't help but smile broadly as this is the first mate match I've seen in a long time, because the mate for Evangeline rejected her, and to see them accept each other is simply

beautiful. I rub my chest once more and think how lucky they are and please Goddess, let me find my mate, my Luna.

Evangeline looks sad when I notice her watching Isla and Baildon, and knowing her mate rejected her, I can only hope she'll be granted a second-chance mate. That is something I think she'll get if she proves to the Goddess she has learned her lesson.

No one can say what the Goddess Selene sees or hears, but from what we are taught, she is all seeing. It's one of the worries I have when thinking about finding my mate. I hope I'm showing that I'm a fit male, and will be an excellent mate and Alpha to the pack.

I mingle with the other five males as Baildon is sitting with Isla on his lap, looking smug, I have to say, and rightly so. Isla is a hard worker and has never caused a day's drama for herself or anyone else.

"Do any of you possess a particular area of expertise? What is it that you want to do or excel at more than anything else?" I ask.

The one named Chaz nods, "Yes, I'm an expert hunter, not a bad fighter either, but my tracking skills are the best and I don't mean to sound boastful, but it's the truth. I'll be a good patrol warrior mind you."

"I'd be handy in a garden; I have worked alongside Hope at times, so am not bad at planting and growing," Chester states with a good amount of pride to his voice.

"Silas has been getting our kitchen garden and orchard cleared out, cleaned, and is now replanting. I'm sure he'd be happy to have help with that, as it's not a small area." I wave to Silas who walks over and I introduce them and watch as Silas grabs Chester's arm and drags him away to the garden.

"What about you five?" I ask as I turn toward the five of them.

"We are all warriors. We've patrolled the area where we live to keep the she-wolves safe. Gamzin has put himself into the position of leading our area, but he's what you would call

unelected, and we mostly ignore him,” Walim informs me with a snarky grin on his face.

Baildon walks over holding onto Isla’s hand tightly, showing all signs of being territorial. “Alpha Connell, Hope will come back, I’m sure. I’ll make sure even if I have to fetch her because now I know I’m joining the pack with your permission. I’ll not leave her or Swift behind.”

“What do you think Swift would want to do here if she agrees to join?” I ask.

Baildon grins, “That’s easy as Swift is a natural fighter. She’s fast and can be deadly if she wants to be. She hunts better than some of the men in the Parklands. She is also big friends with Hope, looks out for her, brings her food. Hope does the cooking, because let me tell you, you do not want to eat Swift’s cooking.”

The man who introduced himself as Walim laughed and gave a look that was hard to work out, but when he mimicked vomiting, we all laughed at his antics.

Baildon, Drew, Walim, Chaz, Alan and Stephen all want to join the pack and be patrol warriors. We arranged for them to join once all the she-wolves give their decisions, plus it will be easier to do them all at the same time, than one here and one there.

Chester has not reappeared from where he went away with Silas, so I’m sure they are enjoying talking about the garden and orchard.

The two she-wolves don’t reappear, and I can see it’s worrying Baildon and the other males, but I also see he’s not going to be leaving his mate as the urge to claim her is getting stronger the longer they are together.

Noah walks over to me and the group of males as we finish eating and I slap his shoulder. “Take everyone to look around the garden, orchard, kitchen, dining room and the rooms they will have if they decide to stay. Take the second group that have arrived too, and if you need to, get William to help you.”

“Yes, Alpha Connell. Come on and I’ll give you the tour. You can tell me what you’ve decided to do, if you’ve decided.” I hear Noah say as he walks away with the males behind him. All except Baildon, who is being dragged into the packhouse by a more than willing Isla. I can’t help the smirk and the feeling he’s one lucky male.

I’m taken by surprise when Knight pushes the block away and snarls. *Mate, I want my mate.*

‘Yeah, so would I Knight, so would I.’

Chapter 11



HOPE

Stopping outside of the Blackshadow Pack's territory, I slow down as I skirt the town of Wolfsfoot and the Wolfsfoot Pack members. Swift is beside me and I can feel her annoyance at my making a run for it, although she does not know why.

What is going on? Swift's wolf Red asks Briar. I roll my eyes because they are so impatient.

Hope panicked, and I'll speak to her once she stops with the dramatics. Briar responds, and I can hear her giving a wolfish laugh as she does.

Our humans need to be more like us. Red complains, and I cut the link before checking where we are and changing back.

Swift quickly changes back herself, pushes her red hair behind her ears and gives me a foul look. "What the heck is going on? Why did you run like that? No messing about Hope. Tell me what spooked you badly enough for you to run?"

"Well, you know I never wanted a mate, because of my father being an alpha and me being illegitimate."

"Yes, I know all that."

"Well, I caught the scent of my mate," looking at Swift and hoping she understands why I panicked.

"You did not!"

"Yes, I did, and I wasn't waiting to see who it was. I wanted away from there before he smelled me." I purposely give Swift my puppy dog eyes to stop her blowing into a full temper tantrum.

“Goddess’s sake, Hope. Whoever it is, is meant for you, sent by the Goddess herself. Stop being such a wimp. This is what you need to be whole. Who gives a fickle that your momma had a child without being mated to that asshole sire of yours. It’s his loss. Your momma was a great person. She loved you selflessly and was happy to live in the Parklands as long as she had you. Now we’re going home, we’re going to pack up and get what you want to take with you ready, and don’t think I’ve not noticed you didn’t pack everything. But we are moving to that pack and I’m going to boot your ass all the way if I have to.”

A tear runs down my cheek, thinking of my momma. I miss her so much and my father I don’t give a damn about. I wouldn’t give him the time of day if he was standing in front of me. He broke my momma’s heart and I’ll never forgive him for that.

From what momma heard a few years later, he had no heir and his chosen mate wasn’t such a good choice as she was barren. Not telling him she couldn’t have pups because of an injury must have been a blow to him, but too late to claim this daughter, and unless he rejected her and took another, he’ll never have an heir.

I’m thankful we stay south of the Northern Parklands, as he is the Alpha of the Wolfsong Pack in the area of the Northern Sector. Alpha Soren Wolfgang, you will have to meet the Goddess one day, and answering to her isn’t going to be easy. The grin that crosses my face I can’t hold back, and seeing Swift give me a questioning look, I shake my head. “Come on, Swift, live up to your name,” I say over my shoulder just as I shift back to Briar and begin running home. I’m not stopping this time either. I’m going to run all the way, whether it be wolf or human.

Waking in my shack after sleeping for twelve hours, I’m hungry and thirsty. Feeling hot, I turn my head and see Swift asleep beside me, and she has one arm over my waist and her head tucked between my shoulder blades.

I giggle as I know she's going to pretend she didn't cuddle into me, spooning, and I'm going to have to tease her about this. Hearing someone whispering outside the shack, I slide off the bed and quickly open the door.

Gamzin is laying a hunk of meat by the side of the door and Dagon is beside him with a rabbit. "Oh, I didn't mean to wake you, Hope. I knew you must have run a long way as you both never sleep this long, and one of you has been snoring."

Dagon chuckles but looks at his feet when I frown and give him my best glare. "Thank you, Gamzin, we appreciate you doing this for us. We got to the Blackshadow Pack but turned and left before meeting anyone. I cannot tell you anything, but I will if I go back and check it out more thoroughly."

"Why didn't you stay, once you'd gone all that way?" Gamzin asks and leans on the shack which has it move slightly. He quickly takes a step away looking guilty because we both know it could fall even with a gentle push.

Swift pushes past and gives a snort. "She chickened out and ran home. Of course, that meant silly me ran after her to make sure nobody hurt her."

Dagon laughs and looks at Gamzin. "We should have gone and checked it out. Maybe we would like it?"

"I already told you I'm not joining a pack. I enjoy doing what I want and when I want to do it. I don't want another alpha telling me how to live. I had enough of that previously." Turning and walking away without another word, I smile a little when Dagon tries to catch up and ends up jogging.

"Do you know where Gamzin came from?" Swift asks, and I turn to look at her, shrugging my shoulders as I do not know. I've never spoken to him about it.

"Wolfsong Pack," Swift adds, gives me a smirk, then walks around the shack to start the fire pit to cook the meat, which she'd picked up eagerly.

"Oh, Goddess," I murmur and now I'll have to tell Gamzin my story one day so I can hear his.

Rushing away I find the water jug in the shack and take it to the stream where I fill it before bringing it back to fill the kettle and make a chamomile tea.

After we've eaten, which we've done without conversation, I know I'm going to have to say something. "Swift, I'll pack up and we'll go to the Blackshadow Pack. I know you want to be a member of a pack with the security it will bring to us."

"We need our mates too Hope, they complete us. I want my mate, I want pups, but I also want to belong."

"I know. But you know as soon as we go back my mate will smell me and that will be game over?"

"I'm sorry, Hope. I know you didn't want that."

"What happened?" We both turn when we hear the comment and Gamzin steps over to us, sitting on the ground in front of the fire pit, giving us a questioning look.

Sighing, because I know I can't ignore this any longer. "I found my mate. Well, I would have if I'd stayed. I panicked and ran."

Gamzin stares at me a moment before I notice the corner of his lip twitches, then he grins, and throws his head back laughing. Once he gets himself under control, he grins again. "Is that all? I was worried something horrible had happened to you both, after the short explanation earlier."

"I never wanted a mate, Gamzin, and I have a good reason for it."

"Do you know who her father is?" Swift asks and I pin her with an ugly look because this isn't her story to tell.

"No, I don't speak to people about mine or their past. It is what it is and we can never change it, we can only move on from it." Gamzin gives me a steely look, and I know he now has his interest piqued thanks to Swift, but he'll not ask, he'll want to see if I tell him or not.

Taking a deep breath, I start to speak, "My momma's mate was an alpha heir, and he rejected her as his father had arranged a chosen mate for him, one that would bring power

through the alliance. They had one night together and I am the result of that night. My momma loved me and left the pack when she discovered she was having a pup. She didn't want to risk the old alpha taking her pup from her or killing it.

"My father did nothing to stop any of this from happening. He agreed to the union and told my momma he was done with her. Rejected her, and she accepted without a second thought. She always said the Goddess did things for a reason, and time would tell us why.

"Momma came here and built the shack, she had me, and I think lived happily until the disgusting no-man's-land rogue found us and she fought him to save me and, as you know, she died."

"I'm sorry, Hope. I liked your momma. She was kind and deserved much better than that," Gamzin says and pats my hand, trying to comfort me, I think.

"Thing is Gamzin, the Goddess has paid him back in some way, because his chosen mate had an accident when young, and never told him she was barren because of it. So, he has no heir, and his father died knowing his line would end unless he took another chosen mate, or found his Goddess-given mate." I smile broadly, showing all my teeth in a wolfish sharp smile.

"Can I ask who the Alpha is?" Gamzin stares at me, letting me see he's not judging, and that's what has me deciding to reply.

"Alpha Soren Wolfgang," I say quietly, waiting for his reaction, but I didn't expect him to explode.

"THAT PIECE OF SHIT. HE IS THE WORST ALPHA I'VE EVER MET AND HE NEEDS KNOCKING OFF HIS PEDESTAL!" Jumping to his feet I watch as Gamzin paces back and forth, mumbling under his breath, and so low even my wolf hearing isn't picking up what he's saying.

I look over at Swift, and she has eyes so rounded in shock that I'm wondering if I look as bad as she does. I wait a minute before I speak. "Well, you obviously know of the Alpha."

“Oh, I know him alright. He’s the alpha of the pack I left.” Gamzin looks at me closely before sitting down once more and continues to stare at me as though he’s making his mind up about something.

Swift points to her mug and I see she’s finished the tea I’d made, so I quickly make another and hand her a refill, one for myself and I make one for Gamzin, who gives me a nod of thanks before taking a sip then starts to speak.

“I left the Wolfsong Pack because the Alpha and Luna were disgusting leaders. Luna Corintha is a hateful she-wolf. She is quick to anger, and isn’t slow to lash out with her fists. I’ve come up against her a few times when she’s hit a pup, or a timid she-wolf. I despise her and her mate. They are both rotten to the core.”

“I’m thrilled I don’t know him, and he’ll never find me, as I’m sure he’ll not come to the Parklands.” I finish my tea, and we all sit, contemplating what we’ve heard.

“If you join a pack and the packs merge in a meeting, a ball, or something like that, then you may come across him. But I would suggest you stay away from anything like that, unless you are forced to attend. Then have yourself look less like your momma, because Hope he’ll recognize you are your momma’s daughter. You look so much like her it cannot be mistaken.” Gamzin searches my face, and I can tell he’s seeing my momma in his mind when a little mistiness shows in his eyes.

“If he finds you, he could try to force you back to his pack as his heir. He’s never had another pup, so you’d be the one he’d drag back to get mated to someone in the pack so they could take over as alpha. The only way you’d avoid that is if you had already found your mate, and preferably your mate, being an alpha himself.”

I look at Swift and swallow loudly because we do not know who my mate is at this point, but we know where he is. All we can do is hope he is a high-ranking wolf, like a Beta.

“The shifter council would get involved if he tried that sort of thing, and although they are stuffy old shifters, I think they would see the error in forcing you to go back to the pack when he rejected your momma, and you in that process,” Swift says. Trying to calm my nerves I’m sure.

“He would argue he didn’t know he had a pup, or he wouldn’t have done it. Or he’d have kept your momma in the pack so he could be a part of your life. He’s an asshole, and will spin it any way he can to win, so be careful Hope.” Gamzin is looking at me seriously, and I give him a nod to let him know I understand.

The last of the meat is cooked and Swift tears it into portions, handing some to me first and then to Gamzin, who is shocked at the offer, but takes it and eats.

We all sit quietly thinking about what we have discussed, and it’s then I realize Gamzin isn’t who I thought he was. He’s caring, considerate, and will put himself in danger for others. I’ve made a grave error in judgement and one I’ll make sure never to do again.

Chapter 12



CONNELL

Monday morning, and I'll be attending to the new pack members. I want them to be official members so they have the safety and security of the pack. They'll be able to mind link myself and the other pack members.

The Beta challenge is stirring up a lot of excitement, and I'm more than happy to see the pack getting involved. The kitchen staff are talking about putting on a side of food that anyone will be able to take if they are hungry.

Silas and Chester, I notice, are joined at the hip and always rushing about doing something for the garden. I also saw one of the women named Antica being involved with the garden too, but it seems Dahlia isn't happy another woman is helping them.

Bladrick and Caleb are holding training sessions to check who needs the most training, and who, if any, can be placed on the patrol roster quickly.

Standing watching the training, I notice Baildon and Drew are excellent fighters, followed fairly closely by Chaz. The others are decent, but rough, showing their rogue status by not having the flow and ease in their fighting. They have a more, 'blast into the enemy, and if you get hurt, then you do' attitude.

Patrol warriors need to be aware of each other, protect the backs of their pack members as well as holding their own against an opponent. We don't fight with the other packs in our area. We've had peace between us for a long time and I

hope it intends to stay that way. One of the reasons I'll run to help if we are called to assist in the defense of another pack.

Spirit Walker Pack are the ones that suffer the most direct impact from the rogues in no-man's-land, and I hope, if we can build the pack, to send some warriors to assist. Maybe a system where they go for a month, then come back, and are replaced by others. If we were the ones being attacked, I would hope some of the packs would come to our aid.

Stopping to watch the training, I grin as I see Noah being thrown over Baildon's head, landing on his back and the wind being forced out of his body with the impact. Baildon laughs, then holds his hand out to help Noah stand. I can see the bonds growing while I watch, and I can't help but think this has been a good idea and will result in great pack members once they settle with us.

Caleb steps up to my side and watches the training for a few minutes before speaking. "I think we've some excellent fighters in the future with these, and pack members. They've only been here two days and look at them. They've fit in with ease."

"Yes, I was thinking the same thing. The two she-wolves haven't reappeared as yet. Baildon asked if he can go find them if they don't arrive this week."

Caleb looks at me before nodding. "I think that would be a good idea. He said he saw her as a sister, and she's a healer. But, even without that, I'd not be feeling good about leaving two she-wolves to fend for themselves."

A chuckle bursts from me when I see William chasing Walim around the training grounds, threatening he's going to beat him when he catches him. But it has Walim laughing harder and putting on an extra burst of speed.

Stephen sticks his foot out and trips Walim, giving William the chance to catch him, take him down, and they wrestle, laughing all the while.

“Come on, Caleb. Let’s go to the office and check on the map of the territory. I want to put it forward that we build more cabins. We don’t want to build extra levels onto the packhouse. Mated pairs will be happier in their own homes, with the privacy that they can enjoy.”

“That’s a great idea, Alpha Connell.” Caleb walks beside me as we enter the main door of the packhouse, and I take in the smell of something that has my mouth watering.

Diverting from the path to my office, I make my way, with Caleb keeping pace behind me, to the kitchen. Opening the door, I see Nessie directing two new women on how to make bread.

“What’s that delightful smell?” I ask as my eyes scan the room.

“Oh, good morning, Alpha Connell, Beta Caleb. I think you can smell the cinnamon rolls.” Pointing at a tray filled with the most amazing looking rolls. I look at Nessie and she grins while handing me a plate to get as many as I want. Grinning, I place two on the plate, and after thanking her, I walk out of the kitchen, holding my plate as though I just won a major prize.

“That was a good move. These are darn good.” Turning, I see Caleb has a plate with a roll and a half on it. The other half is in his mouth already, and he’s chewing for all he’s worth.

“After the evening meal, I want you to arrange Bladrick, Noah, William, and yourself to be here for a meeting about building the cabins.” I stand and point out where I’m thinking of building, and he nods his head in thought, agreeing with me on the proximity to the packhouse, in case of anything happening where everyone needs to get to a safe place.

The packhouse is going to be the safest place and my idea of making the pack safer includes building a safe room for the pups, and non-fighting she-wolves. There will be less worry for us in defending them.

Flint walks into the office and takes a seat, acting like he lives here, and has a right to just wander in. I'm not going to argue with him because he'll always deserve my respect for the help and guidance he has given. His support has been the thread that's kept me sane after the way my father behaved, and the horrors he brought to the pack.

I lift an eyebrow questioningly at Flint, who gives me a deadpan look, but I notice the tiniest of twitches of his lip as he's holding in his smirk.

"Can I help at all? I've nothing better to do at the moment. I've spoken with all the new people. They are all happy to be here and are more than eager to join the pack. Why don't we get that done today?" Flint asks, and I'm sure he's right, the sooner the better.

"Okay, we'll do it when everyone comes for the evening meal. We can welcome them and then eat together. It'll give that feeling of being included and accepted." Taking my seat behind the desk, I speak once more. "I'm going to suggest that we build cabins around the packhouse. Near enough for everyone to get here in an emergency, but far enough, they'll have privacy. What are your thoughts on that?"

Flint leans forward in his seat and beams. "That's a great idea. I've spoken of this to other packs, but it seems most prefer a mansion of a packhouse where everyone lives in it. Trouble with that is it can cause drama among the she-wolves when jealousy rears its head, or fights among the males over anything and nothing."

"I also want to build a safe room for the pups and nursing mothers, even she-wolves that are not fighters. That way, even if we are overrun, the next generation of the pack is safe, at least until allies arrive."

"That is good too, Alpha Connell. You have great thoughts for your pack, and it will come back to you with bonuses in the future. The Goddess Selene sees all, and you are becoming a male and Alpha I'm sure she's proud of."

I rub my chest hearing that because it brings a pang to my heart, even thinking that I am mending what I had become in the past, because of my father, and how he had me treat people.

Later in the day, before the evening meal, I have a shower, change, and quickly make my way downstairs once more. Hearing my name, I turn to see Flint walking toward me.

“Alpha Connell, I just wanted to inform you that the Shifter Council meeting is to be held at the Wolfsfoot Pack. Spirit Walker Pack are having so much trouble with the rogues that we felt it unwise to ask Alpha Lyle to leave his pack for too long and Wolfsfoot is pretty central for all the Alphas. We have been able to supply four warriors from each of the other packs after Roman Walker visited and explained the issues that the Spirit Walker Pack is facing.”

“I agree. He’s not going to want to leave his pack land, not when it’s under threat. I wouldn’t want to leave my pack if we were having the issues he is. I’m hoping to send him extra warriors on a rotation to help him, because his warriors must need a rest from patrols. They are working on the border in fours at this time. That’s taking most of his warriors from the pack and from resting enough, as they are not having the time out to recuperate.

“Now you tell me Roman Walker has found some help from the other three packs in our area. I feel a little less worried for Alpha Lyle’s pack, knowing they have twelve extra warriors.”

“I’m going to speak to the council and see if we can get extra wolf shifters from other packs out of our direct area. We can look at the Northern and Southern Sector packs, see if any would like to transfer here.” Flint’s suggestion takes me by surprise.

“That would be great, and we can take as many as would like to come. The pack has dwindled, and I’m doing everything I can to add members and build the pack back up in numbers and help create mated pairs. I don’t care if they are fated or chosen mates, but we need mates in the pack. The love and

affection they give to each other drifts throughout the pack, as you know, and it'll make it a happier and healthier place.”

Slapping my shoulder, Flint nods, “Yeah, you are a great Alpha, and will be hailed as that if you keep working and thinking as you are.”

Before the evening meal, I take the ceremonial dagger from the safe in my office and head to the dining room. The room is buzzing with excitement and expectation. The rogues are on one side of the room and I can see they are nervous. I'm not going to drag this out, and reaching the front of the room, I clap my hands to get everyone's attention.

Knight is at the forefront of my mind, watching and listening. I know he'll inform me if anything is feeling wrong. But I need him connected to me when I have the rogues become members.

“Good evening everyone. As you all know, we are welcoming new members to the pack this evening. These members were rogues, but not the same as the no-man's-land rogues. You've all had time to speak to them, get to know them, and you'll all have seen Isla found her mate.”

The room bursts with applause at the mention of Isla and Baildon, and I can feel the joy from that union flowing through the pack link to me.

Good thing, and I've spoken to Jet, he's Baildon's wolf. Good wolf, good pack member. Knight informs me, and I'm surprised he's not told me before that he's spoken to Jet.

‘If you feel anyone is not fit to be pack, you tell me before I initiate them.’ I quickly say to Knight and at his grunt, I turn my attention back to the job at hand.

“Baildon, step forward,” I state clearly. As he steps in front of me I hold the dagger to my hand, but before I make the cut on my palm, I look him in the eye and ask, “Do you Baildon swear to uphold the word of your Alpha, protect the pack and be an upstanding member?” I slash a cut across my palm and do the same to him.

Baildon replies, "I swear," and as he doesn't know his surname, we have to be satisfied with only his recognized name. I was worried it would stop the initiation, but thankfully it hasn't. I feel the link to him snap into place and it's strong. He is a Beta by blood and he's a strong Beta too. I can't help but feel the satisfaction of knowing he is now a pack member.

One after another I initiate them all into the pack, and feeling the link snap into place for each one brings me satisfaction that what I am doing is the right thing. The warmth from these new members is astonishing. They have all needed to feel wanted and included, and I'm more than delighted to give that to them.

After our meal and in my office, I discuss my ideas for cabins, which we can build for the mated pairs, or anyone that would like to live outside of the packhouse. They can use them on the understanding they maintain them and keep them in excellent condition.

Flint has joined us for the meeting and I can't help but think he's getting bored with having no urgent issue to attend for the council at the moment. I have noticed he spends two hours in his room around two every afternoon. Probably that is when he has his FaceTime meetings with the council, keeping them and himself up to date with all things.

"I want to hold the Beta Challenge on Wednesday. Do you think that will be appropriate?" I ask everyone, and we'd agreed a week from when I'd last discussed it we have run over that time slightly.

"Yes, I think that's fine. I've heard nothing detrimental about anyone that has placed their name on the list to compete. Funny, mind you, that the people who have stepped forward for this are the new people you've just initiated into the pack. Apart from Armon, Iona and Swan, who are pack warriors, and I'm not surprised as they are all speaking to she-wolves about learning to fight and protect the pack and themselves

in case of an attack,” Bladrick says and looks proud of them as he informs us all.

Flint grins, “I think it’s time our she-wolves stepped up and showed what they can do. Let’s face it, they are lethal when protecting pups, so why not when they protect the pack.”

“Okay, so get it organized and we’ll hold it on Wednesday afternoon. Let the kitchen know, because Nessie will be angry if we drop it on her the morning of the challenge.” Grinning because Nessie has come into her own since she took over the kitchen, showing she’s good at cooking, organizing, and motivating.

Chapter 13



HOPE

Swift wakes me with a jab to the ribs. “Come on lazy, let’s get everything packed so that we can take it with us.”

This is a good thing. It’s time we moved on and we need mate.

‘Alright, Briar, I know, but you also know I didn’t want a mate. I wanted to be free to grow my herbs, heal when I can and live a quiet life.’

You are not meant for a quiet life. You are someone that has a lot to do and will have a lot of influence. Now come on, your momma would be proud.

‘Okay, I’m moving, but I’m going to blame you if this all goes wrong.’

Yeah, of course you are.

I roll my eyes at Briar, and notice Swift is standing with her hands on her hips giving me the look, the one that says get your ass moving.

“I’ve got us some cold meat from last night’s meal. Eat some of that and then can you make us a tea before we start the walk. It’s going to be a long walk and we’ve a lot to carry.” Swift hands me a cracked plate with a few pieces of cold meat on, and I have to say it’s the most unappetizing meal I could ever wish to eat as my first meal of the day.

Taking the plate outside, I walk around to the fire pit and smile when I see everything is ready for me to make the tea. Swift is eager to get moving, and it’s more than obvious because she never touches my fire pit normally, and she certainly doesn’t have water boiling ready for drinks.

During the making of the tea, I'm surprised when Gamzin, Dagon, Berrit, Graham, and Lonnie walk toward me, appearing from my herbal patch. Now that is worrying.

"Morning Hope. We're here to help you carry what we are able. I don't think you can take everything with you. But if you can pack a small piece of each of the herbs, we may be able to take a few different ones with us," Gamzin states sitting on the ground next to me.

"I can do that, and if we wrap the roots in something wet, then we may save them. I have seeds for many of them. It's the ones I don't have seeds for that we'll need to take with us." I'm worried that I'll lose some, but we can only carry so much, and I'm grateful for everyone showing interest in helping me.

Swift rushes around the shack and comes to a halt in surprise. "Hey, what are you all doing?"

Gamzin grins. "We're here to sample Hope's tea and then we're going to help carry what we can to the Blackshadow Pack."

Swift sits next to me on the ground, takes the cup of chamomile tea and looks at each of the males. "Thank you. We were worried about how we were going to carry everything. The stuff in the shack, Hope said to leave here, and to only take the herbs and equipment that she'll need."

I make tea for everyone and pass cracked cups around to everyone. It's better than having no cups but then having to drink from cups that have cracks around the rim is not nice if I'm being honest.

We survived and will survive.

Hearing Briar speaking to me gently brings tears to my eyes, and I put my head down and blink rapidly, not wanting anyone to see I'm about ready to cry.

Berrit asks, "Do you have enough sacks, boxes, or bags to carry what you have?"

“We have enough, because I took what everyone had left once they departed on the journey to Blackshadow Pack. Good thing I knew where they all lived. Once we got back after Miss Scaredy Pants ran away I checked if there was anything left that would be useful,” Swift states grinning broadly.

“Good thinking,” Berrit nods.

“I can clear this area for you, Hope. I’ll pack all the cooking equipment and if I can carry it all I will, then we’ll be able to stop and have something cooked, and a hot drink tonight,” Graham states. Then continues, “we’ll never do this journey in one day, so if we find a sheltered place where we can watch for any threats, we can relax, and even sleep after we’ve filled our bellies.”

Gamzin and the others nod in agreement. We quickly finish our drinks and continue clearing things away. Berrit fetches fresh water and we rinse out the cups before packing them into a backpack that Swift had found on her search and find mission.

Lonnie brings a box to me and places it on the ground. “I dug this up as I know it’s one you pick leaves from. I don’t know what it is, but thought you may like to take it. I took half of what was there and sat it in water a few minutes before I wrapped it in that towel and then the box.”

Looking at the box, I smile. “That is Thyme, Lonnie, and it’s the same one that my momma grew. I’ve kept it going and I thank you so much for getting me this piece. I hope it survives.”

“I’ll carry it and be careful with it, Hope. Can you show us what else you want us to take with us?”

“Come on, Lonnie, I’ll show you.” That is how I come to spend the next hour helping to pack herbs into boxes or bags for us to carry. Covered in dirt and thirsty again, I rush back to the shack where Gamzin, Berrit, Swift, Graham and Dagon are waiting.

“You ready Hope?” Gamzin asks.

“Yes. I just want a drink of water, then I’m ready to walk.” I’m surprised when Swift hands me a bottle of water, and her smirk tells me she knew I’d be thirsty after helping to dig up the herbs.

An hour later we’ve not traveled that far as we are carrying quite a lot of equipment. I smile at Swift, who can’t contain her excitement at heading back to the Blackshadow Pack.

Gamzin, and the others who have helped me pack everything, are walking alongside us and are alert, which surprises me as we’ve not gone that far as yet.

“What made you decide to join the Blackshadow Pack, Gamzin?” I ask because he’s always said he would never join another pack.

“I’ve heard mutterings from a friend in the Wolfsfoot Pack that no-man’s-land rogues are getting more aggressive. They have been attacking the Spirit Walker Pack regularly. We all know that if they invade the Northern Parklands, we stand no chance of defending against them. Their numbers have increased and are becoming a genuine threat, and one we don’t want to deal with.” Gamzin looks at Swift and then me in such a way I’m worried what he’s going to say next.

“You know that the others haven’t returned, which means they are okay with what they found in the Blackshadow Pack. It brings hope for us, Gamzin, and you are a good person. You never deserved to be a rogue here with us,” Swift says and gives Gamzin a look of respect.

Dagon speaks, gaining everyone’s attention. “None of us deserved to be rogues. We have all been treated badly, one way or another. I don’t know everyone’s story and I don’t need to know. But what I feel is we are a pack, we’ve been a pack, we’ve helped each other, we’ve gained friends and look at you, Hope, you have a brother in Baildon, and a sister in Swift.”

I give Swift a huge smile, then frown. “Well, where the heck is my brother now, Dagon?”

“Something had to stop him coming for you, or he knows you’ll come to your senses and follow him to the pack,” Lonnie says.

“He knows you were with me, and I’d keep you safe. He’s going to come for you if you don’t appear soon, I’m sure,” Swift adds.

“I don’t know, we’ve not been as close of late. He’s been spending time with Suella, too. Now that’s something I never expected him to do.” I turn my nose up, and when I hear chuckling I look over and Gamzin is smirking.

“He’s a man, he had to find some relief at some time. Suella is okay, you just don’t know her,” Gamzin says. I give him a dirty look and turn my face away from him.

Lonnie chuckles. “We’ve all visited Suella at one time or another, Hope. She provided a service to the community, just as you have with your healing abilities. That’s how you have to look at it.”

I ignore them all because I don’t want to speak about Suella or the sex she provided for all the males I know.

Swift giggles. “Come on, Hope. Forget about all that, let’s pick up our pace a little before we stop to eat lunch. I’ll hunt for rabbits for tonight later, and we’ll have our bellies full before we sleep.”

As if mentioning her, we all turn when we hear, “WAIT FOR ME!” and see Suella rushing toward us with a backpack on her back. Wearing a pair of shorts that are hardly big enough to cover her butt, and a t-shirt that has holes showing more than enough of her bare chest and belly.

I ignore her and continue walking but can’t help but overhear her speaking to all the males, and I see Swift grinning as she looks at me out of the corner of her eye. I give her an eye roll before marching a little in front of everyone, even though the

bag on my shoulder and the box I'm carrying are weighing me down.

Conrad, Stein, Theo, Ronnet, and Heath jog up from behind, and join us along with Aster, Karia, and Eliza. All rogues that I've healed at one time or another.

Karia walks over to me and takes the bag from my shoulder. "I'll carry that one for you, Hope. I only have one bag and it's not heavy at all. I can carry yours and then the box won't be such a burden."

"Thank you, Karia. That's nice of you."

"You saved my life. This is the least I can do for you." Karia gives me such a lovely smile that it warms me.

Swift steps up to my other side and rolls her eyes before whispering, "If Suella stops to have sex with anyone, we are not waiting for them. We'll just carry on walking. Honestly, she's devouring them with her eyes like they are a damn hot dinner. Anyone would think she was sex starved, and we all know she had sex only a few hours ago, because we can all smell Ronnet on her."

We all freeze for a moment when we hear Gamzin shout, "PROTECT YOURSELVES!"

Looking around, we all drop what we are carrying, and either stand ready, or shift into our wolves. Swift has easily shifted into Red and is standing in front of me defensively.

Berrit, who'd been right behind us while walking, dropped the massive amount he was carrying and changed into his wolf, launching himself at the no-man's-land rogues that have appeared.

Snarling, growling, tearing, screaming, it's frightening. I see a rogue sneaking up behind Aster who is trying to fight off a rogue who has hold of her arm. I pick up the cauldron that Berrit had dropped, and I swing it with all my might, hitting that rogue in the head. He drops to the ground, and I cringe when I see one side of his head caved in. I look up at Aster

and she gives me a whispered thank you before we both look around to see what is happening.

There are rogues going down to the group and I can't help but be proud of my friends, who are rogues the same as myself, but they are fighting well, and taking out the threat quickly.

As soon as the last no-man's-land rogue is down, Gamzin shouts. "PICK UP EVERYONE AND LET'S MOVE. DOUBLE TIME PEOPLE!"

I grab the box and a bag and start walking fast. Swift is carrying five bags and everyone else has something, even if it's not what they were originally carrying. We hightail it from the area as fast as we can, and don't stop for lunch. In fact, we don't stop until we are well into the Blood Pearl Pack territory.

Blood Pearl Pack patrol warriors find us resting in a small clearing. Huddled together is an appropriate description. Gamzin quickly steps toward them and explains what is happening. We all wait for the warriors to contact their alpha.

I can't help but think how great it is to see female she-wolf warriors. Who would have thought we'd ever see such a thing!

"You can stay and rest. Are you here for the night or are you moving along?" one of the warriors asks.

Gamzin responds quickly, "We'll stay but move early in the morning. We have some injuries we need to look at and treat. Are we allowed to hunt for rabbits, and are we near to a water source?"

"Water is not far. I'll take one of you to get that, but only two of you can go hunt for food." The second warrior gives a flick of her head for someone to follow her. Graham picks up the cauldron and a bucket and follows the warrior to get water.

"Swift, Heath, you two hunt for meat," Gamzin says and turns, throwing out orders for everyone to organize a fire pit, an area to sleep, and to help me find what I need to make drinks.

I'm busy finding lotions to cleanse and help fast healing for everyone that has been hurt and notice out the corner of my eye Suella sitting with her back against a tree doing nothing. I flick my eyes around and everyone is doing something except her. Gritting my teeth before I say something nasty, I turn to Lonnie, who has a nasty gash on his forearm.

It's an hour before I've cleaned everyone up. We have the water boiled and drinks made, and a second cauldron of water with wild onions, bracken fern leaves, stinging nettle stems and leaves, and mushrooms, simmering ready for the meat to be dropped into it once it is cleaned and diced.

By the time everyone has eaten, we've cleaned up the area and settled down to rest. My eyes are drooping. I lay next to Swift, who is already asleep and softly snoring. I'm just slipping into sleep when I hear grunting and heavy breathing. When I realize what I'm hearing I snap loudly, "Can you not keep your legs closed for a while? We don't all want to hear you having sex, and tomorrow you can carry as much as everyone else since you have so much energy left."

Everything goes quiet, and I hear chuckling from around me as well as a few female giggles. Obviously they all think the same as me, but weren't coming out and saying it.

Chapter 14



CONNELL

Beta Challenge Day, and I can't wait for it to start. It's going to be fun watching them fight for the position. The way they fight will be watched too because the last thing I need is a Beta that fights dirty, unless he's fighting against the no-man's-land rogues or saving mine, or my Luna's life. Now where did that Luna thought come from? I'm having a lot of thoughts about finding and having my Luna, I realize, and if I'm being totally honest, I can't wait to find her.

Entering my office half an hour later, I take the seat behind my desk and check the paperwork waiting for me. One is a report on how much work needs to be done, and the cost to repair the lodge. Another is the amount it will take to upgrade Merry's cabin, and that one is simple as she'd kept it in good repair for the most part. The last I'm studying is the cost of building a safe room, what it will entail, and how long it will take.

I look up when there is a tap on the door. It opens and Caleb walks inside. "Morning, Alpha Connell."

"Morning, Caleb. I'm checking the work required for the lodge, cabin, and the safe room. With us building the pack size, I think we need to do one thing at a time. Should we start with the largest job, or the smallest and work our way to the largest?" I'm probably speaking to myself more than to Caleb, but I look up when he replies.

"I think we should do the smallest, which is the cabin, right?"

"Yes, cabin, lodge and then safe room. But we have the cabins we want to build also, so a lot of work." I rub the back of my

neck at the thought of all the work required.

“Yeah, I still think if we start small, it gives the impression of achievement. That will boost everyone’s morale. Mind you, I want to say that everyone seems to be in high spirits since you took the alpha position.”

“I’m trying, Caleb, but restoring faith after the horrors my father brought to the pack isn’t easy. I’m surprised they even accepted me as their alpha.”

“Nobody blames you for what he did. We all saw you were unable to fight him at that time. Man, he was so out of control and feral we could all see it. The ones that tried to bring him down were either ripped apart, banished, or had to watch their mates being murdered. Which, let’s face it, was the same as being killed themselves, anyway.” Caleb takes a seat and grins, “Changing the subject, I’m excited for the Beta Challenge. We have quite a few names down to compete. My question is, do you want me to compete or what?”

“No, I know you will either be my Beta or my second Beta. It depends on who wins the challenge. If they are stronger than you, then they will take the first Beta position. But you will remain a Beta regardless of who that is.” I’m firm on that decision, as Caleb has shown I can rely on him no matter what happens, or what I ask.

“We have mostly the new pack members, Baildon, Chaz, Drew, Walim, Stephen, Alan, plus Iona, Swan, Armon, and Brian.” Caleb rubs his hands together then continues speaking. “I wish some of the pack had stepped forward, but it seems they are all happy to do what they do, and not have more responsibility. I thought Gaul would have stepped up, but when I spoke to him he said he was happy doing work around the grounds, fixing things and generally being on call when needed.”

Gaul is a great pack member, but he has no ambition. He likes to just do what is needed without having to step up. He’s a good one to help do the fixing up of the cabin and lodge. “Leave him be. He’ll be good to help with all the construction

we're going to be doing. He follows orders well. He just doesn't want to give any."

Chuckling, I look down when my phone rings. Picking it up from the desk, I'm surprised to see the call display. It's Alpha Aurora calling. Taking the call, I speak with the authority in my voice she'd expect to hear from another alpha. "Good morning, Alpha Aurora. What can I do for you?"

"Good morning, Alpha Connell. Well, it's what I can do for you, actually. I have some of the rogues from the Northern Parklands in my territory. It seems they are making their way to you. I know I gave permission for them to cross the pack territory previously, but I didn't know there would be more. I've allowed them to stay overnight, rest and recover."

"What do you mean, recover?" I quickly ask.

"They were attacked by a few no-man's-land rogues. They survived okay, but had some injuries that one of the females treated. My patrol warriors made sure they had water, and allowed them to hunt before watching over them for the night."

"What the hell is going on when rogues attack other rogues?"

"I don't know Alpha Connell, but we are watching our borders carefully. So far, we have only had a couple of skirmishes, unlike Alpha Lyle, who seems to get the worst of it."

"Do you know how many were traveling to me?" I ask, wondering if I can send a vehicle to collect them.

"Around fifteen or sixteen, I think. They are carrying boxes of herbs and other equipment, from what my warriors tell me. Hardly any clothing or other supplies. You'll be supplying necessities for these people. They have nothing of worth." Alpha Aurora growls slightly under her breath. "I'm going to send over clothing that may be suitable for them. We keep a room here where anything that doesn't fit, is put there for anyone else to take. We've handed out clothing parcels to the Parklands a few times now, so it's nothing to us to send some to you."

“That’s kind of you, thank you. Can I send two trucks to pick up the people traveling? Or do you think a truck and a van would be a better option?”

“Hm, send a truck for the herbs and equipment. Then a van that’s large enough for all the people. I think about sixteen, as I mentioned before,” Alpha Aurora gasps a little before continuing. “Oh, I’ve the minibus. How about I put them all in that and send to you, and you send the truck to pick up the other things?”

“That would be great. Thank you so much. I’ll get the truck sent in a few minutes. Shall I tell them to come to the border nearest Wolfsfoot territory?” I don’t want to cause trouble with Alpha Gabriel, but I’m not going to leave these rogues stranded when they are trying to get to safety.

“Great. Meet us at that border and my warriors will take your people to pick up the equipment. By then, the minibus will be near, or at the border, too.”

“Thank you again, Alpha Aurora.”

“No problem, Alpha Connell. I’ll either speak to you later or see you at the council meeting.”

Before I can even say bye, the call is cut and I turn to Caleb, fill him in quickly on what is happening, and he rushes out to organize the truck and a driver.

I make a call to Alpha Gabriel and, thankfully, he is understanding about the rogues passing through once more. He can’t stop them from entering town, but if they veered onto the territory itself, it would cause an incident. Informing him of what is happening is the polite and right thing to do, and it’s building trust between us.

Caleb returns a while later, informing me the truck has gone with Noah and Chester. Chester has gone to make sure they know this is not a trick or a threat. Hopefully, they’ll be at the pack by the end of the afternoon, with no issues happening along the way.

Flint walks into the office, grinning broadly. “Okay, let’s get these challenges started.” Rubbing his hands together, he turns and walks out again. I look at Caleb and he smirks while rolling his eyes in mock exasperation.

The lawn area in front of the packhouse has been turned into a challenge ring, which is a large circle marked clearly to show if a challenger is thrown out, or if they step out, they will be automatically disqualified.

Flint has excitedly announced himself as the adjudicator, giving any final decision that may be needed. I roll my eyes this time, because as a councilman he’s more excited about this Beta Challenge than I am, and it’ll be my Beta by the end.

Taking my place at the front of the challenge ring, I sit and relax back, waiting for what is going to happen. I’m quite happy to let Flint strut around, and enjoy himself and the power that he is throwing around.

“Pack members, we are here to oversee the Beta Challenge Competition. Pack members who will compete, please step to the left side of the challenge ring. You will not step inside the ring until your name is called.” Flint is giving off a powerful aura as he’s addressing the pack. “Step forward, Baildon, Chaz, Drew, Walim, Stephen, Alan, Iona, Swan, Armon and Brian.”

Once everyone has stepped to the left, Oscar, the pack’s head warrior steps into the challenge ring, and positions himself near the center.

Flint shouts, “WALIM, ALAN.” They both step into the ring and give each other a feral smirk. Now these two know each other, and have probably fought before.

Oscar speaks quietly to them both, instructing what can, and cannot be done, whilst inside the challenge ring, and one of those rules is they cannot shift into their wolf. I lean back in my seat and look around at the pack members that have taken to sitting on the ground.

Even the pack warriors not on patrol are here and eagerly watching. I'm sure they'll be shouting encouragement for Armon, Iona, and Swan. Swan's brother Ryan is here, stepping from one foot to another, looking a little worried, but Swan is standing calmly with an eager look on her face.

Flint steps to the side of my seat and is grinning, eyes sparkling and enjoying every moment of this. I shake my head at him and turn back to watch the fight.

"FIGHT!" Oscar shouts and steps back slightly. Walim rushes over to Alan, jumps into the air, flicks his foot, and lands a blinding smack to the side of Alan's head. Staggering back, Alan shakes his head before bellowing and lunging for Walim.

Eagerly leaning forward in my seat as Knight is pacing around in the back of my mind. He's eager to come out and fight, but I have to keep him locked down, because I know he loves a good fight, especially since we became Alpha of the pack. He sees it as his dominance to have all the pack members below him.

Alan slides on his knees toward Walim, catching him around the calves, smashes a fist behind his knees and Walim goes down. Before Alan can pin him down, Walim has thrown a punch hitting Alan on his temple and slips his arm around his neck, pinning him against his own body. Alan, we can see struggles to get out of the hold, but he's not going to get free. Everyone is holding their breath, waiting to see how long Alan can last before he becomes unconscious. Alan taps out and Walim releases him and quickly stands, taking a few steps away. Oscar walks over to Alan, checks he is okay, and announces Walim wins round one.

Next up are Swan and Iona, and they both bounce into the ring, eager and excited. They, however, settle quickly when Oscar speaks to them, giving out the rules.

The fight is over fast. Swan pins Iona down before anyone has a chance to even see what happened. Flint laughs loudly and I look at him in surprise.

“That was one hell of a move,” he spouts, looking back at me before waving at Swan and shouting, “Well done, Swan, that was amazing.”

Iona looks shocked but steps up to Swan and hugs her. Shows how these two are such good friends and honest warriors. Ryan rushes over to Swan and picks her up, spinning her around while laughing, then loudly tells everyone within earshot that he’s her brother and taught her everything she knows. Swan rolls her eyes but kisses him on the cheek before pushing him off and following Iona to take a seat to watch the next fights.

This is how the rest of the afternoon plays out. Baildon wins against Stephen. Chaz takes the win against Brian, much to Brian’s disgust, but Chaz playfully teases Brian about giving him lessons. The fifth winner is Armon, who narrowly beats Drew, but that fight took a long time to be over and only when Drew is thrown back and trying to balance himself steps out of the ring.

Winner goes against the winner, and we see Walim beat Swan, although she put up one heck of a fight and Walim has a large black eye to show for his win.

Baildon fights Chaz next, and they both fight hard, and are as determined as each other to take the win. Baildon takes the win after punching Chaz in the solar plexus, taking his breath, and allowing the moment Baildon needs to pin him down.

Armon fights Walim, and this is interesting because Armon is a pack warrior, and is an excellent fighter. But after watching Walim in the previous fights, I’m not sure who’s got the edge to win this fight. Surprisingly, Walim wins once again, and Armon high fives him and they leave the ring with arms thrown around each other’s shoulders.

We have a half hour break, and the excitement is rushing through the pack. Caleb has taken a seat on the ground next to me and he’s talking to Flint about each of the fights.

The last fight is Baildon and Walim, and although Walim has had an extra fight than Baildon, he is looking good enough to continue. In fact, he's not showing any sign of exhaustion at all. I think these rogues have had to keep themselves fit to survive, and hunting for food, fighting when needed, and from what I've heard protecting the she-wolves that lived among them. It's all proven to have built formidable fighters and males with morals.

The fight begins and they are far more careful about how they fight each other. Baildon is keeping a cool look on his face, but I notice the tick on his cheek. Walim is sizing up his opponent, and it's clear he's seeing him as an enormous threat. He's not showing as much confidence as he has in the last fights, but he's also not backing down, or showing signs of submission.

Baildon throws a punch and Walim uses his forearm to block. The punches are thrown back and forth, each blocking the majority of hits. Flicking feet, jumping, and twisting, they are both doing everything they can to take down the other. The fight lasts over thirty minutes, and both are showing signs of tiredness now.

Baildon slips and goes down onto one knee, and as you would expect, Walim takes advantage and wraps around Baildon's back, arm around his neck, and squeezes. It doesn't matter how hard Baildon struggles, he can't break Walim's hold, and eventually taps out. Everyone is silent for a few moments because both deserved to win and it's hard to declare a winner and see another just as worthy step away.

Before Oscar can announce the winner Baildon stands, takes Walim by the wrist, holds it in the air shouting, "WINNER!" and now everyone roars with applause.

I can't help but think I need Baildon to be in a higher position in the pack hierarchy, because he is just as worthy as everyone else we call Beta, Head Warrior, or other higher ranking pack members.

Chapter 15



CONNELL

Standing in front of the pack, I give them a huge smile, and hold my arms out wide. “Pack members, let’s give a huge thank you to everyone who took part in the Beta Challenge.”

It takes a few minutes for the shouts, whistles, and applause to calm, before I could even be heard again. Still smiling, I look at everyone who has competed, and I’m more than happy to see them all standing proudly. This is what my pack is going to have, ‘*Pride.*’

“I won’t waste any of your time, because I know you all want to go inside and eat. Even though you have eaten everything on the banquet tables and they are now bare out here.” Laughter rings around the lawn, and again, I see how much the pack has changed in the relatively short space of time since I took over as Alpha. I see Flint nodding at me, arms folded across his chest, and looking pleased with what he sees. “Okay, I have given some thought to the Beta position, and I declare from this point onwards that Caleb remains my number one Beta, but Walim will be my number two Beta. Walim, please step forward.”

Walim walks from where he’d been standing alongside Iona and Armon. I place my hand on his shoulder and give it a squeeze. “Do you have a surname, Walim?”

“Walim Blackclaw, Alpha.”

“Do you, Walim Blackclaw, vow to protect your Alpha, and pack members? To be the best Beta you can be for the pack?”

“I solemnly swear to protect and serve my Alpha and pack.”

Cheers ring around the pack, and Caleb holds his hand out and shakes Walim's hand, before wrapping him in a man-hug and whispering into his ear. Whatever he has said has Walim look at him solemnly and nod his head in agreement.

Caleb understands how Walim feels as he was sworn in as Beta when I asked him to step into that position, on the understanding it could be a permanent position or a temporary one.

"Come, let's eat." I watch with amusement as the pack bustles inside, and the excitement that I'm seeing in everyone's eyes has me rubbing my chest once more.

Flint steps to my side, grips my shoulder, and gives it a squeeze. "Come on, let's eat too."

Sitting and eating, my eyes roam around the pack members and we have around seventy now with the new members. We have a few more coming, and I can't wait to greet them and swear them into the pack. I'm convinced taking the Northern Parklands rogues into the pack is a good thing, not only building our numbers, but giving these shifters the chance of a better life.

Knight is pacing around in my mind, and I've done my best to ignore him for hours, but I'm annoyed with him now. 'What is wrong with you, Knight?'

Don't know. I feel like something good is about to happen, but I don't know what yet.

'Well, can you just calm down, because you're giving me a headache?' I feel him turn his back on me, circling a few times before throwing himself down and placing his chin on his paws, and letting out a loud sigh, 'Drama King!' I laugh at him but get no response.

Walim, I notice, is listening to everything Caleb is telling him. His first lesson at being a Beta, I presume. The look of concentration on his face tells me he is going to take his position seriously, and I'm more than happy to see that.

Noah jogs over with excitement all over his face. “Alpha Connell, I’ve just heard from my friend in Wolfsfoot, and the truck and minibus are just passing through the town. They’ll be here before we know it.”

“Noah, it’ll take a while, so calm down. What has you so excited, anyway?” I ask because he’s more than a little giddy.

“I don’t know, but Moses is excited about something.” Now Moses is his wolf and pretty laid back, which is one of the reasons his fighting skills are not as sharp as they could be.

“Go away, but let me know when they arrive?” chuckling as I watch him dash away. Turning, I speak to my Betas, “I’m going to the office. I’ll come and greet the shifters when they get here.”

“Okay, Alpha Connell,” Caleb responds, and Walim gives me a nod, letting me see he’s heard.

Walking into my office, I look behind me when I hear my name, groaning inwardly when Zoella rushes toward me. “Alpha Connell, I’m going to visit my friend at the Blood Pearl Pack tomorrow. Oh, sorry, is it okay if I visit my friend?”

Now I know this is her way of getting what she wants, but she does not know that I’m pleased she’ll be gone because she’s been getting on my last nerve of late. “Yeah, it’s okay. How long do you think you’ll be away?”

“I was thinking six months,” she timidly informs me.

“Six months! I don’t think so, Zoella. Now you decide, you go for a month and come back, or you become a pack member of the Blood Pearl Pack instead of the Blackshadow Pack. I’m all for everyone having time out for family and friends, but to drop that on me without prior warning is not okay, and I’d have to replace you in the office, anyway. But to be so disrespectful is just not going to happen. Now, decide!” My voice has gotten louder and louder, and by the end it’s nearly at shouting pitch.

“I’ll stay at Blood Pearl Pack,” Zoella whines, then turns and leaves the office.

Watching as she walks away, I see Caleb and Walim standing either side of the office door and looking as shellshocked as I feel. Her actually taking me up on my offer never entered my mind. All I wanted was to shock her somewhat, because of the disrespectful way she'd gone about it.

"I think she was going to go. She'd already made her mind up. She hasn't been doing much around here and she's not been mixing with other pack members either. I mentioned it to William last week, and he told me to watch her, as he thought she was being suspicious," Caleb informs me, and I shake my head in disbelief as I walk over to my desk and drop into the chair.

"Sounds like you were played, Alpha Connell. She had you make the move she wanted, and now she's going to be happy with how she's leaving the pack," Walim adds, and I look at him, give him a nod, and look back at Caleb.

"Bring Zoella back here." Caleb nods and rushes out of the office, leaving me and Walim watching the door. "Take a seat Walim, may as well rest your legs a while."

Walim takes a seat but remains attentive to the door. "You going to allow her to leave, Alpha Connell?"

"Oh, she's leaving, but maybe not as she wanted to leave."

Caleb returns with Zoella in front of him, and she's looking more than sheepish. Caleb steps into the office after her, and closes the door, folding his arms over his chest and looking furious. "Alpha Connell, you'll be interested to know that Zoella has her rooms all packed into boxes and bags. She was all ready to leave before she came to speak to you."

Snapping my eyes to Zoella, I can see the shame written all over her face. "Why would you do this? I have tried to be a good Alpha, changed how the pack is run, giving you all respect, from myself, and for yourselves. Why would you disrespect me and the pack this way? If you wanted to leave, you only had to speak to me, and it could have been done

nicely, instead you have done this, and caused bitterness, and ill feeling.”

Zoella is stepping from one foot to the other, looking down at the ground, and her aura is throwing out shame. “I’m sorry Alpha, I just wanted to go live with my friend.”

Knight surges forward and my eyes flash a darker brown with flecks of silver, letting everyone in the office know that he is taking over. *Pearl, what is going on here?* Knight snarls at Zoella’s wolf.

Human is stupid. She thinks going to live with friend will be easy. She’s lazy and doesn’t want to work, or help. I’m trying to get the Goddess to hear me because I’m ready to leave my human. She brings shame to me.

Because we’d not kept this to an internal link, Caleb and Walim have heard Knight and Pearl speaking. Of course, Zoella now knows that her wolf has had enough of her too.

Taking back control, I speak, ‘Pearl, I’m so sorry I didn’t see what was happening. You should have spoken to Knight if not to me.’

I couldn’t Alpha Connell as she shut me down each time I tried.

‘What do you want me to do, Pearl?’ I want to give Pearl the opportunity to be heard, to know what she would like to happen.

Remove from the pack.

I stand from the chair and step around the desk, never taking my eyes from Zoella and Pearl, who is still in control at this point. I give Pearl a small nod and smile, showing how sorry I am before I speak. “I, Alpha Connell Torrance, reject Zoella Worth from the Blackshadow Pack. She is no longer a pack member, and at this point in time, a rogue.”

Zoella screams and we feel the bond break as she is removed from the pack. Holding her chest, shock flashes across her face, and tears stream down her cheeks, falling to her knees,

she shouts, 'Pearl!' and that's when we all see the glow of Pearl in her eyes and the way it fades until it's gone.

Knight again surges forward, and I feel the hurt he is feeling. *Pearl has gone to the Goddess; she was called home. You will suffer for the rest of your life without your wolf.*

Now I'm in shock because when Pearl asked me to remove them from the pack, I didn't know she would leave Zoella too. There is more going on here than just being lazy and wanting to go to her friend. Looking at Zoella who has struggled to her feet, I open my mouth to ask her, when she looks up with dead-eyes and speaks.

"I'll be gone in an hour," walking away with no other explanation.

Caleb is standing, looking as shocked as both Walim and I. "What has she been doing that her wolf would want to leave? It has to be more than she is telling you. I'm going to look deeply into what she's been doing. Walim, starting this morning we'll go through every inch of Zoella's office but have someone stand in front of the office door right now so no-one can get in, and remove, or move anything."

Walim gives Caleb a nod before rushing out of the office. "I agree. Something else has occurred for her wolf to leave her like that. To ask me to remove her from the pack, knowing she'd be called home to the Goddess, and leave the pack she loved."

"I'll find out. I have an itchy feeling, but I need to speak to Chaz." Before I can even ask why, he's gone. Shaking my head because this has turned into a shitshow, and one I never saw coming.

Walking over to the safe, I take out the journal, and write the next entry.

Alpha Connell Torrance.

Things at the Blackshadow Pack have been consistently changing since I took over as Alpha. The pack is showing

more confidence, excitement, and pride, which I've never seen from them before.

I have taken new members into the pack from the Northern Parklands, and they were rogues, but shifters who have been wronged by their former packs, family or both.

So far, the pack has gained twenty-three new members from these rogues and they are fine members. From these members, we have a gardener, hunter/tracker, warriors, kitchen and household helpers and after a Beta Challenge, a second Beta in Walim Blackclaw.

Today I have removed Zoella Worth from the pack at her wolf Pearl's request. Upon that removal, Pearl was taken home to the Goddess. We now must investigate why a wolf would ask to leave their person. It takes something horrid for a wolf to want to leave and return to the Goddess.

I feel elation for the pack's progress, but regret for losing Zoella from the pack and Pearl to the Goddess Selene. But the Goddess knows what she's doing and with that in my mind; I know she'll find a better human for Pearl in the future.

Signed—Alpha Connell Torrance

'The new members have arrived Alpha Connell.' I hear Caleb's mind link, and I quickly place the journal back into the safe and make my way to the front of the packhouse.

The minibus has people stepping out, and they look tired and ready for a good meal. Knight shoots to the front of my mind, nearly knocking me off my feet with the force of it. "MATE!" he screams and I push him back as he surges us both forward.

Taking a deep breath, I smell lavender, honey, and chamomile. It's soothing but alluring. My eyes flick around the new people and I see a young woman, light brown hair tied in a bun at the nape of her neck, wisps which have escaped hanging around

her face. She has brown eyes and a few freckles across her nose and cheeks.

Walking over to her, I remain calm as she looks like she wants to run. Standing in front of her, my eyes roam her face and the gentlest of smiles I can give crosses my face, "Mate," I murmur as my hands cup her face.

"Mate," she whispers back to me and I can see she's calming with my touch.

"I've been waiting for you all my life, my mate, my luna." I lean down and place my lips over hers, giving her a gentle but thorough kiss. I would dearly love to ravish her, but I don't want to frighten her with my desire. I can feel her nerves and worry, but I'll make sure she knows she can trust and love me in return. "What is your name, mate?"

"Hope."

"Hope, what a beautiful name. My name is Connell, Alpha Connell, but you never call me Alpha." I kiss her once more and place my arm around her, holding her against my side before looking around at everyone standing in shock watching us.

"Caleb, announce to everyone that my Luna has arrived at last. Their Luna Hope will be brought forward to them in the morning. I'll meet everyone in the morning, also, make sure they are fed, and given rooms next to each other. They can share rooms if they would rather, but for tonight, I'm taking my Luna to our suite of rooms, where she can rest and we can get to know each other."

I hear another 'MATE!' shout, but I don't stop to see who it is. I'll find out tomorrow, when I'm more settled with my mate and she is calmer with me. The Goddess has blessed me, and I never thought I'd be so lucky, but my mate is beautiful. She is the sun that shines in my sky, and the moon that glows in the dark.

"Get your hands off me, mutt, or I'll take them off for you." Hope stops walking and spins around to look at where the

commotion is happening behind us.

A feisty she-wolf is nose-to-nose with Noah, and I can't help but throw my head back, laughing. Oh, this is going to be interesting. Noah has gotten himself a warrior-mate by the look of it. Now his wolf Moses had better step up or he'll be in big trouble.

Hope giggles, looks up at me and quietly says, "That's Swift. She's like my sister. She's a hunter and a warrior. If that's her mate he better be strong or she'll run rings around him."

"I'm going to enjoy watching what happens, but let's go get you settled." I lead Hope away from the drama and into the packhouse, where I stop anyone speaking to us, as I take her to our suite of rooms on the top floor.

Chapter 16



CONNELL

Sitting with Hope in the living area of the alpha floor, I can see she's nervous, and although she has shown no sign of rejecting me, I can feel her worry. I need to settle her feelings and not cause her to run.

"Hope, you are my mate, my most important being in this world. I would never hurt you. I am alright to wait to claim you if you are not ready yet." I can see Hope's eyes show surprise at my statement, but also, they soften with the understanding I'm not a beast, nor am I going to attack her, or force her to mate at this moment.

"I have never wanted a mate. My experience with mates has been a bad one. In fact, I've only known my mother's, and that was not a good thing," Hope states gently.

"Tell me what happened."

"My mother met her fated mate, and they had one night together. Then he rejected her because his father, who was the Alpha at the time, had arranged a chosen mate for him. It was a political match, of course."

I nod my head slightly because I've heard of this. "I have never agreed that you throw out the mate the Goddess made for each other. How could you be happy with another when your mate is still out in the world somewhere?"

"The result of that one night was me."

"Did he know about you?"

"No. My mother kept the fact she was having me to herself. She left the pack and settled in the Northern Parklands. She

brought me up by herself and struggled to feed and clothe me, but she loved me unconditionally. Sadly, she died in a rogue attack, along with others who were fighting to protect the few of us who lived near each other.”

“Do you think he would want to know you?” I ask.

“Well, since his chosen mate didn’t tell him she’d had an accident when young and was barren, then yes, he’d more than likely want to know he had a daughter, one he could use as a broodmare to get a male for his bloodline. But it’s never going to happen. I’ll never tell him or go to his pack.”

Throughout this, Hope has kept her calm, speaking with the tone of a statement, and with no attachment to her words. I can tell she feels nothing for her sire, and rightly so. Her father sounds as terrible as mine was.

“I would never reject you, or any pup that we produced. I would die protecting you and never think for a moment that your mother’s fate would be yours. If your father finds out about you and comes for you, I’ll fight to the death to stop him from taking you. Once you are marked as mine and are the Luna of the pack, every pack member will fight to the death to protect you, their Luna.”

Hope is looking at me with surprise, then speaks to me in an accepting tone. “Thank you, Connell. I would like us to be mates, but would you give me a little time to get to know you before we complete the bond?”

“Yes, I would do anything for you. But please don’t take too long because Knight, my wolf, is screaming for his mate.” I give her what I hope is a cheeky grin, and she smiles in return before a sweet giggle leaves her pink bow lips.

“My wolf is Briar, and she’d like to meet her mate soon, too. She’s going to enjoy having him chase her, I’m sure.” Hope’s eyes are sparkling now with amusement, and her body language has changed to relaxed which pleases me greatly.

We spend two hours talking, getting to know each other, and the bond is warming and growing as the time passes. Nessie

has brought us food and we've eaten while we've been relaxing, but I can see the tiredness in Hope's eyes.

"Come on, let's get to bed." I hold my hand up to stop her speaking. "Nothing will happen, not that you don't want to happen, anyway. If you'll allow it, I'd just like to hold you while we sleep."

After freshening up and giving Hope a t-shirt to wear to bed, I climb in next to her, only wearing sleeping shorts. I can see the brief panic in her eyes, but I remain calm with my movements. Lying on my back looking at the ceiling, but aware of every movement that Hope makes.

"Can I snuggle into you?" Hope asks and I turn my head to look at her and give her a winning smile while holding my arm out for her to shuffle closer to my body, and lay her head on my shoulder, and an arm around my waist. I'm counting sheep to stop my body reacting to her closeness and sense Knight at the front of my mind, taking in Hope's scent. If he was a cat, he'd be purring with the joy of having his mate nearby.

I listen to Hope's even breathing and count my blessings that I found my mate, and she's gentle, kind, and from the reaction of everyone who'd come with her, she's loved too. I can't stop the pride that is swelling in my chest, and that's how I eventually fall asleep.

Waking up the next morning, I take in the enticing aroma of Hope, and enjoy the moment before anything can stop or spoil the feeling. When I feel a gentle finger stroke my cheek, nose and chin I slowly open my eyes to see Hope with a gentle smile on her face as she studies me.

Remaining still while she continues her perusal, gasping when she looks from my chin to my eyes and finds them open and watching her. I wrap the arm that isn't underneath Hope around her and draw her onto my chest where she lays quietly watching my face.

"Do you like what you see?" I ask and give her a wink which has her blush a beautiful shade of pink.

“You are very handsome.”

“Why thank you, my beautiful mate. I’m happy that you think so.”

A knock on the door has us both look up, and I growl slightly under my breath. “Sorry, Hope. I better check what’s going on.” Climbing out of bed, I hurry to the bedroom door and open it, but keep myself fully in the doorway so Hope cannot be seen.

Caleb is looking embarrassed as he shuffles from one foot to the other. “I’m sorry Alpha Connell. Flint wants to announce Hope as Luna officially before he leaves today. He asks if you can hurry and get downstairs.”

“Tell Flint he’ll have to wait a while. I need to be sure this is what Hope wants because I’m not forcing her to take on the Luna position if she doesn’t want that. I’ll be down in a while.” I don’t give a shit what anyone thinks. I’m not pushing my mate into the position. She’ll become Luna because she wants to be with me forever, and not because she feels it’s a duty she has to fulfill.

Turning back to Hope, I’m surprised to see a beautiful dark gray wolf, and the light from the window, where the morning rays are landing on her back, shows silver flecks that appear to glow. I know it’s only the light catching, but it looks magnificent. She has silver eyes that you would class as nearly ice blue.

Sitting in the middle of the bed watching me approach, I hear the mind link. *Hello mate, my name is Briar and I want to meet my wolf mate.*

‘Okay Briar, just give me a minute.’

I link Caleb and inform him that Hope and I will go for a run before we head to the office and give any announcements required.

Knight bursts from my skin, not waiting any longer for me to shift. *Hello mate, my name is Knight and you are mine.*

Damn, could he be more of an alpha, I think to myself while watching from the back of my mind and through the vision of my wolf's eyes.

Mate. Briar responds, and I feel like eye rolling, but think better of it when I know Knight will stubbornly refuse to shift back if I do.

Turning, Knight throws his massive paw onto the bedroom door handle and steps back as the door opens. Trotting out, he does the same to the living area door, and heads down the stairs until trotting out of the packhouse, across the lawn and into the forest.

Knight checks if Briar is behind him at all times, then picks up his speed and runs, enjoying the wind in his face and his mate by his side. Coming to the clearing where the cornflowers grow, Knight finds a spot near a large tree and lays down, with Briar settling by his side.

Licking her face, Knight places a paw on her shoulder, holding her in place until he is satisfied she is clean, before shuffling even closer and placing his chest on her side. When Briar makes no complaint, he lays his head across her neck.

Are you ready to mate, to become mine? Knight asks Briar and I feel a panic in my mind, because this isn't how it's supposed to go down. I want Hope to have the option.

Yes, we are both ready to mate. Briar replies, and I'm shocked that it appears Hope is okay with this.

Knight stands and so does Briar. Turning her back to him, she lowers her shoulders slightly, throws her tail to the side, and he's on her before I can stop him.

Gripping the back of Briar's neck, Knight positions himself and mounts her perfectly, piercing into her while gripping harder onto her neck. Briar whines a little at the penetration but pushes her butt into him as she does so.

Knight pumps into her while maintaining the hold on her neck. I pull back to give them privacy at this moment of

mating for the first time. It feels like I'm being a pervert, although Knight and I are one.

Biting deeper into Briar's neck, Knight marks her as ours and there is nothing I can do to stop it. Hope is now tied to me as strongly as Briar is tied to Knight. We are one for the rest of our lives.

When Knight roars 'MINE!' and the knot ties them both, I feel them settle, and rather than back-to-back, Knight takes one of his front legs over Briar's back and stands alongside her, although they are joined, and will remain so for a while.

I stay quiet, allowing them to concentrate on the surrounding area as they still have to be alert to any danger that may sneak up on them while in this submissive position.

It is quite some time before the knot releases them, and surprisingly Briar whirls around and bites Knight's neck. Claiming him just as strongly as he claimed her. My heart, my Luna, my life, I think to myself while still lounging in the back of our minds.

After trotting back to the packhouse and to the alpha suite, I shift back and give Briar a stroke on the top of her head before she shifts back to Hope. I turn her face so I can see the mark on her neck and it's beautiful. Knight gave her a mark that looks like a wolf's face baying at the moon. It may be my imagination, but I don't care.

"Are you alright?" I ask Hope and look into her eyes.

"Yes. Briar asked me if I was ready, and I said yes. I think you are a good person, and I decided it was time I put my mother's past where it belongs, in the past. This is my future and not the residue of my parents' lack of bonding. It's what the Goddess intended for us, and who are we to say she's wrong."

"I'm happy you decided that, as I feel the bond growing strongly. I'll be true to you, and I'll be the Alpha you deserve. I promise you that with all my heart." I draw Hope to me and kiss her gently as I know we have to change from our

nightwear and go downstairs to accept all new members to the pack, including my Luna.

An hour later I'm standing in the dining room, and have accepted Gamzin, Dagon, Berrit, Graham, Lonnie, Suella, Conrad, Stein, Theo, Ronnet, Heath, Aster, Karia, Eliza, Swift and Hope into the pack. The pack has now accepted thirty-nine new members from the Northern Parklands, showing that the area has shifters that are good and have been treated badly for one reason or another.

Flint is grinning broadly and steps forward, holding his arms wide, gaining everyone's attention. "Pack members, as a council member, I am honored to announce Alpha Connell has a mate, and has claimed her. You can all see the claiming marks on their necks."

It takes a few minutes for the room to calm down after congratulations are shouted, applause given and the rush of excitement has flowed around the room. Flint continues, and I'm watching Hope closely to make sure she is okay, and not being overwhelmed.

"Hope Torrance." Flint grins at the shock that runs across Hope's face, but once she took my bite, she became mine and became Torrance.

Chuckling, Flint continues, "Hope Torrance, do you accept the position of Luna for your Alpha, mate, and the Blackshadow Pack?"

Hope looks at me, then around the room before clearly responding. "I, Hope Torrance, am willing to be the Luna for the Blackshadow Pack. I will do all in my power to be a good Luna and assist the pack and members. I will also be a true and loving mate to Alpha Connell Torrance."

The applause that rings through the room is staggering. The pack rushes forward and bows to Luna Hope, taking her by surprise for a moment, but she stands tall and thanks everyone for the welcome with such sweetness you cannot help but love her.

Swift throws her arms around Hope, and you can see the love and friendship between the two. They are more like sisters than good friends, and it warms my heart to know she has had Swift by her side.

I am taken by surprise when Baidon walks over to me, claps me on the back and grins. “Well, well, brother-in-pack because I claimed Hope as a sister, I’ll tell you once, and once only, you love her, respect her, and be true to her or I’ll make you pay in the worst way I can think of.”

“Of course, I’ll be true to her, respect her and love her. She’s my mate, my Luna, and my heart.”

Chapter 17



HOPE

Thursday morning, and who would have thought I would have a mate, and a pack that I am now the Luna of. Briar won't stop talking to me about Knight and it is driving me crazy enough that I've put a block up to get a little peace.

How am I going to be a good Luna and one that can help everyone in the pack? I don't even know the total number of pack members. I rub my hands together which is a nervous reaction for me, and when noticing myself doing it I quickly stop, take a breath, and walk downstairs, and out the front door of the packhouse.

Hearing shouts, I turn and see Swift along with Gamzin walking toward me. I wait for them to reach me and give a weak smile. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Luna," Swift giggles, then gives me an eyebrow waggle and wink. "I see you've been claimed."

Gamzin chuckles, gaining my attention. "Are you okay, Hope? Because if you're not and want to get away from here, I'll help you."

"I'm happy to be here, Gamzin, and I'm actually happy I found my mate. It's the Luna part of it all that worries me. I've been a rogue all my life, and yes, what we consider a soft rogue, unlike the no-man's-land rogues, but a rogue nonetheless."

"Stop!" Gamzin holds his hand up, palm facing me, which has me stop speaking. "You are a caring, considerate, loving person, Hope. You've brought kindness and help to everyone around you, just as your mother did before you. If any of the females I've met could, or should, be a Luna it's you."

I notice he cringes a little as he side-eyes Swift, but she's finding this highly amusing, and I just know she's going to give him trouble now. But the moment she steps forward, I see the claiming mark on her neck.

"Wow, you mated!" I grab her around her waist and squeeze tightly, because I know she wanted to find her mate, and although she'll more than likely lead him a merry dance, I'm sure he'll enjoy it and her love because of it. I also want to distract her from whatever mischief she could throw at Gamzin.

"I sure did. He's a sweetheart, and a warrior, but he says he's not as good at fighting as some of the others. Now that has to change, because I'm not having my mate, not being a top fighter." Swift gives me that one-sided smile of hers that means she's up to something.

Gamzin mumbles to himself but I hear, '*poor devil*', and I giggle, knowing exactly what he means. He turns to me with a blank face. "Where are you going?"

"I was looking for you, or someone that knew where my equipment and herbs are."

"Oh, we took them around to the garden. Chester was there with a man called Silas. He's the head gardener, apparently, and he said that he'd water things, and put your seeds in the potting shed and equipment into the equipment shed."

"Can you show me where that is?"

"Yeah, come on." Gamzin leads me around the packhouse with Swift talking at a hyper speed about what she's seen so far, what she has heard, and the splendor of the room she has with Noah.

I give Gamzin a secretive look and he winks before looking away, both of us doing our best not to laugh at Swift, and her description of the room she is living in with her mate. Speaking of mates, Noah appears, throws Swift over his shoulder and jogs away. Watching with my mouth dropped open as I see Swift manhandling Noah's butt.

“I don’t want to know, and I don’t want to see,” I say to Gamzin as his chuckle turns to a loud laugh, which you’d only describe as a guffaw.

“Are we all going to be okay, Gamzin?” I ask seriously and stop walking to look directly into his eyes.

“I think you are going to be fine. You’ll make a damn good Luna, and your mate is lucky to have you.” Throwing his arm around my shoulders, he pulls me forward and we continue walking to where I now see Chester waving. “I’ve spoken to some of the males and they’d like to be warriors here, well some of them would. A few others have said they’d like to build the cabins that your mate spoke about yesterday.”

“That’s good. I’m thrilled that we all will stay here together. We’ve all struggled and suffered. As you know I said I’d never take a mate, because of what happened to my mother. But, you know, that was her story and Briar has told me we walk a different path, and we need to face it head on, be proud of who we are.”

Gamzin squeezes my shoulder before he steps away from me. “That’s true. Proud of you, Hope. Now, let’s get our lives moving forward, and with that, I need to go speak with your mate about becoming a warrior.”

I watch as Gamzin walks away, and I can feel the hope and excitement rolling from him. It would be good for him and the others to find a purpose, that means more than finding food for us all to survive, and fighting bad rogues that want to take what we have. Which wasn’t much when you consider we only had enough to survive.

Chester waves me over to where he is standing alongside another male. “Hope, this is Silas. He is the chief or head gardener, depending on what you want to call it. We’ve put all the seeds in the potting shed for you, and the equipment in the shed next to it. Oh, and the other we’ve watered and left in the greenhouse until you tell us where you want us to plant the herb garden.”

“Hey, hey, slow down Chester,” Silas states, patting Chester’s chest while rolling his eyes at me, and I have to admit I can’t stop a laugh from erupting.

“Now, it’s an honor to meet you, Luna.” Silas gives me a sweet smile and a tip of his head, showing submission to my pack position. It feels strange, but I know I’ve to get used to it, and quickly.

“Oh, I’m sorry Hope, I’ll have to get used to calling you Luna.” Chester’s eyes look like saucers as he realizes calling me Hope could be classed as disrespectful.

“You call her Luna or Luna Hope, not Hope, and if I hear you calling her wrong, I’ll smack you around the back of your head until you get it right,” Silas tells Chester and they are nearly nose-to-nose at this point.

“It’s okay Silas, I’ve known Chester a long time, and it’ll take time to get used to me being Luna, for him and myself.”

“Maybe so, Luna, but you are the Luna of the Blackshadow Pack and we’ll all respect you.”

“Thank you, Silas.” I squeeze his forearm and allow my excitement to shine through. “Show me where we can create a kitchen herb garden and another one for medicinal purposes.”

Walking around the garden, we dig out an area for the kitchen herb garden, and leaving Silas and Chester to plant some of the herbs I’d brought with me. I walk around looking for an ideal place for my medicinal herb garden.

Stepping into what can only be described as an orchard, I find a corner that is perfect for what I’m looking for. Quiet, out of the way, will get the sun in the morning and shade in the afternoons. I can put a small fence around to stop anyone walking over it, too. Yes, this is where I want my medicinal garden to be, and it’s near to the greenhouse, potting and equipment sheds as well.

I spend most of the day digging and planting with Chester and Silas. A lovely young lady brings us drinks and introduces

herself as Nessie, who, it turns out, is in charge of the kitchen. I spend quite a while speaking with Nessie about what herbs she uses in the kitchen, and what she would like to try and use. It's nice to speak with someone who has an interest and can understand the benefits of what I do, especially with the lotions.

Connell finds me on my hands and knees in the newly turned earth, covered in dirt but with a huge smile on my face. Standing me up in front of him, he wipes dirt from my cheek and kisses my nose.

"It's time for you to come in now. You need to get washed up and ready for the evening meal in an hour." Connell gives a nod and smile to Chester and Silas. "Did you get done with the chores the Luna gave you?"

"We did, and Luna Hope is welcome here anytime. In fact, I want to learn about this lotion and potion making," Silas says and anyone can see how serious he is just by the look on his face.

"I'll teach you."

"Well, I want to learn, too. I am second-in-command gardener, you know," Chester states proudly. I give Connell a look out the corner of my eye and I can see he's struggling to hold back the laughter.

"Of course, you can learn, too. I'll be happy for you both to help me."

Walking away, the rumble that I hear building in Connell has me grinning, too. But when he stops walking, places his hands on his knees and laughs loudly, I can't help the giggles that burst out. Rubbing the tears of laughter out of his eyes, he tries to speak, but nothing is happening except squeaky noises, which sets us off once more.

When he gets himself under control, he speaks. "Oh dear, Chester is going to be amusing. Silas will run rings around him, I'm sure. What did he do in the Northern Parklands?"

“Chester wasn’t an expert hunter, but he can skin and gut an animal faster than anyone you know. He is a good person, cares about people, and often helped me find herbs, wild onions and other things we could forage.

“Gamzin, and his merry band, as we called them, hunted, fought and kept us as safe as they could. He can be gruff, but he cares about us all. He will tell you his story when he is ready, I’m sure. But he wants to be a warrior here. Did he speak with you?”

“Yes, he did, and it’s arranged that tomorrow he and any others can try out as warriors on the training field. If they are good enough, they’ll be placed on the patrol rotation. But they will all be expected to learn how to fight and fight well. Any of the females can learn to fight too, if they want, that is. But I expect them to have basics to survive at least long enough for a warrior to get to them.” Connell stops in his tracks and we both watch a woman shouting in the face of none other than Suella.

“Oh, my. That’s Suella. She was where all the men went to get relief,” I tell Connell, but my cheeks are bright red. I think it’s my embarrassment that has him realize what I mean by relief.

“Right, well, that is Iona. She is one of my patrol warriors and she is mated to another patrol warrior, Hallec.” Pointing to a male who is doing his best to get the screaming woman away from Suella. “Come, let’s see if we can find out what’s going on and diffuse the situation.”

Walking over with Connell, I’m surprised when a small group has quickly surrounded the arguing women, and some look like they would enjoy these two having an all-out fight.

Baildon, Gamzin, Swift and Noah appear from the left of us and quickly wade into the argument.

“What’s going on?” Baildon asks.

“This piece of wolf shit tried to seduce my mate,” Iona snarls, and she’s ready to charge and rip into Suella by the looks of it.

“I didn’t know he had a mate,” Suella whines, looking around and trying to get some sympathy.

“You are new here and if you want to be welcomed, you’ll keep away from the males, because you do not know who may be mated and who may not. But if I see you around my mate again, I’ll rip your heart out.” Iona is stepping closer and closer, and my mouth drops open when Halleck picks Iona up bridal style, gives Connell and me a chin lift and stomps away with his mate who is still throwing threats toward Suella.

“Baildon, Gamzin, Suella, in my office now,” Connell snaps, and walks away after giving me a kiss on the forehead, telling me to clean up, and that he’ll see me at the evening meal.

Swift, Noah and I watch the three of them walk over to the packhouse and disappear through the front door before we consider moving from where we’re standing.

“What the heck? Will that woman never be satisfied?” I ask, looking directly at Swift.

“If she comes near Noah I won’t warn her, I’ll just rearrange her face until it looks like her ass,” Swift snarls, and Noah chuckles, which he cuts short when he sees the serious glare Swift is giving him.

“Was she not mated to anyone?” Noah asks.

Gagging, Swift replies with such a look of disgust. “She has warmed the bed of every male in the Northern Parklands. Well, maybe not all, but all the ones in our vicinity. She did nothing to find food, clothing, water, or heat. All she did was lay on her back or knees. Makes me sick, and you better stay away from her, too,” glaring at Noah as though he’d done something wrong.

“Me? I’m not interested. I have the best mate I could wish for. You heard me, Swift, before I knew you were behind me. I told her to take a walk because I wasn’t interested and never would be.” Noah I notice rubs across his chest.

“Will Halleck and Iona be alright?” I can’t help but ask Noah.

“Yeah, they have been mated for a long time. He’ll calm her down and things will be good. Iona won’t forget, mind you. You can also guarantee Suella and her will never be friends.”

Remembering I have to get washed and changed, I say bye and rush into the packhouse as I want to be ready and downstairs when the evening meal begins.

Chapter 18



CONNELL

Striding into the office with Baildon, Gamzin and Suella behind me, I take a seat behind my desk. “Close the door Gamzin,” I state, and point at the seats for them to take one.

Baildon is watching me closely, Gamzin is calm knowing he’s done nothing to be in trouble for, and the idiot Suella is making eyes at me, totally ignoring the fact I have a mating bite on my neck.

“Let’s get down to business. Suella, what happened with Hallec? Don’t lie because he has been a close friend and one of my inner circle since we were pups,” glaring at her so she knows she’s in deep trouble.

“I’m new here, I don’t know who is mated and who isn’t. I was only talking to him and that woman came up screaming and shouting.”

“Iona is a pack patrol warrior. She is calm under pressure. Knows how to assess a situation, and has never in all the years I’ve known her, which is again, since we were pups, reacted irrationally. Now you need to tell me everything, and hold nothing back. I can just as easily banish you from the pack as I allowed you to join.”

Gamzin looks at Suella and gives her a look that most would shrivel at, but she is either senseless, or stupid, or both. “Did you mess with that male? I told you before we got here you had to respect the pack members and their bonds, or you best stay where you were. Now you’ve been here no time at all and caused trouble with a mated pair.”

I sit back in my seat and watch Gamzin rip Suella a new one. Baildon is watching with about the same amount of amusement as myself. I'm sure both these males have been with this female and, by the scent of other males coming from her, she has had sexual relations with more than these two.

When they have finished bickering I lean forward, placing my elbows on my desk. "Suella, this is your one and only chance. You stay away from mated pairs, you stop the flirting, and if you want to be the pack whore, then I'll provide you with a cabin where you can stay. But, you will not be included in any pack activities, OR allowed anywhere in the packhouse, OR around any pups, and you will stay in your cabin when we have any guests, or dignitaries visiting."

The shock on the she-wolf's face would be comical, if this wasn't serious, but I'm not going to back down. This is, I hope, the wake-up call this female needs.

"So, what's it going to be? Leave the pack, or become a pack whore?" Which has me cringing as we've never entertained that here even in my father's reign. "Or do you want to be an honest to goodness pack member? To stay in the room you've been given, work around the packhouse alongside the other females cleaning and maintaining the laundry, or anything else required?"

Suella looks at Gamzin whose face is set, giving no help to her at all. Looking at him, I can see he's not ever going to be a male that will take her as a mate. Looking at me, Suella replies, "I'll help in the packhouse."

"One time you cause trouble and I'll throw you out of the pack. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?" I end shouting so she realizes how serious I am. Giving me a tip of her head in submission she whimpers, "Yes, Alpha Connell."

"Baildon, would you take Suella to Caleb and tell him what has happened here? He'll make sure she is placed where she needs to be. Once that is done, come back."

“Yes, Alpha Connell. Come on Suella.” Baildon leads the female out of my office and I pinch the top of my nose. Sighing as I can’t help but think she’ll cause trouble down the line.

“She’s not a bad person, Alpha Connell. She’s just never had to do anything apart from what she’s done. I know she was illegitimate, same as Hope, but where Hope’s mother nurtured her to be a good and loving person, and provide something back to us all, Suella’s mother was the opposite, and didn’t give a crap about her. She encouraged the males in the Parklands to use her daughter from the age of sixteen. In payment, they would provide food, clothing and fix the shelter, when required. It’s all she’s known, but I think she’ll be a good pack member when she realizes she has worth, and not laying on her back or being on her knees.” Gamzin rubs his knees with the palms of his hands and gives me a look that tells me he’s being as truthful as he can be.

“We’ll see what happens in the future Gamzin, but I hope I’ve not put faith in her that will be misplaced. Now, let’s change the subject and talk about you being a patrol warrior.” That is exactly what we do. We speak about how he protected the people that lived in his area of the Parklands. How he made sure they had food and stayed warm in the winter. His admiration for Hope, and her healing skills, and the way she quickly helped anyone she could. He even spoke of Swift, her fighting ability, quick temper, love for Hope as her sister and her protectiveness toward the pack.

He told me about each of the males and females that I’ve included in the pack, and how much they have all been wronged one way or another.

Then he takes me by surprise. “You need to be careful who you tell Hope’s background to. Her father will come for her if he finds out where she is. She is the only living heir he has and he’ll want to mate her to one of his pack so he can take charge of any male pup she has. He’s ruthless, and I know, as it’s where I belonged before I rejected that pack and went rogue myself.”

After asking questions and getting answers, I'm feeling a little unsettled, but know that the council would stand with me on this matter of Hope because she is my fated mate and I've claimed her. I'll kill the bastard if he ever tries to take her from me.

Baildon returned to the office but kept silent while Gamzin spoke about Hope's father. He speaks up when he feels we've exhausted the topic.

"If her father ever comes for her, I'll stand by your side. She is my sister by choice. Her mother helped bring me up, and I loved her like my own mother. She is missed. She was such a kind person, helped everyone, a true Luna and that idiot Alpha threw her away for a liar, one who knew she was barren and couldn't provide an heir the pack would need. He deserves what will happen and I'm sure the Goddess Selene has plans to bring him to his knees."

Gamzin looks at Baildon with shock on his face. "I've never heard you sound so angry about anything."

"I'm beyond angry, I'm livid, and although I've never met the man, I hate him."

"Okay, we'll see what develops, but if he comes here, I'll set him straight, and I know the pack won't allow him to take their Luna. We've waited far too long for her to arrive. I'll kill him if he comes here demanding anything. I don't care that he is her father." Baildon and Gamzin look satisfied with my response.

"Now let's move on to other things. Gamzin, I want you to train with Head Warrior Oscar. I have an idea, but I don't want to discuss it with you until I get the report on your fighting ability and the males that came with you that want to become patrol warriors."

Gamzin nods, "No problem, Alpha Connell. I'll do that."

"Baildon, now I'd like you to be my Gamma, protect the Luna at all costs and be in charge of the safety of the she-wolves and any pups in the pack. I'm hoping we can get a safe room

built in the basement of the packhouse. That is where you would take them. Then you would guard that room with your life, and the life of any warrior that stands beside you. What do you say? Are you interested in being the pack's Gamma?" Gamzin is grinning at Baildon, who I have to admit has a shocked look on his face. Recovering quickly, Baildon tips his head on one side, showing his respect and grins, which is all the answer I need.

"Good. Do you, Baildon, vow to protect your Luna, and female pack members? To be the best Gamma you can be?"

"I solemnly swear to protect and serve my Luna and female pack members."

I walk from behind my desk to Baildon and shake his hand, pumping it hard. I can feel the excitement growing, that from this pack of misfit rogues I'm finding pack members that will, if needed, lay down their lives. How anyone could throw these shifters out like trash and treat them so badly, I do not know. But they are valued here, and I'll show them they are.

After Baildon and Gamzin leave the office, I mind link Caleb to come to the office along with Walim and Oscar.

It doesn't take long before the three are standing in front of me. "Take a seat, please." I wait for them to sit and their attention is on me. "I've spoken with Baildon and Gamzin this morning. Baildon I have made my Gamma. He'll be in charge of the Luna's safety and the safety of the pack females and any pups we are lucky enough to have. I expect you all to help guide him where, and if, needed."

"Yes, Alpha," all three respond and I see no animosity from any of them, which shows my confidence in them is warranted.

"Oscar, you have been Head Warrior for a long time, and you've been overstretched planning the patrols, going out to check the borders and trying to keep everyone motivated in their training. I want you to test Gamzin and see what strength he has as a fighter, and as a strategist. He kept the

group safe in the Parklands, and I think that experience we could use and promote him to Delta, but only if he is capable. Once that is decided, and if it's decided he would take on the role as Delta, he will plan patrols, and check the border is safe at all times. You, however, are to be known as Chief Oscar, and will be the trainer for all warriors and females that will train. I want the females to have the basic ability to protect themselves. What do you say, Oscar?"

"I think it's a good idea. Something that's been needed a long time. We can only do so much at one time, and I feel this is when things get overlooked and safety becomes compromised. Not because anyone is at fault, but purely because we cannot have eyes on everything, it's just not possible," Chief Oscar replies. "I agree that splitting the training and security in two is the right thing to do, and I've seen some of the training that the new pack members are capable of and it's impressive. If Gamzin is as good as what I've seen, then he'll easily do the job. I'll test his strategies and let you know, and I'll do it quickly so we can get the Delta position in place."

Walim speaks, "Gamzin is a strong, strategic fighter. I've never known him to be more than scratched in a fight. He's quick on his feet and lethal when protecting anyone. He'll be a good Delta, and as for keeping the border safe, well, you'll get no one better. I mean no disrespect, Chief Oscar."

"None taken," Chief Oscar responds with a grin on his face.

"Report back quickly on the Delta so we can get things in place. I want to be set by the end of next week. Now, Caleb, you'll be coming with me later today to Wolfsfoot for the council meeting. Walim, I'm leaving you in charge here, along with Luna Hope. Your priority is to make sure everything runs along smoothly until my return. I'll only be away until late evening. I'm not staying in Wolfsfoot. I'm coming back to my Luna." I grin a toothy grin, and Knight flashes in my eyes, letting everyone know we will never spend a night without our love by our side.

Caleb gives me a serious look and then drops a bombshell. "Searching Zoella's room and her office, we found evidence that she was handing information to her cousin, Fragina, who is a rogue living in no-man's-land. It seems anything you were told, any reports you had, and what she overheard about Spirit Walker Pack, particularly she passed along. She was a traitor to the pack and to our kind, and if she had not already left the pack, we'd have had to execute her."

"If we see her anywhere, we grab her and bring her back here to face the consequences of her actions. Keep the evidence safe, and when Flint comes back later today or tomorrow, we'll show him and place our complaint with the council," I reply, sighing because who would have known that the pack gossip was a traitor.

"When do you want to leave?" Caleb asks.

"Give me an hour and I'll be ready. I just have to speak to Hope before I leave."

The three leave the office and I mind link Hope. *'Hope, will you come to my office, please?'*

'Ok. I'll come right along,' Hope replies, and I smile as it feels so natural to speak to her like that, and the ease with how she responded warms my heart.

It's only a few minutes before the door opens and Hope walks into the office. "Come here, sweetheart," I say as I hold my hand out to her. As she reaches me, I draw her to me, and take her by surprise when I sit her on my lap, and wrap both my arms around her waist, place my nose in her neck and take a huge lung full of her amazing smell.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I'm good. I just love your smell, and Knight does too." My eyes flash to Knight, letting her know he is listening to us talking. "Now, I have to go to Wolfsfoot today for the council meeting. Walim will stay here, so if you need anything, you only have to ask him. But Baildon is now the Gamma of the pack. His job is to keep you safe along with all the other she-

wolves. If he tells you to hide, you hide, to run, you run. If it's for your safety you do as he tells you without arguing or anything else." I give her a look that tells her I'm not messing around at this point, and I expect her to listen.

"Okay, I'll do that. But you know Baildon and Swift have kept me safe for years, so I'm used to them ordering me around." She giggles at the look I give her, because I'd never made that connection before.

Satisfied she'll listen to Baildon, I continue to the next thing that may put her nose out of joint. "Now, as Luna, one of your duties is to organize pack events. I'll always help, of course, if you need it. But every female in the pack would be more than happy to help you. They'd see it as being part of the Luna's inner circle, a prestigious place to be." I waggle my eyebrows at her, which has her giggling. "We have a mating ball to organize. Flint will help you with it as we are inviting shifters from other areas. He hopes we'll find mates amongst them. It's time we opened up dialogue with them once more, in my opinion, and maybe this will be the start. Do you think you can organize that, with the help of Flint, the pack females and myself?"

"Yes, as long as I can use the other office that Zoella left. I would want to have my meetings in there, keep everything together." Hope is planning in her mind already. It's so easy to see and the crease between her eyes shows her concentration.

Knight chuckles in the back of my mind. *Briar is telling me Hope is already throwing ideas around in her mind.*

'That's good. I didn't want to overwhelm her before she even settled into being the Luna.' I reply, but feel thankful that Hope is going to be a great Luna.

Chapter 19



CONNELL

Arriving at the Town Council House, I walk into the meeting room, leaving Caleb outside, with the other Betas, or Deltas, the other alphas brought with them. Taking a seat quickly, as everyone else has arrived, I pause, however, to give everyone a nod of respect.

Flint, as the head of the shifter council, is seated in the center of the other seven members. I'm surprised they have all attended. It's not normal for all the members to be in the same place, at the same time, because of security. It does, however, explain the huge number of council warriors I saw outside the building.

Looking to my left, I see Gabriel Goldman, the Alpha of the Wolfsfoot pack. He gives me a slight nod of recognition, and on my right is Chet Blueblood, the Alpha of the Eclipse pack. Next to Chet and who is looking more than a little annoyed, is Lyle Walker, Alpha of the Spirit Walker pack. Finally, Aurora Pearl, Alpha of the Blood Pearl Pack, who is looking anywhere but at Alpha Lyle next to her.

"Welcome to the meeting," Flint states, but we all know we were summoned rather than invited. "It has come to our attention that the no-man's-land rogues are becoming more aggressive and have been breaching Alpha Lyle's border with more force than ever previously seen."

Lyle grunts but remains silent otherwise. I see Flint glancing at Aurora, but she's looking at a sheet of paper in front of her rather than having her eyes on the council members.

I side eye Gabriel and he shrugs, letting me know he does not know what is going on. Looking back at the council, I see Merry, Roman Walker and Lykos all giving Aurora meaningful looks. Well, meaningful to her, and them, but not to the rest of us.

“What the hell is going on?” Chet asks. Obviously he’s noticed the same as ourselves.

“Well, it seems Alpha Aurora has decided not to send extra warriors to help Alpha Lyle keep his borders safe. We all know that the border between Spirit Walker Pack and no-man’s-land is the most vulnerable piece of land between safety and an invasion,” Porter Riverrun calmly states while keeping his attention entirely on Alpha Aurora.

“It’s not that I won’t. It’s that I don’t have the spare warriors,” Aurora calmly states, looking up at the council members.

“You have a larger pack than Alpha Connell, yet he is sending men as soon as he has more trained. Taking on rogues from the Northern Parklands, and giving them hope, and something to live for,” Eve Planter snaps, continuing while giving Aurora a dirty look. “In my opinion, I have my doubts that Alpha Aurora is capable of continuing as an active alpha of her pack.”

Uproar begins with the council members and Aurora, who is on her feet, palms on the table in front of her and snarling at Eve. If things don’t calm down, we are going to see a fight break out in a minute. I look to my right and give Chet a small smirk, and he gives me one back, before we both take in what is happening now.

“Calm down. Eve, sit down. Alpha Aurora, you can’t just tell us you have no spare warriors. You need to give us the full story before Eve pulls a vote of no confidence in your leadership as an alpha,” Flint says, but how he’s remaining calm surprises me.

Aurora steps away from the long table we’re all sitting around, and walks towards the door, then surprises me with what she

says next, after giving me a look of sympathy, but I'm not sure why until she speaks.

"You are quick to want to take my position of alpha, aren't you, Eve Planter? But when Alpha Brutus Torrance terrorized and brutalized his pack for years, you stood by and did nothing. I have pack members that are still traumatized by his actions, and I'm not blaming you for that Alpha Connell, but I've done nothing but good for my pack and yet I'm the one being threatened. Take your threats and shove them up your ass, Eve, because I'll fight to the death for my pack and my position. The only way I would step down is if MY PACK WANTED ME TO."

Aurora is out of the door and gone before anyone can say anything more. I turn and look at Eve, who throws herself into her seat, looking more than a little shocked.

Flint rubs his forehead, then turns to Eve. "I know you have never been keen on female Alphas Eve, but to speak as you did was totally out of order. You never allowed her to say why she hasn't sent warriors to assist Alpha Lyle. From now on, when we have dealings with Alpha Aurora, you will not be included. Are all other council members in agreement with that?"

One by one, the council members give an aye vote and Eve looks more than a little ashamed of her outburst. The problem being, once this sort of thing is said, it can never be taken back and her relationship with the Blood Pearl Pack Alpha is now damaged beyond repair. We all know how hard Aurora worked to get her pack to the place they are now, and it is strange she is not assisting, because she is usually the first to step forward.

"I don't know what is happening at Blood Pearl Pack, but it is not like Alpha Aurora to not offer support, and in any form she can. Something is wrong, and I've asked her, but she won't tell me," Lyle states calmly and looks at the council members before continuing. "I think we should leave her to whatever she is dealing with, and if we get the opportunity,

we offer any help we can, the same as she has done for all of us in the past.”

Ulmer Oakfold taps his fingertips on the table. “I agree, and I’ve known Alpha Aurora since she was a pup. I’m going to visit her pack and see if I can figure out what is happening. Leave it with me, and I’ll bring anything I find back to the council.”

“Okay, let’s move on. The rogue issue is slowly getting worse, and Alpha Lyle has seen an increase, in both the frequency, and the number of rogues active in the attacks. The council have sent warriors, Alpha Chet and Alpha Gabriel have sent warriors.” Flint is ticking off on his fingers as he speaks. “Alpha Connell is training new warriors and is happy to assist with warriors as soon as he is able. Is everyone happy with how things are progressing with supplying help to Alpha Lyle?”

“I’m doing all I can to increase the size of my pack. I’m training warriors for border patrol, and as soon as I have the numbers, I’ll send to you, Alpha Lyle, however many I can spare. I consider at this time your border to be my border because if you are breached, it will only be the next step before they are breaching mine. Anything I can do to help, please call me.” I’m looking directly at Lyle as I speak so he can see how earnest I am.

Chet has supplied warriors and is rotating the warriors, so they stay fresh, and at their highest fighting energy. Gabriel is doing the same, much to the council members’ relief. I’m sure with the words spoken toward Aurora this morning, they don’t want to irritate another alpha.

“Let us move on. I am thrilled to announce that Alpha Connell has met his mate. Hope came to the Blackshadow Pack from the Northern Parklands where Alpha Connell was finding new pack members. Most of the shifters have been abused by their last packs, family, or have had terrible circumstances leading to them being rogues. We are finding more of them have come from other regions too.

“The council will look into what is going on, and see if others are in the Parklands that want to become members of a pack.” Flint covered two topics easily here and I can’t help but grin to myself at how easily he can do that.

A squeeze on my left shoulder has me look at Gabriel. “Congratulations Alpha Connell. There is nothing better than finding your mate.”

“Thank you.” I don’t follow with anything more as Gabriel was once going to be Beta of my pack until he found his mate and consequently became Alpha of the Wolfsfoot Pack. We’ve had a strained relationship, but it has improved since my father died. He is another who, if proof were needed, can say I’ve become a better person, and deserve the respect that my position calls for.

Receiving congratulations from the other alphas, and the council, pleases me because I would never step away from Hope and she may have been a rogue, but she is a member of my pack, and now the Luna.

“I forgot to tell you Alpha Connell, but I caught a young female, newly rogue, dashing in and out of your border. From what she tells me, she was running from her brother who wanted to arrange a mating so he would enhance his pack position. But she was having none of it,” grinning broadly, Chet continues. “She’s a feisty one, but she was staying in the lodge near the border and what sounds like Merry’s old cabin when her brother got too close. She’s now a member of my pack, so she won’t be infringing on your border again,” he informs me.

“That’s good then. It’s something I can stop worrying about. We’ve been watching and waiting to see if we could catch whoever it was. She didn’t do any damage at all. It only appeared that someone was sleeping or resting there.”

Flint rubs his hands together and has a huge smile on his face. “Last order of business, and an exciting one. Alpha Connell is going to be hosting a mating ball at the Blackshadow Pack. After some discussion, we decided to invite wolf shifters from

the other Kingdoms. We know some went from all areas of our Kingdom, but their offspring have never come back, and they may need to do that to find their fated mates. I've put out feelers and am waiting for responses at the moment. Alpha Connell, I'll keep you informed so you know the numbers that may partake."

"Okay, thank you. My only worry is the sleeping arrangements because we are only now in the process of building new cabins and I wouldn't want guests to sleep in the dining room." I grin because I can just imagine it looking like a camping expedition.

"You could call it a camping ball," Chet chuckles.

Councilman Roman Walker slaps his hand on the table, laughing loudly, much to his mate's amusement. "C-can you im-imagine..." he stutters through his laughter, "someone like Alpha Benedict sleeping on the floor of a dining room."

Now we all know Alpha Benedict may be young, but he is so stern and boring that nobody ever mingles with him. The vision of his pompous ass sleeping on the dining room floor has me laughing along with Roman.

We discuss a few minor things before leaving and I head home, filling Caleb in on what was discussed. He's as surprised as I am about the development regarding Alpha Aurora, but he also has a feeling something is not right with her, and maybe her pack. But until she spills what's going on, nobody can do anything to help her.

Knight is giddy knowing we are nearly home and he'll be seeing Hope and Briar at any minute. 'Calm yourself. I'm as eager to get to Hope as you are, but we don't want to frighten her.'

Ok, but you better get your human self-mated or I'll make sure I mate Briar again. She enjoys mating, and I am happy to mate as much as she wants.

'Stop. Stop thinking about mating.'

Why? I need to be sexier than you because you are slow at getting us mated.

'Go away and let me do this in my own time.' I quickly slam the block between us closed and grin because I know he'll be pacing back and forth and cursing me for doing it.

Turning as I walk through the front door of the packhouse, I smile at Caleb. "I'll see you tomorrow. Get a good night's sleep. It's been a heck of a long day."

"Goodnight, Alpha."

I don't wait to hear if he says anymore. I'm already striding through the packhouse and up the stairs to the alpha suite where I'm going to find my mate, my Luna, and hopefully make love to her for the first time.

Entering the suite, it's quiet and, as I expected, Hope is in bed and sleeping. I make my way into the bathroom and quickly shower before stalking to the bed where I stand for a few moments, enjoying the soft look on Hope's face as she sleeps.

Climbing into bed, I gently draw Hope to me, pushing my nose into her hair and taking a large sniff of her aroma, which is lavender, honey and chamomile. It is such a relaxing but enticing aroma, to me anyway. If anyone else tries to sniff her, I'll kill them.

My hand runs over her hip, over her belly and up to her ribcage, slowly moving to take hold of one of her breasts. I'm more than happy she sleeps naked, which gives me the opportunity to feel her skin against mine.

I gently tweak her nipple, which has Hope move and a little moan leave her lips. Grinning, because I know I can entice my little mate to want me to continue.

Kissing her shoulder, nibbling her neck, I know she's awake. She doesn't stop me, but stays relaxed, enjoying what I'm doing.

Turning her gently so she's laid on her back, I lean over her and suck my mating mark on her neck, which has the desired

effect. Hope moans loudly and tips her head to the side, giving me full access to her neck and mark.

I can feel Knight nudging in the back of my mind, and I know he's trying to urge me to take Hope fast, but I want to do this gently and show her I'm caring of her feelings and how I make her feel.

Cupping her breast, I lower my mouth and tease her nipple with my tongue, slowly moving over to her other breast and hearing her sigh. I feel my hardness pressing against her thigh, and when she takes me in her hand, stroking me gently, I can't help but groan with excitement.

I feel myself pushing against her, and although I'm trying to take things slowly, I'm finding it difficult not to follow Knight's advice.

Hope rolls onto her side and pushes her ass against me. I place one hand on her hip, pulling her to me. With the other, I pull her hair so her head is tilted back and I have access to her neck and shoulder. Biting my way up and down her neck and shoulder has her moaning and rubbing my hard cock against her ass cheek.

Taking things slowly is only heightening my own desire. My bites are becoming more urgent, and I'm sure there will be more marks on her neck and shoulder than just the mating mark by the time we're done.

As I'm trying desperately to slow myself down, I feel her hand guide me to her wet opening. As soon as she feels me at her entrance, she pushes herself onto me, and I slide into her all the way.

It only takes a few deep strokes and I feel Hope reaching her climax. Her muscles grip me hard and she moans deeply as the feelings rush through her. This takes me to the limit, as I can feel her emotions now we are mated. I flood her with my seed as she grips me so tightly with her channel.

I'm so shocked by the sudden orgasm, I hold her tightly to me. A little voice breaks into my thoughts, saying, "Can I breathe

now, please?”

Opening my eyes, I see Hope looking at me over her shoulder, and I release some of the pressure with which I was holding her.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.” I search Hope’s face for any signs of distress.

Rolling over to face me, she looks into my eyes and says, “I didn’t know it would be like this. Finding my mate. The feelings that it would create. The need that would be unleashed. I just never imagined....” Her voice trails off.

“Hope, I’ve waited for my mate, for you. I wanted nothing else, but I didn’t know that finding you would complete me as well as it does.”

Rolling onto my back, I pull Hope in close and she rests her head on my chest. I lay like that until I hear her breathing slow and I know she’s asleep. I close my eyes and sleep comes quickly.

Chapter 20



HOPE

Today I feel like the Luna of the Blackshadow Pack, and now that I've committed my heart to Connell and to the pack, I'm going to do everything in my power to make them proud to call me Luna Hope.

Walking into the kitchen, I smile at everyone as they are cleaning after the breakfast rush. "Is everything okay in here, Nessie?" I ask.

"Everything is under control, Luna Hope. Can I help you?"

"No, I came to see if you needed me to give you any help. I'm willing to do whatever is needed."

"Oh, no, we have everything covered, and I've given the new pack members jobs," Nessie says.

"Where did you put them?" I ask, because I don't want those that came from the Parklands to be placed somewhere I know they would hate.

"If I give you the staff rundown, then you'll know where everyone is. In the kitchen I am here, of course. Then there is Evangeline, Isla, Nora, Betina, and Lorna. Housekeeping, I placed Suella, Clover, Jessie, Aster, Karia and Eliza. Antica wanted to be in the garden, so that's where she is, along with Dahlia, who used to be the lead in the kitchen."

"Thank you. I'm going to be looking for helpers who can spare some time without tiring themselves out."

"Helpers for what, Luna Hope?" Nessie asks with a frown.

“We are going to hold a mating ball, and I’ve done nothing like this, so I need some of the females to help me, give advice, or anything at all, because I’m doing this fairly blind, as you can imagine.” I’m as honest as I can be, and everyone is paying close attention to what I’m saying.

Nessie quickly places her hand on her chest and grins. “I’ll help. I’ve helped at one before, and if you want, I can ask a few of the pack females I know have done this previously, and some of the new female members, because it’s nice to have fresh eyes on something like this.”

“Thank you, Nessie, that will be splendid. Can you arrange for anyone that is interested to meet in the office that was Zoella’s around three this afternoon?”

“Yes, I’ll do that, Luna Hope.”

Walking away, I turn when Nessie speaks again. “You could hold the meetings in the Luna’s House.”

“Luna’s House?” I question.

“Yes. The last Luna had her own house, as she didn’t want to be around her mate. She lived there and had her friends visit her there. It’s not been used in a long time, but we could clean it and use it for meetings, and the like. Unless you’d rather use the office next to Alpha Connell’s office?”

“Leave it with me and I’ll think about it.” I need to speak to Connell about this Luna House, and what’s going to happen to it.

Standing at the edge of the kitchen garden, I watch Silas and Chester discuss the vegetable planting area and see a woman I’ve not met before, and boy, does she look sour.

Antica is singing under her breath and pulling weeds in the area where she is working. She looks happy and I can’t help but feel warmth at the sight. We all needed to belong, feel safe and loved.

“Luna Hope.” I turn and smile at Silas who is walking towards me, covered in dirt, but has a sense of peace around him. “We

have everything ready to plant out the herbs tomorrow. This area,” pointing where I’d told him would be a suitable position for the herb garden, “will be planted first thing. I’ve seeds sown in the potting shed, so we hope they all will grow without too many failures. Oh, there’s also a cabin on pack land that has a lovely established herb garden. It’s not being used as residence anymore so I’ve sent Chester to dig it up and transfer all those lovely plants into here, as well.”

Any gardener knows not every seed will grow, but these seeds have been carefully saved by me and I’ve never had many failures, so I am excited to see what Silas’ success rate will be. Transplanting some established plants will be beneficial too, I’m sure.

“That is good, Silas. Thank you for placing the herb garden here. It’s perfect and close for the kitchen staff to come out and pick what they need.”

“We have the area in the orchard dug over, and what you have brought, we have planted. Now we just have to wait and see if they like the earth and will grow fruitfully.” Silas frowns a little, but it’s one you always see on a gardener’s face when they want things to flourish but know they may not.

“Are Chester and Antica settled in helping you, Silas?” I ask and give him my full attention.

“They are both settled well, and quickly. They take instruction well, and will learn, and do whatever is needed. I’m thrilled to have them here with me. I retired for a while and missed the garden and the work, but it was too much for me on my own. Now I have helpers. It’s again a joy.” He looks at the sour faced woman, then mumbles, “well, it would be if she wasn’t in the garden.”

“What’s that?” I ask, but Silas shakes his head quickly, responding to my question.

“Nothing Luna Hope. Do you want to come and see the medicinal area?”

That is how I spend the next hour, walking around the garden and orchard. I discuss plants, herbs, bushes and the fruit trees with Silas. He's a great male to speak with, and he is very knowledgeable.

"So, tell me, Silas, why is that woman so sour looking?" I can't help but ask as I'm about to take my leave of the garden.

"That is Dahlia. She used to oversee the kitchen and housekeeping staff. But she was born with a sour face, and she'll more than likely die with it. She was, and would be, quick to order everyone else around but do nothing herself. Now she's got to work, and I make sure she does her share. Nobody in the garden will do less than others. They all do what they are told, but she does it with a sour face. The rest of us do it because we love doing it and being outside in the fresh air."

I'm sure there is a story about why Dahlia is no longer in the kitchen, but I'm not going to ask. It seems as Luna I have a lot of things to do and monitor, so her miserable self is not going to be important to me.

I walk around to the front of the packhouse and notice the signs that once there used to be something growing up the walls but it has been removed. That is a good move by whoever chose to do that, because it would have been easy to climb and enter the packhouse through any window.

Stepping over to what looks like a circle, something used to be here but has been removed. It had to have been here a long time as the grooves around whatever it was needed to be filled in completely, and maybe place grass seeds on, see if it will grow over.

Hearing a bellow, I look up and see Swift and Noah. They are fighting on the lawn, and Swift is kicking his butt by the looks of it. Walking closer, I take them by surprise when I speak.

"Swift. Stop kicking his butt. If you are helping him improve his fighting style, then do it in a training type of way. Stop being a bully." I scowl at her, because I've seen her teaching

some rogues to learn to fight, and she wasn't teaching them how she is supposed to be teaching Noah.

"Noah, I'm going to speak to Chief Oscar. If you need your fighting style improved, then as the chief trainer he needs to be doing it, or overseeing it. Swift, I will speak to him about you being trialed for a warrior position, and in the meantime, you leave Noah alone. No more fighting at all, for any reason." I say this as firmly as I can, and I've said all this quickly so neither of them can speak before me.

"Yes, Luna Hope," Noah respectfully replies and tips his head to the side, showing me his neck.

"Okay, Hope," Swift starts to speak but is interrupted when we hear a snarl.

"You will speak to your Luna with the utmost respect or you will answer to Alpha Connell." Walim stares hard at Swift. Now he is the second Beta of the pack, he has a beta aura flowing from him.

"Yes, Beta Walim. I apologize Luna Hope," Swift says, tipping her head. But gives me a wink when her back is turned to Walim and Noah.

"Swift, you will report to the Luna office at three this afternoon as you are helping arrange the mating ball," I hold my palm out to quieten her before she blusters, "No excuses. You will report at three, or you will be reprimanded and refused training."

"Yes, Luna Hope," Swift replies, but she's squinting her eyes at me.

I need to have a serious conversation with Swift about the fact that yes, she is like a sister to me, but I am her Luna, and she has to be respectful in front of any and all pack members. When we are together privately, we can speak as we always have.

"I want to speak with Connell about some training myself, only basic training, but I'd like to be taught with you Swift, as well as Swan, and Iona. I think training with the three of you I

can probably learn enough to defend myself to a small degree.”

Noah speaks before Swift can respond. “That’s a good idea Luna Hope. Swan and Iona are experienced fighters and have patrolled the borders for a long time now. They train with the male warriors, so have tips I’m sure, and they can teach about taking down a male, and giving yourself the opportunity to run.”

Swift opens her mouth to speak, but Noah gives her a firm look, and I’m more than surprised when her jaw snaps closed and she says nothing.

“I’ll look into that.”

Beta Walim is standing by my side and looks over at Baildon, who’s jogging toward us.

“I’ve been looking all over for you Luna Hope. I’m supposed to be the Gamma of the pack, which is to protect the Luna at all cost, and what does the Luna do? She disappears without a trace.” Baildon has obviously been dashing around trying to find me, as he has a sheen of sweat on his forehead.

I just cannot hold back the giggle that bursts out, and I throw my palm over my mouth to stop it, but nothing is going to hold it back and the giggle becomes a full-on laugh.

“Oh, come on, Luna, give the new Gamma a break.” Swift laughs, which causes me to laugh again.

“You have known me long enough, Gamma Baildon, to look for me either in the garden or the kitchen.”

“Yeah, but we are not in the Northern Parklands anymore, and you are not in that little shack you’ve always lived in. But I’ll take your heed and look for you in those two places first.”

Later in the day, I’m standing in the office looking at the ladies that have come along to help arrange the mating ball. We’ve had to clean the office, as it was in a terrible mess. Zoella obviously didn’t care about cleanliness or organization.

Swift, Nessie, Isla, Jessie, I know, but Jen, Floss and Tiny I haven't met before. They are all excited to be helping organize the office and throwing ideas about the mating ball.

"You know the past Luna stored all the purchased tablecloths, decorations and things for events such as this in the attic?" Floss had stopped cleaning with the cobweb brush to state.

"Oh my, yes, I remember now, but I don't know when anyone last went into the attic. Probably Alpha Connell's mother," Tiny adds to the conversation.

Nessie speaks, "I think we need to check what is up there. Will you ask Alpha Connell if we can go into the attic, Luna Hope? We'll need males to go with us because we can't lift enormous boxes around."

I jump when I hear the male voice behind me and roll my eyes when Baildon steps into the office. "I'll get the permission to go into the attic, and I'll make sure we have two more males to help with the lifting and carrying."

Looking over at Isla, I smile because she's looking at her mate Baildon with stars in her eyes, and it's easy for all to see how they are already enamored with each other. I know Baildon always wanted pups and lots of them, so I can imagine Isla being pregnant soon.

"Can I be aunt to your pups when they come?" I ask Baildon. He looks at me shocked, but then grins, giving me a wink and a nod, much to Isla's embarrassment as she is bright red at this point.

Briar is befriending wolves from the females that are friendly with me. She is excited to have others she can run with. Connell told me he wants to start monthly runs, where the pack runs together as a bonding experience. I think it's a great idea, and Briar is throwing this out as she's been acquainting herself as the top female wolf in the pack.

Gamzin bursts into the office and Baildon blocks his progress, pushing him back with a hand on his chest. Gamzin looks

panicked, and it has me taking a long look at him. He's pushing Baildon out of the way as he starts to speak.

"Luna Hope, I have a rogue who has run through the Parklands, Blood Pearl and Wolfsfoot, after Raymer told him that's where I'd come. He's injured but wanted to warn us."

Baildon pushes again to move Gamzin out of the office, but I push him gently out of the way so I can see what is going on. "Baildon, move. I need to speak to Gamzin."

Growling, but deferring to me, Baildon steps to the side. But it's noticeable he is watching us closely. "Now, Gamzin, take a deep breath and tell me what's going on."

Gamzin breathes in and out a few times, then starts to speak again. "I was walking with the border patrol, asking questions about the way they work rotation, when an injured rogue ran toward our border. He collapsed to his knees just outside the border and asked if we can find Gamzin.

"When I informed him I am Gamzin, he said he'd spoken to Raymer in the Parklands, and he had said to come to the Blackshadow Pack and find me.

"The male ran through Blood Pearl and Wolfsfoot Packs, dodging patrols and staying one step ahead, getting to our border by sheer damn luck I think."

I interrupt, as this is getting to be a long explanation. "Where had he come from? Why did he need to find you?"

"He knew me when we were pups, and he came from the Wolfsong Pack. Luna Hope, your father Alpha Soren Wolfgang has just learned he has a daughter, and he knows where you are." Gamzin is looking at me with such a fierce look that I feel goosebumps run up my arms and the hair raises on the back of my neck.

"Oh, no, no, no," Baildon snarls, "get the Alpha. We need to make him aware and he will probably have to speak to the shifter council."

My mind is spinning, but all I can think about is the fact my father knows. He's going to come for me. "How did he find out?" I ask, and Gamzin shakes his head before responding. "I don't know Luna Hope."

"Come on, let's go see this rogue and see how hurt he is." I rush out of the office, following Gamzin to wherever he's placed the rogue.

Chapter 21



CONNELL

'CONNELL!'

The sound of Hope shouting to me in my mind has me running out of my office and into hers, but she's not here. I quickly mind link, *'Where are you?'*

'In the dining room.'

Rushing to the dining area, I find Hope where she's surrounded by females, but also Gamzin and Baildon standing guard over them all.

"Alpha Connell, Wolfsong Pack knows about Hope," Gamzin throws out, but I push past him and grab Hope, pulling her to my chest and wrapping my arms around her protectively.

"How do they know?" Remaining calm for Hope and showing that the Alpha of this pack has himself under control. I mind link Beta Caleb and Beta Walim, along with Chief Oscar, to come to the dining area immediately.

Taking a seat, I place Hope on my lap, and looking around, I notice a male I've not seen before. He's definitely rogue. "Who is that, and why is he here?"

Gamzin speaks, "Alpha Connell, this is someone I've known since a pup. He was a member of the Wolfsong Pack, but has renounced the pack after hearing Alpha Soren Wolfgang screaming about having a daughter, and getting his hands on her."

I turn to look at the injured male, but I can see he has been treated. He has to wait for his wolf to finish healing him. He dips and tips his head, showing respect. "What's your name?"

“Yarrow, Alpha. Yarrow Whitestorm,” he quickly responds with a respectful tone. I think this male is decent and trying to show me that with his tone of voice and manner.

“Tell me what you know.”

“Alpha Soren and Luna Corinthia have not been able to have pups since the Luna is barren. The Alpha has tried to mate with other females but no pup was produced. We all know that it’s unlikely to produce a pup unless you are mated to them, although it happens at times.” Taking a deep breath he continues, “A female contacted the Alpha and told him he has a daughter, and where she is. He went crazy, smashing furniture in his office behind the closed door. But we all could feel the anger, resentment and spite oozing from him.”

I rub Hope’s back, drawing circles to ease the tension I can feel building inside her. ‘Knight, speak with Briar. Make sure she knows we will do everything to keep them safe. I don’t want Hope stressing too much.’

I will, and we will kill him if he comes here.

I can hear Knight growling and snarling in the back of my mind, but I close him down so I can concentrate on what’s being said.

“That explains why Zoella’s office was such a mess. She’s usually neat, but when we checked the office and her room, they were in a mess. She’d been searching for information, I’m sure. But how would she know that Hope is Alpha Soren’s daughter?”

“Does it matter? He knows, and that’s what we have to concentrate on,” Hope replies.

“He was shouting about coming here and taking her, no matter what she wants. He has plans for his Beta to mate with her. Now his Beta is around thirty years old, and it turns my stomach thinking about it. He’s going to be the next alpha of the pack, if he can grab Hope and make it happen. But I know, because I’ve seen it myself, Luna Corinthia is having relations with this male.” Yarrow has such a look of disgust on his face

that I'd laugh if it wasn't all so sickening and worrying. "He is also a nasty piece. His wolf is as bad. I'm not sure if the pack is going feral with the way they are acting."

"I thank you for coming and informing us about what you heard. Now tell me, how did you get hurt?"

"First, I had a run-in with our border patrol, but I fought my way past them. Then I had to run through Blood Pearl Pack territory and was grabbed by two female warriors. I explained where I was coming and that it was urgent, but because I wouldn't tell them why it was urgent, they roughed me up a little. But I waited until an opportunity presented, and fought one and got away, running out of their territory, through the Wolfsfoot pack without issue and to the border here, but my wolf is tired, so my healing is much slower than normal."

"Are you intending to go back to the Wolfsong Pack?" I ask.

"No, I wanted to join here if you would allow me to. I've wanted out of that pack for years, but the alpha keeps a close watch on everyone, any sign of wanting to leave, or getting caught leaving, and you disappear." Yarrow is full of information, and he's going to have to speak to Flint or even the full council.

Looking at Gamzin, who knows this male, he gives me a nod. But I speak to him through the mind link, anyway. *'Is he trustworthy?'*

'Yes, Alpha Connell. I've known him from being a pup and although I left the pack, I know even at that time he wanted to leave with me.'

'Okay, but you will have to watch him and make sure he's not a spy of any kind, because it's on your shoulders that I'm agreeing.'

'Thank you, and I will watch him, to be sure.'

Gamzin places his hand on Yarrow's shoulder and speaks to him so we can all hear. "Alpha Connell will agree to you becoming a pack member, but I will be your mentor. You will

be watched until we are convinced you are not a spy, or here for any nefarious reason.”

“Thank you, Alpha Connell. I will prove to you I’m here for the right reasons, and that I am a committed member of the pack. I was a patrol warrior, but I enjoy using my hands for making things. Any kind of maintenance work, building, or similar is where I’d be best.” Yarrow looks at me with all sincerity on his face.

Neither Knight nor I can detect any lies or deceit from him. “You will report to Gaul and will follow his instructions. We are having new cabins built so I’m positive he will welcome you becoming a part of his team. Gamzin, I will leave that with you, but bring Yarrow to my office in an hour and I’ll make him an official pack member. By then, his wolf should have been able to complete much of his healing.”

A light tapping on my arm has me looking down at Hope, who I still have on my lap, and with my arms wrapped around her. “Yes, sweetheart?”

“I have placed healing lotion on his injuries and it will help speed the process. I think Yarrow needs a few hours’ rest, so my opinion is to bring him into the pack later, after our late meal.”

I kiss the tip of Hope’s nose, and grin when she blushes the brightest of pink. “Okay sweetheart, we will do that.”

Now everyone is looking at me as though I’ve grown another head. “What?” I ask because I’ve done nothing strange that I know of.

Caleb chuckles before stating, “Well, we’ve never seen you so sweet. Honestly, it’s pretty shocking to all of us.”

“Never mind that. I want both my Betas, Gamma, Chief Oscar and Gamzin in my office in half an hour.” Firmly stating this because it’s going to be imperative we have the border patrol on full alert.

Picking Hope up bridal style, I walk away smiling down at Hope, who has a fit of giggles. “You alright, sweetheart?”

Erupting in more giggles, Hope kisses my chin. "I'm good, babe."

Stopping as I'm shocked she called me babe, but when I see her eyes sparkling and the laughter bubbling, I know it's because I've just started calling her 'sweetheart'. "I like you calling me babe," I playfully growl as I continue carrying her to my office.

Once in the office, I place Hope into the easy chair and I take a seat behind my desk. "I will protect you, Hope, so do not overly worry about your father. If he comes here uninvited, it is a sign of war and I'll call Alphas Lyle, Gabriel and Chet to arms with me. Not sure about Alpha Aurora, as something strange is going on with her and her pack."

"Before everyone arrives and you talk about this mess, can I have someone assigned to help us? I want to go into the attic and look at what your mother had for celebrations and parties. One of the ladies told me she kept everything up there, and it is better than spending more money on buying things we already have."

"Yes, I'll get a couple of males to assist. Noah, William and Bladrick are available, I'm sure. But don't let them mess you around. They are quite the jokesters when they want to be," I warn Hope, but I know all three of them will make sure their Luna is safe and gets what she wants.

"I want to look at the Luna House, too. I was told about it and it was suggested that I could use it like a headquarters when I have my meetings with the females. I could store things there as well, instead of in the office next door. You use that office as a secondary to yours, and I don't want to take it away from you." Hope is looking a little worried now.

"The Luna House was my mother's. She had it built so she could get away from my father, and I used it briefly. It has no special meaning for me, so you can use it for whatever you want. Or we can allow one of the mated pairs to have the house. It is only small, so I'm not sure it would be a good

place for meetings. But get Beta Caleb, William, Bladrick or Noah to take you over to look at it.

“My choice would be for you to have the office next door. It was the Luna’s office until my mother moved to the house. At that point she stopped doing most of the Luna duties, so the office was gradually taken over by Zoella when I made her secretary. But Hope, once you take over your duties, I’ll have no need for that office.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll look at the house and then we can discuss it. I want to know what duties I need to be doing, and if I need any training to do them.” I walk from behind my desk, lean down and kiss Hope, but have to break it off when a light coughing is heard behind us. Typical that they all arrive when I get my lips on my mate!

“Come on, Alpha, leave the Luna in peace.” Beta Walim chuckles, along with the rest of the males that have walked in.

Hope quickly leaves the office and I settle once more behind my desk. “Take a seat and let’s get this meeting started.”

An hour later we’ve discussed the fact Zoella was more of a traitor than we realized. Because she had to have been the one that informed Alpha Soren about Hope and where she’s located. None of us know how she found out, but she could have overheard something as her ears were as large as an elephant’s and her mouth as loose as you could ever imagine. Being a nosey gossip is a nice way of describing her.

“I think we need to tighten the border patrol along the northern part of the territory. It’s where the threat will come from, after all.” Chief Oscar points at the map on the wall, running his finger to where our northern border meets Wolfsfoot and Spirit Walker Packs.

“I’m going to have to speak to Flint and Alpha Gabriel,” I muse thinking out loud.

“If we thin the patrols on the south and west borders, we can add more to the northern, but keep the east border covered. We all know that the south and west borders are the ones

which have no threats to them. We can keep a minimal patrol on those sides, if everyone agrees with that?" Chief Oscar says.

What he suggests is reasonable, and I give my agreement but check if anyone has any comment other than the suggestion Chief Oscar has given. When no one has any other ideas of how to find extra cover for the northern border, I give permission for this to take place immediately.

"I think Luna Hope needs to have some lessons on protecting herself. It's been suggested previously, but now we know this asshole Alpha is going to come for her, she needs to be able to, at the minimum, get away from anyone grabbing her," Beta Walim states.

"I agree. Chief Oscar, you arrange that, and I'll speak to Hope about it later this evening." Everyone is happy with the suggestion, and I can see Baildon has his jaw tensed at the idea, but knows it is the least we can do for Hope's security if it ever happens that she is alone.

"Alpha, I have watched Gamzin's fighting techniques and have given him three strategy tests. I have to admit his strategy is better than my own, and I am happy to say that if you are willing, we can pass the title of Delta to him, so he can begin organizing the patrol warriors and developing any strategy required." Chief Oscar surprises me with this statement. But from the little Hope has told me Gamzin has been keeping everyone safe for a long time and he's done it with no personal gain, which to my mind makes him one hell of a fine male.

I quickly swear Gamzin into the Delta position, and I inwardly smile when his chest puffs out to its fullest and he receives slaps on the back from everyone in the office.

Once everyone has left the office, I pick up the phone and make the call to Flint. I know our shifter council is not the council that oversees the area that the Wolfsong Pack is a part of. But they are all shifter council members and I'm sure will

come to some agreement as to what to do about Alpha Soren Wolfgang.

“Alpha Connell, what can I do for you?” Flint asks as he picks up my call.

“I have an issue that needs your urgent attention.”

“Tell me?” Flint stonily asks.

I fill him in on what has happened regarding Hope, her father, and the traitor Zoella. I also update him regarding the Beta, Gamma and Delta positions I've now filled and how well the new pack members are fitting in.

“I'll speak to you later regarding Alpha Soren. Keep me informed if anything develops. Also, speak to Alpha Gabriel as he is between you and what could be an invasion force.

“We still have no answers as to what is happening with Alpha Aurora, but she has closed her borders and is not responding to our calls at this time. She has her mental block firmly in place. I do, however, think it is within her pack, and nothing that you or the other packs in our area need to worry about.”

“I will speak to Alpha Gabriel in a few moments. Hope is organizing the mating ball and I will have a date for you within the week. I just need to know how much time is required to get this all put into place, because this has to be a success or Hope won't have the confidence to do anything in the future.”

“Is she settling in alright?” Flint asks, and I can hear a touch of concern in his tone.

“She is organizing herb and medicinal gardens, the mating ball, and looking into the Luna House with an eye to using it as a headquarters, or if it should pass on to a mated couple. All in all, Hope has jumped in with both feet and given me her trust. Nothing, and nobody will have me break that trust. We are fully mated, and I'll make sure she is happy and protected or die trying.” The menace in the last part of my statement surprises even me, but it is the oath I give to myself and to Hope.

Chapter 22



HOPE

I'm fairly excited to see the Luna House, mainly because it was Connell's mother's. William and Noah are walking beside me and Swift, of course, has tagged along.

"Why are you not training with Chief Oscar today?" I ask Swift, giving her a frown, because she's not done any training today that I know of.

"Later this afternoon, as Chief Oscar is busy. He told me, Swan and Iona, that he'd train with us later, but hey, you've got to come along too." Swift laughs when she sees what must be shock on my face.

"I know I have to do it, but I'm not keen on fighting, as you well know. This threat from my father has made me itchy, and if I have to free myself from someone grabbing me, then I'll do it."

William and Noah look shocked. "What do you mean you have a threat from your father?" William asks.

I explain what is happening with my father, and about my history, my mother's story and they both look fit to bust by the time I'm finished with the telling of it all.

"We will all be on alert, and I'm positive the patrol warriors will be put on high alert. If I know Alpha Connell at all, he'll have the shifter council and other Alphas alerted to a threat." Noah states with a face set like stone. It's such a different look for him, as he's usually light-hearted and full of fun. But here is the warrior that I know he is, even though Swift thinks he could fight better than he does at the moment.

“Noah and I have been training in the evening. I’m sharper than I was, and Noah has better techniques. We are going to make sure you are safe, Hope. Your asshole of a father won’t get you, and believe me, if he takes you, I’ll come for you no matter what I have to face. You are my sister in all ways but blood, and I’ll make sure you are safe.” Swift throws her arms around my waist and hugs me, and I can’t help but hug her back. Noah and William have sappy looks on their faces watching us, which brings me back to the job at hand.

“Come on, let’s look inside this Luna House. Make my mind up if I’m keeping it or letting a mated pair have it.”

We hardly spend any time in the Luna House. It’s small, musty smelling as though it’s not been used in a while, and it has an aura about it that I don’t like. Sadness is what it says to me, and after throwing open every window in the house, I step outside and look at Noah and William. “I don’t want it. I don’t like it. I’m happy for a mated pair to have it. I won’t ever come back here.”

Swift gives me a questioning look, and I shrug my shoulders. “The house is sad. You can feel it, and I don’t like it. It needs love, laughter and a pup to give it a lived-in feel, and something to give it warmth and character. It has two bedrooms, so is good for a newly mated pair or a pair with one pup, or two pups of the same sex. Mind you, I’m not sure there are many mated pairs in the pack. I’ll have to find out.”

“If you don’t like the aura of the place, you’ll never like it. It will be nice for a mated pair, though,” Swift replies. “The office next to Alpha Connell’s is a pleasant office, plenty of space and it’s near if you have to ask a question, or you just want to pop in, you know, to close the office door for a while.”

Noah and William chuckle, and I stare at Swift because I’m not sure what she’s talking about, but when it hits me I slap her arm and giggle. “You are naughty, ” I reply, and Noah waggles his eyebrows, which has Swift blushing.

Walking around to the garden, I wave at Silas and head to the potting shed. Thankfully, I’ve sent William, Noah and Swift off

because I know they'd just trample all over the garden.

"Hello, Luna Hope. Are you having a good day?" Silas asks as he follows me into the potting shed.

"It could have been better, but it's all going to be okay. Well, I hope so, but I came to check on how the seeds are doing. Do we have anything popping through yet?" I ignore the small frown he had when I started my reply, but he brightens quickly as he shows me the seedlings.

I spend an hour with Silas, planting seeds, repotting seedlings, and talking about the garden. It's a very enjoyable hour and I'm always going to be happy coming here and speaking with Silas. He is knowledgeable and has the aura of a father figure, which I've never had, but welcome.

"I would like to plant a long row of sunflowers in front of the packhouse if it's possible. The squirrels will come and the birds. I'll make sure the pack knows not to chase the squirrels, too."

"Yeah, that's going to be a must or they will try to catch them, especially if they are in wolf form," Silas chuckles.

"Do you need any extra help? I know you have Dahlia, Chester and Antica, but if you need extra, I can find you more. The second group that came from the Parklands are still trying to find somewhere to fit into the pack." I ask and know that two of the males and a female would be interested if Silas wants more.

"I could use two robust males and another female. The orchard is getting behind because we are so busy here." Silas rubs his chin in thought. "Yes, if you could get me those, then that would be good."

"Take it as done. I'll get them to come over right away. I have to go check out the attic now." I pat his forearm and rush away, but see Baildon looking for me. Waving, I get his attention, and he waits for me to walk over to him.

"Can you see if Barron, Cyd, and Tisha want to work in the garden? If they do they need to report to Silas pronto."

“I’ll do that, but where are you going now? Honestly, Luna Hope, it’s hard to keep up with you.”

“You know it’s strange to hear you calling me Luna Hope, and not just Hope. I can’t see you as Gamma Baildon. You are just Baildon to me, my brother.”

Baildon smirks, “I know, but Alpha Connell wants everyone to call you Luna Hope, and I’m happy to do that. But it will slip now and again, I’m sure.”

“I’m going to the attic now. Can you get Noah and Bladrick to come and help? Apparently, there may be some lifting and carrying involved.”

“Okay. Do not go into the attic without us. I’ll go speak to Cyd, Barron, and Tisha, who I know are watching the warriors train. In fact, some are joining in now, and may make the grade.”

“I’ll not go into the attic, but hurry them along.” Standing at the main doors of the pack house, I watch Baildon run to the training area, and take a moment to breathe fresh air, and consider all I’ve heard and done already today.

Noticing Baildon walking back toward the packhouse, I enter and head straight for the attic. I don’t enter because I honor my word, and I never want Baildon to worry about me doing something I said I wouldn’t.

Opening the large door, Baildon gives me a serious look. “No lifting or dragging things around. The three idiots will be here in a minute, and we’ll have them doing all the hard stuff.” He gives me what I know is a mischievous look, and I wonder if I should warn Isla about it. Nope, I’ll let her learn herself.

Following Baildon up the stairs, I look around what is a massive room. The walls to the top of the brickwork have been shelved, and each shelf is filled with boxes. Every size and shape of box you can imagine, but thankfully when I get near to the first shelving I notice each box has a label. Luna ceremony, Alpha ceremony, Heart and Soul Week, Harvest Time, Ballroom accessories.

“Oh, here we are,” I cry out to Baildon, who is down at the other end of the attic.

Walking over to me, he grabs a box and places it on the floor, before ripping open the top and the sight of bright pink hits our faces. I look up at Baildon, screw up my nose and shake my head no.

We find a lot of boxes filled with pink. Bows, streamers, ribbons, tablecloths, and everything else you can think of. Every pink box is placed on the bottom of the shelving before we move to find purple, green, orange and blue. But I’m more impressed with the black and white box, which has very elegant ribbons, bows, candles, table settings, balloons and much more.

“This is the one. Black and white, it’s so elegant, and we want the mating ball to stand out. When we send invites, we can give a dress code of any subtle color.” Hearing a noise behind me, I turn and let out the loudest SCREAM!

Baildon flies past me and tackles the clown to the floor. Yes, a clown, a full-size clown, and it was walking toward me. The clown is screeching for Baildon to stop, and I frown because I recognize that voice.

“STOP! Baildon stop.” When he stops and looks down, the clown’s face is at the side of his head, and ripping what turned out to be a mask, looking up at us with a very embarrassed face, is Bladrick.

“You idiot, I could have killed you,” Baildon snarls.

“I’m sorry. I just wanted to play a prank. I didn’t know you were going to be acting like that.”

“What’s going on?” Turning to see who is speaking now, I shake my head at Noah, who is dressed like a clown, too. “Are you okay, Bladrick?” He nonchalantly asks.

“Is he okay? IS HE OKAY?” Baildon ends up shouting. “I could have killed him. I thought he was going to attack the Luna.”

“Oh, no, that’s not happening.” Noah states as though this is something that happens all the time, but when a large two-tone gray wolf slams into him and snarls, I can’t help but squeal.

“Alpha Connell! Um Knight, it’s okay. We were just playing games,” Bladrick states, hands out to say please stop, before he tips his head to the side in submission. Noah rips the mask off and is on the floor fully submitted to his Alpha.

Growling and snarling, pacing back and forth in front of the two clowns, I don’t think Knight knows if he wants to let them go or kill them. I walk up slowly and stroke his neck, leaning on his side slightly. “It’s okay Knight, they were just playing tricks. I’m sorry I screamed and scared you. I was just taken by surprise.”

It takes a few minutes of me stroking and murmuring quietly before Knight allows Connell to come forward. Thankfully, he shifts back fully clothed or I know I would have been as red as a tomato.

“You two will do what Gamma Baildon tells you, and when you’ve finished here you report to the training area where I’ll meet you for a session.” Grinning, showing all his teeth, and with his fangs descended, it is more than obvious their alpha is going to teach them a lesson.

“I’ve found the color and the decorations I want to use for the mating ball,” I quickly say, trying to get Connell’s attention back to me, and away from the two idiots that are now being ordered to carry everything downstairs to my office. I keep talking until Connell kisses my forehead and whispers, “I’m going to my office now. I will see you in a while.”

“Okay,” I lamely reply, then march down to my own office where I open and check what is inside as the boxes are brought downstairs.

It’s late by the time we get organized, so I contact Chief Oscar and arrange my training for the morning, as I’m too tired to do my best at the moment. If I’m going to learn to fight, I

need to start my first lesson while I have some energy. What a long day this has been, and it feels like days since I heard my father knew where I am. I'm not going to worry about it too much because what can I do about it at this moment in time? Nothing!

Chapter 23



CONNELL

I made sure I gave Hope a good wake up this morning, and then kissed her until she was starry-eyed. I can't help but wonder if she has a pup in her belly already.

Yes, we want pups.

Chuckling when I hear Knight break into my thoughts, 'I know Knight, I know.'

Sitting in bed last night, Hope informed me she didn't want the Luna House, and it piqued my interest, as it's not been used since I moved back into the packhouse. I used it briefly to escape from my father toward the end of his reign of terror. It gave me at least a small amount of respite from his never-ending tyranny. That is going to be my first port of call this morning.

Beta Walim appears on my right as I'm walking over to the house. "Where are we going, Alpha?"

"We? I didn't know I needed you along with me?" holding back the chuckle when I see the frown appear on his face.

"Yes, we. Beta Caleb and I have decided that for you and the pack's safety, you need someone with you at all times. The threat from Alpha Soren Wolfgang isn't one to take lightly."

"Hm, but you know I'm the strongest, fastest and meanest in the pack, don't you?" I add, again holding back the mirth I'm feeling.

"Yes, we realize that, but again, as your Betas, we feel it's required."

“Okay, but you can’t follow me into any personal spaces.” The shock and horror on Walim’s face has me bust out laughing, and the thought of him watching me take a piss sets me off again.

“You are joking with me, aren’t you?”

Chuckling, I look at him and nod, “Yeah, I am, but your face was worth it.”

“Darn it, I was imagining having to watch you doing nasty toilet things for a minute.” Seeing my eyes watering with laughter, he joins me, and we laugh together as we continue walking to the Luna House.

Standing in front of the house, my mind plays back to my mother and her retiring here to stay away from my father. She would plant flowers in the garden at the front, which have mostly stopped growing now, as it’s a mass of weeds and whatever that is with thorns all over it.

I remember her standing with her gardening gloves on her hands, straw hat on her head, and a large apron around her waist with huge pockets. The memory has me giving a sad smile because I miss her, even though she was fairly vacant in my life.

Shaking my head, I walk to the front door and open it. The first thing I notice is the musty smell, but I feel a slight breeze against my skin. Walking from the hallway into the living area, all the furniture is just how I left it, and the window is open wide, allowing the air to blow through.

“Hope opened all the windows yesterday, and from what I was told, she didn’t like the place, and didn’t want to have meetings or anything here. Her words apparently were, and I quote, *‘Sadness. The house breathes sadness.’* She couldn’t wait to get out of here and stated, if you agreed, it was to be emptied, cleaned, and painted, and then given to a mated pair.”

Nodding at Walim, I wander through the rest of the house and make my way out of the back door. I notice the bench under

the kitchen window, which has seen its best days, but gently smile, thinking of my mother sitting there with her afternoon cup of rosehip tea.

Shaking myself out of the past, I turn and look at Walim. “Get the place emptied. If any pack members want any of the furniture let them have it, otherwise have a nice bonfire. But do as your Luna asked and get it done smartly.”

“Yes, Alpha Connell.”

I walk away from the house and know I’ll more than likely never step into the place again, but for some reason I don’t care, and I’m pleased to turn my back on it and leave it in the past. “Beta Walim,” I let him know by calling him Beta how serious I am.

“Alpha?”

“I never want to step foot in that house again, so I’m putting you in charge of getting the job done. If the Luna attempts to visit the place, only allow it while you are present. I don’t want her upset by the sadness from that house ever again. Make sure there has been a significant improvement in the renovations before that happens. Oh, and keep this between us, if possible, but don’t lie to the Luna.”

“Yes, Alpha Connell. I’ll make sure that is how it will be.”

“Thank you, Beta Walim. I appreciate that.”

Taking a seat behind my desk, I pick up my phone and call Alpha Gabriel. I’m not sure how he’s going to react, but all I can do is warn him that something may happen at some time in the future.

Listening to his phone ring, I’m wondering if he’s even going to answer. “Alpha Gabriel Goldman speaking.”

Chuckling at the formality with which he spoke, I quickly reply, “Good day, Alpha Gabriel Goldman, this is Alpha Connell Torrance speaking.”

“Aw, morning Connell, sorry for the formality, but Tati has told me off about not being formal enough,” chuckling more to

himself than me. “My father thinks it’s highly amusing that my balls get busted on the regular.”

Now we both laugh, and as Carter Goldman is Gabriel’s second Beta now, I know he’ll see and hear it all. He should have been my Beta, but with all the mess my father caused, he left to be with his son, and I don’t blame him. I always liked Carter. He was a far better male than my father.

“So, what can I do for you, Connell?”

“As you know, I found my mate. We had a traitor in our pack who has been relaying information to the rogues in no-man’s-land. Unfortunately, we didn’t know that until after the female had left the pack. We found evidence in the office that her contact was Fragina and they are cousins. I don’t know this Fragina, but from what I understand, Luna Tatiana does after having an issue with her.

“Anyway, don’t let me digress. My Luna has a history that I’ll have to tell you, but please do not give the information to anyone else.”

“I would never break our confidence, Connell. We are building an alliance that we need to trust with no doubts. You can rest easy that whatever we speak of will not be spoken of by me to anyone else, unless it is called for, of course.”

“Speaking to your Beta, Chief Warrior, and other members will be required. But let me tell you all you need to know...”

For the next hour, I inform Gabriel of what is happening, and the implications it could have on his pack. We discuss the possibility of my warriors joining the Wolfsfoot northern border patrol, which I’m more than happy to do since it is my Luna’s safety causing the issue for Gabriel’s pack.

“Flint will speak with the Northern Shifter Council, I’m sure. He’ll need them to curb Alpha Soren and make it known he doesn’t breach our area’s borders. If he breaches, it will be a war. All the packs of our area will be obligated to join. Aurora won’t have an option, or she’ll find herself cut off from all

other packs and when she needs help, it won't be available," Gabriel is thinking along the same lines as me.

"I'm sorry that this could bring trouble to your border, but anything I can do or supply, I will. I have new pack members who are training to be warriors, but they have fighting experience as they lived in the Northern Parklands. They had to fight to survive, but their fighting style needs to be polished. They expend more energy than needed when fighting, and that is what Chief Oscar is working on at this time."

"Oh, don't you worry about sending warriors. My pack has been getting bored, so something like this will perk them up and get their blood flowing, and not in a bad way. Chief Drake has been perfecting everyone's style here and I'll tell you now, Connell, my pack warriors are like fighting machines and will be more than happy to rip Alpha Soren's wolves to pieces."

I can hear the excitement in Gabriel's voice and can't help the small chuckle that escapes me. Here I was thinking he'd be more than a little angry with me and he's actually thinking 'come on, let's get to it.'

We speak a while longer before I say my goodbye and thanks. Leaning back in my seat, I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding. But the relief that this is not going to cause issues between our packs is immense.

You worry too much. Phoenix is eager for a fight. He's not had a fight since he became alpha, and he wants to test his strength and agility.

Knight has obviously been speaking with Gabriel's wolf while I've been having my conversation. It's good to know that Gabriel's wolf is not angry at our pack, because a livid alpha wolf is not a thing you ever need to see.

'I'm happy that Phoenix is not angry at us. I want to build a good relationship with the Wolfsfoot Pack, and I want Luna Tatiana to know that the past lessons have been learned.'

I'm sure she knows that you have done nothing but show how honest, reliable, and caring you are as an Alpha of this pack. You've shown the council and other Alphas attending meetings that you have stood up and met the challenge, and nobody can say anything other than you are an excellent Alpha to your pack.

'Thank you, Knight. You know my inner thoughts and feelings, and it is your comments that mean the most to me. Knowing how honorable I'm trying to be, and the lengths I'm willing to work for the pack to have good lives.'

Come, let's find Briar and Hope. Maybe they feel like playing for a while?

'Get your mind off sex,' I chuckle, because I would have to admit if asked, that I'm as bad as Knight, when it boils down to it.

Watching the training of the second group that came from the Northern Parklands, I notice three are missing. Turning to Beta Walim, who is still shadowing my every move, I ask, "Where are the three that are missing from this group?"

"Barron, Cyd and Tisha are working in the garden under the guidance of Silas. Luna Hope had spoken with Silas, and they agreed he needed three more to help because of the extra work in the orchard."

"Okay, as long as I know. So, what's going to be happening with the others? Have they said what they want to do yet?" I ask.

"They would all like to be warriors, but I don't think one of the two females will make it. She's just not strong enough sadly and I know it's not going to be what she wants, but I think she'll end up having to do something else. Two of the males are swinging toward working with Gaul building the cabins."

"I want this decided quickly, and them all settled into their positions within the pack. Inform me as soon as you can."

"Yes, Alpha."

No time to eat lunch. I stand in the Luna's office door and watch Hope laughing and emptying boxes along with the females she has chosen to help. It warms my heart, seeing her relaxed and happy. I have to admit, even Swift looks settled with the group, and the fun way they are all working. I hurry away, but not before I give Hope a smile when she catches me watching them all.

Taking my seat once more, I open the accounts book to check the balance in the bank, and know I have to get the books up to date because I'm getting behind with things. Maybe I need to have one of the Beta's help with this type of thing? I'll have to speak to Flint about who would be the ideal candidate.

"Walim, go have lunch, then come back when you are done. Bring me a drink and a sandwich." Having someone hovering over me is wearing on my nerves, and I need a minute of peace.

"Okay, Alpha, I'll be half an hour." I give him a nod that I've heard him but keep my head down as I read the figures in the book in front of me.

Tapping on the office door ten minutes later has me sighing. "Come in," I say as I close the book and lean back in my seat.

Delta Gamzin steps into the office. "I'm sorry to bother you Alpha, but I wanted to report on the border patrol."

"Take a seat Gamzin and tell me."

Gamzin fills me in on the patrol, and weaknesses that he has found in the pattern of the northern patrol border. Looking at the map and studying what he is telling me, I can see that we have a gap every two hours in two sections of that patrol.

"What do you suggest?" I ask, stepping up to the map and frowning as I see it's quite a stretch of the territory border that is being left wide open for more than a few minutes at a time.

"If we add another patrol of two warriors, we can overlap the patrol. They will pass each other here, and here, which closes that gap. I know that we can't see all the border all the time,

but with those extra warriors, the perimeter will be covered more effectively.

“Also, I think we could implement spotting points in the trees. Then, if this Alpha Soren makes a move, we can have warriors in the trees watching for any incoming movement. It would give us a little extra time to have our warriors at the ready on the border.”

“You mean like an early warning signal?”

“Exactly, and if we get ourselves some of those fancy goggles, we’ll be able to see even further than our wolves’ eyes can see.”

“Okay, I’m good with that. Speak to Beta Caleb and he’ll get everything organized. I’ll let him know he has the authority. Good thinking Delta Gamzin. You are going to be the lifesaver of this pack if this asshole comes for Hope.”

“I will do my best, Alpha.” Giving me a tip of his head in respect, he rushes out of the office just as Walim enters with my drink and sandwich.

Later in the day, I’m standing watching Hope being trained by Swift, Iona, Swan, and Chief Oscar, and I’ve got to say this is not going down well. I wince when Hope doesn’t dodge fast enough, and Swift gets a hit in on her shoulder. I can feel the frustration rolling from Hope, but she’s trying her best, sadly, her best just isn’t good enough.

Gamma Baildon is standing on my left and Beta Caleb on my right, and we are all cringing at the scene in front of us.

“She’s ‘hopeless’ is what she is,” Baildon states under his breath.

Caleb nods slightly. “You can say that again.”

We all three wince again when Hope is knocked on her ass once more. I can see Chief Oscar is getting worried that no improvement is being shown.

Iona has taken a position in front of Hope, and is giving her advice but when Hope throws the move she misses Swan,

whirls around and lands on her ass. All with no form of success, and is sure not going to take out an opponent.

Walking over, I look at Hope and she has tears in her eyes. I open my arms and she walks right into them, wrapping her arms around my waist. I take a sniff of her hair before looking up at the four standing in front of me, looking more than a little uncomfortable.

“I’m sorry Alpha Connell, but Luna Hope is just useless at fighting. If anyone comes to fight, grab her, or anything, we just need to hide her until the threat is over,” Swift tells me with her eyes as large as an owl, and looking worriedly at Hope in my arms.

Chief Oscar nods before mumbling, “I agree,” followed quickly by Swan and Iona’s agreement.

“Luna Hope, if anyone comes near you to grab you, just kick them in the private parts, then run. Even a female would not enjoy being kicked there,” Baildon states, and pats Hope’s shoulder as he steps back, looking like he wants to laugh.

Hope looks up at Baildon, and seeing the twinkle in his eye, she giggles. Thank goodness we all end up laughing and the sadness that was oozing from Hope has gone.

Chapter 24



FLINT

Sipping my first drink of the day, I count my blessings that my life is full and keeps me busy. I'm envious of the pairs that are happily mated and although I am truly pleased for them, it does, however, leave me feeling that my life is not complete.

I dare not think of my deceased mate because it will bring the depression that haunts any shifter who has lost their mate. Many give up on life and simply wither until they die, but I'm not that kind of male. Every day is a blessing from the Goddess and I will fill my days helping where I can until either the Goddess deigns me good enough for a second chance mate or brings me home to her.

My office at the council building is an inhospitable place when you look clinically at it, but I spend a lot of time in those four walls filling in paperwork and the like. It is one of the reasons I'm the one who steps away from here and visits all the packs. I enjoy being at the packs, helping where I can, or guiding the Alphas, Lunas, or pack members.

A while later I take the seat behind the desk in my office. Picking up the phone, I make the first call of the day, which is to the Northern Shifter Council office. I am hoping the call will be answered by Councilman Ward. We have been colleagues for a long time and have helped each other many times.

"Good morning, Councilman Ward speaking."

I let out the slight breath I had been holding in relief when I hear who has answered my call. "Good morning, Ward, it's Flint speaking."

"Oh, hello Flint, how are you?"

"I'm good, but I have an issue which concerns one of your packs."

"Just a moment," listening I hear footsteps, then a door closing before Ward speaks again. "Sorry, I wanted to close the door and have privacy. It's obviously serious for you to call, so what's happening?"

"The Alpha of the Wolfsong Pack, is still Alpha Soren Wolfgang?" I ask.

"Yes, what has the idiot done now?"

I'm surprised Ward has reacted that way, but I continue. "Alpha Connell Torrance of the Blackshadow Pack has found his Luna, and the said Luna is the illegitimate child of Soren. He rejected his mate after having a single night with Rose, for Luna Corinthia, who is the chosen mate and not the fated mate. Soren's father demanded he mate for political purposes, and sadly, Hope's mother Rose was thrown to the side."

"Oh, my, and nobody knew about this?"

"No. Rose left the pack after accepting the rejection and lived in the Northern Parklands. Brought up Hope to be a caring, beautiful person. She is a healer and is going to be a perfect Luna for the Blackshadow Pack."

"So, what is the problem?"

"Soren didn't know he had a child, and we all know his chosen Luna cannot bear children. Now some vindictive she-wolf has informed him he has a daughter of his own blood. He's rampaging around his pack and telling all that will listen he is going to get his daughter and mate her to his Beta, who he'll make Alpha, so when a male pup arrives, his blood will lead the pack."

The silence at the end of the phone has me getting itchy. Is he going to want to cause a problem?

"I cannot abide Soren. He is a nasty piece and if I could have had his pack taken off him, I would have. But up to now, all we

hear is hearsay. Not one pack member will stand against him. He will want to get Hope. There is no doubt about that. Tell Alpha Connell to guard his Luna well because if Soren gets his hands on her we'll have trouble getting her back." Ward is growling under his breath, and I know it's his wolf's agitation that is causing it. "I'll look into this quietly Flint. Leave it with me for a few days. I have someone inside the Wolfsong Pack, and I may find out all that is happening. The least we can find out is if they leave the pack territory."

"If they leave, let me know quickly and I'll have our council warriors meet them at our area's border. It's the first form of defense for our area and the council will have every right to stop them. You can guarantee they won't have permission from my council to pass into our area," snarling slightly as my wolf, Bruno is becoming agitated and somewhat ready for a good fight.

"Okay. I'm not speaking to my fellow councilmen until I have more information. I think we need to keep it quiet about Hope for now. The less people who know the better for the moment. If Alpha Soren makes any form of threat or move, I will call an emergency council meeting, where we can implement our council warriors to stand next to yours."

"Thank you, Ward. If anything happens, I will update you. It'll be best we keep each other fully informed."

"I agree. Now, changing the subject, have you heard that the rogues in no-man's-land have been gaining supporters, or followers, if that's a better way of calling them?"

"Spirit Walker Pack has been under attack more of late. With more in the attacking parties, too. But we do not know where all these rogues are coming from."

"Oh, they are shifters thrown out of packs for being bad pack members. I've positive information that the other kingdoms have thrown wolf shifters out of their kingdoms for being feral or causing problems. That's where they are all coming from, bad shifters who are drawn to each other." I can hear in his

tone that Ward is sickened as much as I am about the rogue situation.

“I’ve heard that they have a leader now.” I was hesitant to say it, but feel I have to warn him. The portion of no-man’s-land borders his area, so as a council member of his area, he needs to know the threat is even more real than it used to be.

“I didn’t know that. But it is not surprising, because rogues do not normally pull together like a pack, yet these now do that. We are seeing concentrated attacks, and so are you, by the sound of it.”

I sigh, “Yes, we are seeing concentrated attacks, too. Again, keep me informed if you find out anything new and I will do the same.”

My second call is to Alpha Connell as I need to update him on the Alpha Soren issue and I want to follow up on how well the new members are getting along.

“Alpha Connell speaking,” I hear quickly as he picks up on the second ring.

“Hello, Alpha Connell. This is councilman Flint calling. I want to update you on the Wolfsong Pack issue.” The next few minutes I inform him that the Northern Area contact I have is going to make discreet enquiries about what is happening in Soren’s pack. I can hear his relief that someone is taking this seriously, and it’s not coming back with ill intent. Once we have covered the little I can tell him, Alpha Connell thanks me as I would expect.

“Now, tell me how the new members are coming along? I think there are more in the Northern Parklands we can recover if they are settling well to pack life with you.”

“The new members are settling well, actually. They are slowly finding what or where they want to be. We have some that will make fine warriors, others are in the garden with Silas, we have also been able to build a team of workers to build the new cabins we spoke of. I think we have three females and seven males still to find a position within the pack that suits

them. But on the whole, I've done well, gaining a second Beta, a Delta and a Gamma. Who would have thought my high pack members would be built mainly from the rogues I brought into the pack?" Alpha Connell states, with more than a little awe in his tone.

"You still have your inner circle of William, Bladrick and Noah, who are warriors too, of course. You have a good amount of strength at the top of the pack order. Your lower pack members will feel much safer and the security of the pack is being ensured."

"I'm sure they do, and the pack feels at peace. I don't think I've felt this in my life if I'm being honest. There was always a bad feeling weaving through the pack."

"You are an excellent Alpha to your pack; I'm just waiting for you to have pups, so you have an heir. Now, that will cause a celebration for the pack members." I chuckle as I hear Alpha Connell choke on his own laughter. "Let's hope that Hope agrees with that," I add as an afterthought.

"I'm going to introduce monthly pack runs, where we can all wolf out and enjoy being pack in our animal form. I'm going to throw it open to the members and see if I have enough interest."

"No, tell them, don't ask them. This is how excellent ideas get thrown by the wayside, and usually because one member doesn't want to be bothered. Tell them this is what's going to happen, and make it happen. It will work out well for you in the end."

By the end of the day, I've spoken to Alpha Lyle regarding the information I have been told, and given him assurances that the council warriors will be implemented if he has more issues. He has some of our warriors, but I'll not see him struggling to keep his pack safe if we, as council, can give him extra help.

Looking up when someone opens the office door, and walks inside without knocking, I frown when Ulmer throws himself

down in one of the armchairs. “Are you okay?” I ask, because he looks well and truly troubled.

“No, I am not okay. I’ve been at the Blood Pearl Pack since the early hours of this morning. That Alpha is a pain in my ass, and she’s hiding something,” Ulmer snarls.

“What happened?”

“Nothing happened, and that is the problem. She has her pack so tight-lipped they hardly said good morning. I tried speaking to a few of them, and they gave me a quick nod of the head and scuttled away. Something is terribly wrong within that pack, and Alpha Aurora was all smiles, and I mean tight smiles like she was forcing them onto her face.”

“Good grief, she is usually very welcoming.” I’m now leaning on my desk, giving Ulmer every piece of my attention.

“Oh, she was welcoming alright, but it was so false it had my teeth on edge. But I’m going to surprise her and go back without being announced and see if I can find out what she is hiding.” Ulmer looks at the cabinet where he knows I keep my best liquor and helps himself to a large glass, swallowing it in one. I feel my eyebrows raise into my hairline because *this* is something I’ve never seen before, in all the years I’ve known Ulmer.

“Do you need me to do anything?” I ask, because if I can give him support, then I will do so.

“No, I’ll keep reporting back and at the next full meeting, I expect to have some information to impart.” Ulmer fills his glass once more, but takes a small sip, much to my relief because I don’t want him drunk as a skunk in my office.

Chapter 25



CONNELL

Stepping into my office, I take a quick breath in and out, then a longer, slower one, preparing myself for the day ahead. I grin to myself when I think of the wake up I had this morning, and the way Hope had a blush on her cheeks when she woke me kissing my neck and chest. Of course, one thing led to another, and we had the bed rattling against the wall in no time at all.

The shower was a surprise, as I never expected Hope to join me, and when she soaped my body, lingering on my ever-eager cock, I spun her around and pinned her to the shower wall, and my hands soaped her down, and yeah, I lingered on her breasts...

“Alpha Connell, are you listening?” The sound of a voice brings me back from my mind wandering. Well, replaying the scenes in my mind.

Looking up, I frown at Beta Caleb, who is standing in front of my desk with a smirk on his face. “What do you want this early in the morning?”

“I have everything under control pack-wise and wonder if you have anything else you need me to do. Beta Walim is making sure the new pack members are allocated jobs they like doing. It is only two females and seven males for now, but he said we may get a few more wandering in from the Northern Parklands once they realize the ones who have joined the pack don’t go back.”

“I know there are a lot wandering the Parklands, but some like the fact they are rogues, or have had such terrible

treatment they won't ever trust packs, or an alpha, ever again." I lean back in my seat and give Caleb my full attention.

"I want you to be sure that Silas has enough staff to run the garden now. He's worked so hard along with Chester, Dahlia, and Antica. Hope is excited about the kitchen herb and medicinal gardens. As a healer we are very lucky to have her, and being our Luna, too. But Caleb, she is a shit fighter." I chuckle when I remember her hitting her ass yesterday during the training session.

Caleb laughs, "It's just a good job we have plenty of warriors now. But I think we need to consider the safe room you mentioned. The basement hasn't been used in years and I can imagine it's in a heck of a state. But it's an ideal place to build the safe room, and it could have an emergency tunnel in case the packhouse comes down on top of it."

"Yeah, we need to give it some thought. The warrior council may have some good ideas. Arrange a meeting for Monday morning and we'll hash out ideas."

"Now, I need to get busy. Go arrange that, then bring us drinks back with you. I have a call to make."

I watch Caleb rush away, and smirk to myself, because he is proving to me how honest he is, and how he takes his role as Beta seriously. Once the funny one of our group but now the serious one who everybody trusts and leans on.

Tapping my fingers on my desk while I wait for Alpha Lyle to pick up my call, my mind wanders to the information Flint provided. I hope he's contacted Lyle, but if not, then I'm going to fill him in on everything I was told.

"Good morning," the tone is groggy, and not like Lyle at all.

"Morning, it's Alpha Connell speaking. Are you okay?"

"Yes, fine, but tired. We had another attack during the night, and we have only just arrived back at the packhouse. I need to get some sleep."

“Do you need anything? Whatever I can do, know that I will.” I lean forward in my seat, leaning an elbow on the desk.

“Nothing you can do at this time. We have it under control for now. The shifter council has supplied the pack with more council warriors and it’s giving my males some time to recuperate. Alpha Chet has sent me a dozen warriors since we were at the council meeting, too. At the moment there is no need to worry, but Connell, watch your eastern border. They are getting stronger, and I’m not sure if they are really attacking or just testing our defenses.”

The discussion leads to the information Flint told me, what may happen, and my guarantee that, if I’m needed, I’ll be with him as fast as I can, with every warrior I can spare. I also updated him on the fact we had a traitor in the pack, and if he has a female named Zoella request to join his pack to not entertain her.

“There is something going on at the Blood Pearl Pack. My Northern Border warriors are saying the warriors across the border are not interacting as they usually would. They are staying back from the border and not even acknowledging them if they wave a welcome. That is not how that pack’s warriors would normally act. We have had great interactions with them, even when the borderline is between us. We’ve thrown fruit to them, and drinks when it’s been extremely hot. They have done the same for us. Now, all of a sudden, they are shunning any kind of contact.

“Something is seriously wrong, and I hope the shifter council can get on top of it.” Lyle sounds more than a little annoyed about the situation with Aurora’s pack but, as usual, unless something detrimental happens, there is nothing that can be done.

We discuss Hope and her father. Lyle is going to look at the books he has on the packs to see if he can find anything that may help if we end up at war with the Wolfsong Pack.

We end the call knowing that we have an alliance that can stand the test of time. It is about being honorable, and

knowing we will step forward if needed is a relief that I think most alphas must feel when they want to protect their pack.

Caleb arrives back with a mug of mint tea. I give him a look of 'what the heck are you doing?' when he grins. "Luna Hope said to bring you this drink. Now, let me tell you what she said..." while grinning like a fool, he ticks off his fingers, "Mint tea eases the digestive system, relieves tension headaches, gives more energy, and relieves clogged sinuses."

"There is nothing wrong with my sinuses, and I'm only getting a tension headache because you are in my office going on and on about things I don't need to know. Now, either leave the office or sit down and be quiet."

I send a text message to Flint while internally grinning.

Connell: Is it allowed for my Beta to do the accounts?

Flint: You can allow anyone to do them as long as you trust them. But usually, the Luna would help you with that, or you'd do them.

Connell: I am so short on time that I was thinking of putting the accounting responsibility into someone else's hands for a while. Until I get turned around with everything.

Flint: If you fully trust the person, then I don't see why not.

Connell: Eventually I can do them once more, or maybe Hope would want to do them. But, okay, thank you for your input.

Flint: Any time. Oh, I'm going to pop back over some time to check out your new members. But I'm doing visits with other packs first.

Connell: You are welcome anytime, and you know that.

Flint: Thank you, Alpha Connell.

"Caleb, while you have nothing to do, you can learn how to do the accounts. Check all receipts are entered and make sure they are on the statements. You'll see how to do it and don't keep asking me questions. Work it out yourself."

I pass the accounts and all the receipts, bank statements and my notes on what is needed to be purchased to him when he walks over to my desk. I can see the nerves on his face, but I ignore it and hold back my inner laughter.

I know that Caleb is great with figures and when we were having our schooling, he came out as the top in math of our group at that time. Thinking of schools, I think I should build a new one sometime, because the fire devastated the previous school building and having to homeschool is not good.

Who wants to be stuck in a house all day being taught by someone's mother or father. Yeah, a school will be good, and especially if we get mated pairs and pups springing up in the pack.

Hope walks into the office, gives me a huge smile, and looks at the mug sitting on my desk. I pick it up and swallow down the tea fast because I don't want to be in trouble for not drinking it. I've seen she-wolves react badly to things like that and I'm not stupid enough to cause myself a problem I don't need.

"Thank you for the tea. It was lovely."

Out of the corner of my eye I can see Caleb covering his mouth, so Hope doesn't see him laughing. I'm going to kill him if he causes me a damn problem.

Kissing me on the cheek, I take the opportunity and pull her onto my lap, where she looks at me questioningly.

"What?" I ask.

"In the front of the packhouse there is a circle of earth, and it looks like something was there, but it's been removed. What was it?" Hope asks and all the fun I was feeling dissolves. Now, do I tell her the truth, or do I lie?

If I want my mate to fully trust me, I can't lie to her, but I don't want her upset, either. I can see her starting to get nervous because of the time I'm taking to reply.

“It was a whipping post. My father, the late alpha, had it placed, and he was the evilest of any you could meet. He was feral, and in the end, we had to finish him. But I ripped that post out fast once I became Alpha, and it will never be replaced. I will see none of my pack whipped again, ever.” I make sure with the tone of my voice she knows what I am saying is true, and I will stand by my words, until the day I take my last breath.

Hope says nothing for quite a while. I remain quiet and so does Caleb. He has dropped his head in shame, the same as I have. We could not help at that time and would have found ourselves tied to the post if we tried to intervene. It doesn't stop us from feeling the shame of what happened.

Running her finger down my cheek, I hadn't realized a tear leaked from my eye. But Hope catches it and looks at it balanced on her fingertip before she turns to me and smiles. “That's okay. We'll plant a bush of something bright, something that will diminish the evil that occurred there. I'll sort it out, you forget it. We move on.” Kissing my cheek, Hope hops off my lap and hums as she leaves the office.

Looking at Caleb, he gives me a shrug before looking back at the account book and continuing as though that conversation never happened.

Walking over to the bookcase, I find the oldest one that covers the history of the packs around our area. I flick through until I find the Wolfsong Pack. Retaking my seat, I read every word that is written regarding the pack, but nothing is helpful for the impending war we are more than likely going to end up having with them. I'm going to have to wait until Flint gets back to me with any new information.

Walking over to the safe, I take out the journal, open the page, and, taking a deep breath, start to write.

Entry, Alpha Connell Torrance.

The new pack members total thirty-nine and have settled in far faster than I expected. Quickly deciding

what part of the pack they wanted to work in. Gardening, building, fighting and even some housekeeping. It's heartwarming to see these males and females smiling freely, and hearing laughter as you walk around the pack is something I'm not sure I've ever heard.

I found my mate. Hope. She is the light of my life and I thank the Goddess for her. She is sweet, kind, caring and everyone gravitates to support and protect her. Hope is, however, the worst fighter I've ever met, but she is a healer, so I suppose it is the opposite side of the coin for her.

I cannot wait to get Hope in pup. I've always wanted a large family and pups running around here squealing in delight is something I'm more than happy to aim for.

Hope has a history that is coming back to bite. Her mother was rejected by Alpha Soren Wolfgang at his father's direction. Soren took a chosen mate for political reasons. This turned out to be a bad move as his Luna, Luna Corinthia, is barren and she knew this before she mated. Withholding this vital information and causing Soren to be heirless. Hope's mother, Rose, had one night with Soren before he rejected her, and this resulted in Hope. But Rose ran from the Wolfsong pack, taking up hiding in the Northern Parklands, raising her daughter by herself.

Unfortunately, Soren Wolfgang has been informed of his daughter's existence, and this could cause our packs to go to war. We have been warned that Soren wants Hope for his Beta, so he can have blood as his heir. But it's not going to happen because I'll kill anyone that tries to take her.

Building work is happening on the pack lands. Cabins for any mated pairs we may have, and with the mating ball which I hope finds more mates for the pack, they will have a choice of a pack room or a cabin.

Merry's cabin and Dorridge Lodge are being updated and will be used for the patrol warriors. Giving them somewhere to rest and shelter if needed. Delta Gamzin will monitor the buildings and if all works as we would like, the buildings will be beneficial rather than a hindrance.

Signed—Alpha Connell Torrance

The door flies open and Beta Walim, Delta Gamzin, and Chief Oscar all rush into the office. Laying boxes on my desk, right after I snatch the journal out of the way. I quickly lock it in the safe before turning and asking what the heck is going on.

“Oh, we have the goggles,” Walim laughs, and he has a pair on his face already.

“How many did you purchase?” I ask.

“Ten pairs. We may need more, but we don't want to get caught out. We're going to hang them in trees in certain areas around the border. Then the patrol warriors can climb into the trees, use the goggles, and see if we have any enemies approaching,” Gamzin states, and the eagerness on his face has me rubbing my mouth to stop my smile from showing.

“We need to be sure the northern and the eastern territory borders are covered. From the north we could see the Wolfsong Pack march toward us, but in the east, we may spot rogues from no-man's-land,” Chief Oscar adds to the conversation. “You know they are night vision goggles too. Awesome if you ask me.”

I'm out of here. I've had enough. They are all acting like pups, playing war games. I know they are thinking right, but the goggles they are all sporting have them looking like a war movie is just starting.

Chapter 26



HOPE

“SILAS!” I shout as I near the garden, and I can’t help shouting out rather than being patient until I reach him, because I’m so excited about what I need help with.

“Is everything okay, Luna Hope?” Silas asks and I giggle, grab his hand and drag him behind me toward the side of the packhouse, and then around the front.

Pointing at the circle of earth, I can see from the set expression on Silas’ face he knows what used to be there. “Now, I know what was there once, but we are going to take that memory and make it go away. We...” pointing my finger between the two of us, “are going to plant flowers in a nice round flower bed. We can put bushes, shrubs, bulbs or whatever we like. We must make it bright and cheerful. It will need to look good with the sunflowers that we are going to grow too.”

Watching Silas mull over what I’ve said has him going from the frown and set expression to a light one in seconds, then a grin that forms. “Yes, that’s a great idea. Come with me and we’ll look at what we have already. I have spring bulbs in the potting shed that I was going to dot around the orchard, but we can use some here.”

Without thinking about what he’s doing in his excitement, Silas takes hold of my hand as we head back to the garden. When Baildon opens his mouth to say something I shake my head for him to say nothing, leave it alone. The sense of fun here is more than worth holding his hand.

I'm an herb specialist, not a flower one, although I know my way around some flowers. But Silas has a piece of paper with a plan of the border with flower names jotted all over it. I keep nodding that I agree, but half the time I'm not sure what I'm agreeing with.

Baildon is standing nearby, and keeps grinning as he realizes I'm not always able to follow what Silas is telling me, but I stick my tongue out at him when Silas isn't looking. Chester catches me and chuckles before returning to weeding one of the plots.

"Come on, Luna Hope, grab those gardening gloves and the hand spade and let's get to it." Silas grins, pushing a wheelbarrow I've watched him fill with things I've never heard of.

Two and a half hours later, my back is screaming and I'm covered in earth. Baildon is standing on one side, arms folded over his chest and looking bored out of his skull. Silas and I are thrilled that we've dug over the border, filled with fresh earth. Silas threw in some sort of earth feed, but I didn't ask, I just kept nodding that yes, okay, good idea.

"It'll be more than likely four weeks before the border looks anything like we planned. But come next spring when the bulbs flower and the berries are on the bushes, it'll look stunning."

"Thank you, Silas. I think it is going to look beautiful, and although it's not a mass of flowers at the moment, it looks better than the bare earth that was there before."

"I don't know why you wanted to put all that here." Baildon states, and I give him a dirty look before educating him what was here previously. The look on his face sets, and then he gives me a nod of understanding.

After Silas and I return the gardening equipment, I quickly make my way to shower and change, because next on my daily agenda is a meeting in my office with my mating ball committee. Which had Connell smirk when I told him I'd

formed one yesterday. He'd already seen who I'd asked to help me with the ball, so knows who the committee members are before I tell him.

Walking into the office, the females have the decorations sorted into piles, with bows in one place, banners in another, etcetera. "Any ideas what we should do?" I ask, because I have no clue.

Tiny, who has been with the pack since she was born, speaks out first. "The last ball, we had an archway at the main door, and it was decorated with bows, lace, and vines. It was okay, but it wasn't what you would call awesome. The stage area in the ballroom had balloons, bows, and banners. Now that looked nice as the banners were more like swags and they draped beautifully between the bows and balloons."

"I remember that," Floss says, "Everything was orange and looked gaudy, but you're right Tiny, the stage looked better than anything else."

"If we are using the ballroom, then I think we decorate the stage area where the band will be playing. Maybe we could have swags and nothing else, but alternate the color. I don't want an archway as they walk into the room. It's old-fashioned, don't you think?" I'm looking at each of them as I speak and can see just by their expressions they think so too.

"Luna Hope, we have always wanted to have a red carpet that walks you from the ballroom and into the last Luna's garden. It will need cleaning out as it's a mess now, but it was beautiful with a fountain in the center. It was romantic and I've seen a few mates use the garden to announce the female is in pup." Tiny looks rather sad when talking about the garden, but my ears have picked up and Swift has noticed, of course.

"Let's go look at this garden."

Swift steps out of the office, and we all walk out behind her, but in the end, Tiny takes the lead, as we don't really know where we are going. Much to Swift's disgust, I have to add.

Stepping into the garden, my heart jumps because you can see at one time it was a beautiful place. There are roses everywhere, different colors and varieties. But they are wild and need pruning.

A water feature in the middle of the garden is not working. It's a pair of lovers, wrapped around each other, and the water should flow from the vase that the female is holding. Two pups are rolling around the couple's feet and have their tongues hanging out, looking so sweet.

Turning, I look at Jen, who has said nothing as yet. "Run to the garden and fetch Silas. Tell him the Luna needs him immediately."

"Yes, Luna Hope." Jen runs out of the garden before she's hardly finished speaking.

Rubbing my hands together, I place them on my hips and my eyes dart from one place in the garden to another. I'm going to make this garden what it once was, even if I have to do it on my own. It is something that Connell will cherish. I'm positive.

Silas walks into the garden and walks directly to me. But as I open my mouth to speak, he takes the words out of my mouth. "We'll get this garden back to its former glory in no time. I'm going to speak to Chester and see if he can find any more workers to help us."

Turning when I hear, "You know you are not to sneak off without me." Isla giggles and I know it's Baildon.

"It's hardly sneaking off, Gamma Baildon, when I'm in the garden." I wink at Isla as I've turned my back and stepped around the fountain, giving it a closer look.

"We have some of the new pack members still not pegged down to a job. I'll speak to them and see if they'd be willing to help, even if it's only to get the garden put to rights," Baildon states, and Silas slaps his shoulder, thanking him at the same time.

We all watch Baildon walk out of the garden with purpose in his step. Isla giggles again and I grin at her because she's watching his ass until he disappears. "You've got it bad," I laugh, as a blush rushes up her cheeks, but she is smirking as she dips her head.

"Back to the office ladies, and let's get all the swags down to the ballroom." I lean over and speak to Silas. "Can I leave this to you for now and I'll check back with you in a short while?"

"Of course, Luna Hope."

Running back to the office, I get everyone organized, and it doesn't take long to have the boxes taken down to the ballroom and swags placed around the stage. Where Baildon appeared from I don't know, but he has two males with him, who he introduced as Bariston and Hagon. Both tell me they are hoping to be warriors for the pack, and they both chat with me as though we've known each other for years.

Once the stage is completed, I think the black and white swags look stunning, and nothing more is needed, after all we don't want it looking too much.

I've given Connell the date which is a month from now. That gives us more than enough time to get the ballroom, the front of the packhouse, and now the Luna Garden ready.

I'm very excited and the females are all working hard to have the ballroom look stunning. They even place bows and balloons above the windows.

Nessie excuses herself as she has to make sure the meal is ready for this evening. I excuse everyone, as they all have their daily duties to complete. I stand next to Baildon and study what we've done so far.

"Looking good Luna," Baildon says and gives me a grin at his Luna comment.

"Yeah, it's looking fine, Gamma," I respond, which has him chuckle at my cheekiness.

“Nikko is working in the garden with Silas and Ruston for now. They are all finding somewhere to fit in, and you know, I never thought we’d find anywhere to feel like home. Because we both know that the Parklands was never home, it was surviving.”

Leaning my head on his shoulder, I sigh. “Yeah, it was surviving. But now we are home, and nothing is going to take me from here. If my asshole of a father comes for me, I’ll do everything I can to stay here. I would, and will, never leave my mate. Not willingly. Only death will separate us, and that is because the Goddess has called us home.”

“I feel the same. Finding Isla is something I never thought would happen. I honestly thought I’d never find my mate and never be able to settle. But all I can think about now is making her happy and maybe having a few pups.”

Bursting out laughing because every male thinks about pups, and if they had to have them, they might not be so eager. I pat his forearm and walk to Connell’s office, where he’s working alongside Caleb and Walim.

“It’s time to stop working. Come on Connell, let’s go for a walk before we change our clothes, and before the meal is called.”

Sighing, Connell looks at me, back at his desk, then makes his mind up to come with me. The mumbled ‘*Whipped,*’ isn’t missed. Nobody comments on it, but all look amused by it.

As we are walking out of the main doors of the packhouse, I turn my head to look up at Connell. He leans down and kisses my forehead. “Don’t forget the mating ball will be in one month. I’ll have everything organized and perfect before then.”

“I know you will. You’re going to be a great Luna, and I’ve no worries about that at all.” Stepping nearer to where the whipping post used to be, Connell stops and studies what we have done. “That is amazing, and it’s a beautiful thing to see. How my father could be so evil, I don’t know.”

“Connell, you are nothing like him. When you are under alpha commands, there is nothing you can do but obey. That is not your shame, that is his. Now, come on, I want to show you what we have done so far in the ballroom.”

The next hour I show Connell what we've been doing. I'm pleased the large doors to the garden are now closed, as I want to surprise him with the garden once it's finished.

After getting cleaned up, we walk down to the dining room and take our seats. The room is quite noisy but we don't care about that. It shows they are not worried about the alpha and luna being amongst them. We, on the other hand, love to watch the antics they all get up to without knowing we are amused by it.

“I think we need to rebuild the school. We had one which burned to the ground and with so few pups we have not bothered about rebuilding. I don't think, however, it is great to have the pups homeschooled. They need to get out from under their parents' gaze. What do you think?” Connell surprises me with his question.

“I think if we have pups I'd want them to go to school. To mix and play with the other pups. Learning away from the home and, as you say, not having parents looking over their shoulder, has to be far better. Yes, let's consider rebuilding the school, but not have it too far from the packhouse in case of trouble. They need to be able to get to us quickly, or they need a safe place, they can be hidden if there is a threat.” I give a smile of thanks when Nessie places a plate in front of me, then look at Connell again. “Do we have any teachers?”

“Theda was a teacher, although she is older now. I'm sure she'd be more than happy to step back into that role. She always loved the pups and would do many things with them. I also heard that one named Berrick in the group that is still trying to fit in was a teacher in another pack, before something happened and he was banned from the pack,” Connell snarls when he says the last.

“Speak to them both, then tell me what they want to do. If they are happy to teach again, then I vote we do it. If we have new mate pairs, it won’t be long before pups follow.” I see Connell’s eyes change to Knight’s, and giggle when Briar responds, giving a small growl to him.

The meal is over quickly and when Connell stands, banging his fist on the table to get everyone’s attention, I wait for whatever he is going to announce.

“Pack, as from tomorrow we are having our first monthly pack run. Everyone who is not on patrol will attend unless there is a valid reason not to run. No excuses. I want all of you to run with me and your Luna. Let’s make this a pack tradition.”

Connell is looking from one pack member to another, and the biggest majority are nodding with huge smiles on their faces. I can’t wait. Briar is eager to run with Knight and look at her pack in their wolf form.

Chapter 27



CONNELL

The weekend is rushing by and I'm excited about the pack run, which we are holding today, for the first time. I've heard a few pack members talking animatedly about it, and some grumbled until they saw me giving them a stern look. I had to smirk when I moved away and my back was to them.

Hope is bustling around with Baildon, with at least two of her committee following along. I'm sure she's not been alone for a moment over the weekend so far.

"CONNELL?"

Think of Hope and she appears, much to my pleasure. I hold my arms out and she walks into them, wrapping her arms around my waist. I love this female so much, and I hope I can always be the male she looks up to and loves in return.

"What's going on?" I ask.

"I wanted you to know I'm going to take a peek at what they have done with the Luna House so far. Then I'll be back for the pack run. But are we meeting out the front of the packhouse?"

"Yes, if you don't get to my office in time, that's where we are all meeting. Don't get in the way at the house, they are ripping everything out and putting in new. The kitchen and bathroom are being replaced, as are the windows and doors. I told them if we are renovating, then we'll do it professionally so the pack member that gets it will be comfortable." I kiss the top of her head as she moves from my arms, but she turns back and on her tiptoes kisses my cheek. Well, she would have if I'd not turned my head and caught her lips.

Baildon is standing with his back to us, giving us the privacy that our moment requires. I don't give a damn who sees me kissing my mate, but I know Hope is shy and would rather I not put our affection on display too much.

Turning to walk to my office, I mind link with Beta Walim. *'Luna Hope is heading for the Luna House. Make sure it's a pleasant experience, and come right back here when done.'* I'm sure that will have him rushing from whatever he's doing to be there when she arrives.

Looking up, I spot Suella cleaning the front door. Walking over, I make her jump when I speak to her. "Good day, Suella. How are you settling in?"

Standing and keeping her eyes near my chest, instead of looking into my eyes, which could easily be taken for a challenge, she replies.

"I'm good. Thank you, Alpha Connell."

"Are you doing well with your work?"

"Yes, Nessie has given me more responsibility and I'm now working on my own instead of being paired with another female." Suella sounds proud of that, and it warms me, knowing she is settling into the pack and feeling a sense of achievement.

"I'm thrilled to hear that. You are a better person than your mother taught you to be, Suella. Remember, you are valued here and your contribution to the pack is welcomed." I give her a small smile as she flushes a little, and I turn, walking away, feeling that I have done a good thing by speaking to her.

I check the kitchen, dining room and Hope's office, making sure everything is as it should be. When I reach my office Walim is waiting, standing beside my desk. "Anything wrong, Beta Walim?" I ask, and I know he enjoys being called Beta as his chest always expands when he hears it.

"I was thinking about the issue with Alpha Soren Wolfgang. Do you think we should send someone into his area as a spy?"

Taking my seat behind the desk, I stare at Walim, considering if that would be a good idea or not. “From what I’ve been told, this alpha is a nasty piece of work, and he isn’t always good to his pack. If he caught a spy in his pack, I think he would murder them without a second thought. No, I have Flint looking into it and I think we’ll sit tight and wait until he gets back with any information. Good idea, but not with this pack.”

“Okay, I have been thinking of options to keep Luna Hope safe.”

“I think we all have, but let’s just keep our eyes on her all the time, and meet any enemy head on, if it comes to fruition.”

“Gamma Baildon is sticking to her, much to her disgust, Alpha. They are so sibling-like that they argue all the time. It’s fairly amusing, I have to admit.”

“She tells me all about it, and the fact she does it on purpose just to get his blood boiling,” I chuckle, knowing she is in excellent hands with her chosen brother. “Right, is Delta Gamzin coming soon? I want to know what security he has in place for the pack run.”

“I’m here Alpha Connell. I have been checking the hiding places for the goggles and we have a larger area covered vision-wise. The patrol warriors will be in those areas tonight, making sure our borders are safe, and you can all run freely without issue,” Gamzin states, and takes a stand next to Walim.

I’m lucky that I have been given these males by the Goddess. I’m sure she had a plan for them to be here. They have slipped into their positions as though they were made for them, and it’s taken no effort for the pack to welcome them and not feel intimidated by them.

“Chief Oscar is looking at my patrol plan and the positions I want for the warriors. I’ll check with him when I leave here, but I can see no reason he’d want to make changes. Do you have a marker I can use?”

I hand Gamzin a red marker, and he steps over to the map. I quickly walk over and watch him mark areas with a red dot.

“These are where the goggles are being placed. Two patrol warriors will be in these areas. The north and east are our priorities, the west and south we have no reason to believe are a threat. But we have placed goggles in two areas on both borders. The patrol warriors are going to stay in those areas for a while, watching for any sign of movement.”

“Tomorrow morning, I want you to be in the meeting with the Warrior Council. I called the meeting to discuss having a safe room, but I’d like to cover the border safety too.”

“Yes, I’ll be there for the meeting,” Gamzin states, and after a few minutes of discussing the positions on the map, he makes his way out of the office.

Beta Walim takes a seat in front of the desk and I ignore him as I check the journal I took out of the safe earlier. Looking for any comments about the Northern Sector that could be of help when facing Alpha Soren Wolfgang. After two hours I’ve gone through nearly every page in the journal, but so far have found nothing of worth. My head is aching a little and looking up, Walim has fallen asleep with his chin on his chest, and I can’t help but grin because he’s going to have one hell of a stiff neck.

Looking at the journal, then at Walim, I can’t resist. I slam the journal closed, which has Walim jump to his feet in a defensive stance. “What...what...?” he stutters, and I throw my head back, laughing. I hear Walim mumbling under his breath, which has me laughing even harder. Standing, I take the journal back to the safe and lock it inside.

Beta Caleb knocks on the door, gaining our attention. “It’s time, Alpha Connell, for the pack run. Luna Hope is waiting at the front of the packhouse, and is getting agitated that you are not there yet.” He gives me a grin with a twinkle in his eye, which I know is damn amusement.

Rushing from the office to the front door, I calm myself before walking out and placing an arm around Hope's waist. I kiss the top of her head and whisper, "Sorry I'm late, sweetheart."

Come on, let's run.

I hear Briar speak to me through the link and grin at Hope, whose eyes are now Briar's. 'Hang on a minute, Briar.'

"Pack, from this day we will, each month, hold a pack run. We used to do this in the old days, but the tradition has been lost over time. Some of the traditions, such as the pack run were started by the Winterstorms, and we honor their name by doing these runs now.

"Everyone that is running today, SHIFT!"

The shift by some is fast and simple, but I grin when I see a few shred their clothing, forgetting to use their minds. I shift and stand tall and strong as my wolf Knight, and I look to my right where Briar is standing next to me.

Sending out a mind link to the pack, I state, *Let's run, stay close, and if you see or hear anything strange, you link me or the nearest warrior.*

Running with Briar at my side, I'm fully aware of the pack behind us. I can hear yipping and soft growling, and the feeling of contentment from the pack running through my veins.

Everyone is happy, Briar says. I push her with my shoulder, which has her giving me a soft growl.

Yes, the pack is happy, and we will make sure they stay happy.

Chase me! Briar races away before I can reply, and you can guess we chase her. We run through the forest, jump fallen tree trunks, dodge trees, and jump over the small stream that appears in front of us.

Turn back, Briar. I state that as a command because seeing the stream has me realizing we've come further from the packhouse than I intended, and nearer to the border of the territory.

Back at the packhouse, we shift back into our human form, and watch all the wolves arrive and shift, too. Turning, I look at Beta Caleb. “Keep count that everyone has returned. I want no one going missing.”

“Two are missing,” Caleb states, and I can see he’s frowning in concern.

Shifting once more. *Ahwoooo...* I howl, demanding they reply and return.

Hearing ‘*Ahwoo...*’ returned, and then two males come crashing through to the lawn has me looking at Caleb and I shift again.

“Reprimand them mildly. Maybe give them to Silas for a few days,” I grin. “They need to learn when I say they run together they stay alert and not wander away. I can see they are late teenagers, so they are old enough to know better.”

Caleb nods, “Will do, Alpha Connell.”

Turning to Hope, who is smiling at Swift, I place my arm around her shoulders and pull her against my side. Looking up at me, Hope whispers, “Swift is giving Noah lessons on defensive techniques. I’m not sure he’s doing too well.”

Looking closely, I can see Noah has a slight limp and is favoring one side. I look at Swift and she winks at me before wrapping her arm around Noah’s waist as they walk away.

Monday morning came around way too fast, and I take my seat in the office, in the warrior training building. Gabriel and Thomas made good use of this building when they were my warrior council, and I intend for that to continue.

“Okay, I want to discuss something with you all. I want to have a safe room built in the basement of the packhouse. As you all know, the basement hasn’t been used in years, and, at the moment, I’ve no idea what is even down there, but we have members finding their mate, and that means pups in the future. We need to have somewhere, in case of a conflict, we can hide the females that are pregnant, nursing, or young

mothers. We also need to hide the pups, as they will be the future of the pack.”

Chief Oscar, Delta Gamzin, Declan, Rune, Armon, Weldon, Hallec, Iona and Sterling are all discussing what I’ve said and how it could be viable. I lean back in my chair and listen to all the comments, questions, and concerns.

This is how it should be I’m thinking to myself. The pack should want to protect each other, and the warriors of the pack more than any other.

In the end it’s decided that the safe room is more important than the cabins, because everyone has a room to sleep in, and the packhouse is providing all food and essential services such as bathrooms, laundry and room cleaning.

“Okay, I’ll speak to Gaul, who is taking on the responsibility of organizing all the work that we need to get done.” I want to stay involved but not make anyone feel that I’m looking over their shoulder.

“Who do we have as builders?” Declan asks.

“Some of the new pack members have stepped up, and with ones we have from the older pack members we have Gaul as I’ve said, then Berrit, Graham, Lonnie, Ronnet, Stein, Yarrow, Ruston and Mortas.” I reel off the names, and I’m impressed with my own memory.

“That’s good. I didn’t realize we had so many, but work should get done far faster than I’d expected,” Chief Oscar states.

“Once we have everything built, we’ll have a good crew of workers to maintain the property, and we could put them out to help other packs, for a price, of course,” I add, with a grin. “I would only expect a small percent from what that would earn, so they’d all get a nice payout if they worked for other packs.”

“That would only work if they haven’t found their mates, because no male would want to leave his mate while he went working at another pack,” Hallec says, and his mate, Iona, gives him a warm smile.

“Now, I want you to let me have your ideas of what the safe room should be like, and an escape tunnel, in case the packhouse ever came down on top of it.”

The room goes deathly silent before everyone bursts into frantic discussion. I slink out of the office, leaving them to it, while I go back to my office.

Taking the journal out of the safe, I settle behind my desk, pick up a pen, and open the journal.

Entry, Alpha Connell Torrance.

Today is Monday and just last evening we had our first pack run. It was a tremendous success and the feel of the pack strengthened in my veins.

We will hold the pack runs on a monthly basis and I hope it will bring the pack together. The new members have fit in easily, and no one has had an issue with them. They have smoothly taken roles in the pack, and I'm more than happy with my decision to give them the opportunity to become pack members.

At this time, I count the pack run as successful.

With the issue of Alpha Soren Wolfgang, it has been decided to tighten all security measures. We have created 'hides' in the trees where warriors have goggles to view further from our borders, and as the goggles have night vision, we hope not to be taken by surprise at any time.

Construction will start soon to build a safe room. Somewhere we can ensure the safety of pregnant females, young mothers and pups. We have to make sure the pack's future would survive if we have an enemy invasion.

So far, I am still awaiting information regarding Alpha Soren Wolfgang. I have allies in all except Alpha Aurora Pearl. She has not responded to my calls, texts or emails. Something is wrong with the Blood Pearl Pack, but

thankfully it is not my problem, and I'm happy to leave that with the Shifter Council.

Mating ball is arranged for a month's time, and Luna Hope has everyone and everything organized. I'm impressed with how fast she has taken to her role. I just wish we could make her a better fighter, but she is just not coordinated enough to know her right from her left when it comes to fighting.

Dorridge Lodge and Merry's cabin should be finished this week. Gaul tells me they were both an easy fix and the patrol warriors will be able to find respite in either if, or when, needed. Delta Gamzin has both the properties on his patrol checklist, and I know he'll keep a close eye on them.

Signed - Alpha Connell Torrence

The door opens and Hope walks into the office, gives me a smile as she walks over to me, climbing onto my lap and kissing me gently.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"Nothing. I just wanted you to know I love you, and I was thinking about you." Hope flushes slightly, and I love that she has the ability to still be so innocent.

"Oh, I love you too, and I'll show you how much."

Standing, I lift Hope and smirk. "Pick up the journal, please," walking to the safe, "place it in there and close the door."

As soon as the door of the safe is locked I sprint out of the office, up the stairs and into our apartment where I make my way to the bedroom.

Yeah, I am going to show her how much I love her, and the giggles she's been giving have me as hard as iron. Knight joins in the fun and growls, getting a response from Briar, who damn near purrs in reply.

Oh yes, it's a good afternoon.

Chapter 28



HOPE

Connell had filled me in on his talk with Suella and I'm happy she has settled in with the pack. I never liked what she was doing in the Parklands, but I was even more against having a pack slut.

The mate bond is precious. It's a gift from the Goddess, and I never want to see it abused. Some of that is because of my mother and the treatment she had from my father. It is a deserved punishment that his chosen mate cannot give him an heir. The Goddess works in mysterious ways.

Walking out of the kitchen, I thank Nessie and the other females for the drink I had with them, then walk out of the packhouse, take a deep breath of air and smile when I look at the flower border in front of me. When it is in full bloom, it is going to be breathtaking.

Turning to walk to the training ground, I see Suella walking toward the packhouse, so I wait for her to reach where I'm standing.

"Morning, Suella. How are you coping with the change from the Parklands to the pack?" I ask.

"Good morning, Luna Hope. I like it here, and I'm enjoying working with the other females. I've made friends now and I feel part of the pack because of it."

Suella is blushing, and I know it is because of her past and knowing what she had been doing wasn't right, and I mean for herself, for her own pride and value.

I step forward and give her a hug. “We all had to do things we didn’t want to do, but your mother wasn’t right doing what she did with you. You were her daughter, and she should have valued you far more than she did. Now, where have you been?”

“I’ve been helping at the Luna House. I’ve been wet mopping floors, sweeping debris from where they have been working. Just being helpful when I have free time.”

“Suella, you don’t have to work all hours. You already are working with the housekeeping females.”

“I know, but I get bored, so I don’t mind helping when I can.”

“I don’t suppose you sew? Can you darn, mend clothing or make new?” I ask because one of the females had moaned about having to go to Wolfsfoot all the time for minor repairs or new clothing.

“Oh, Morwenna, or Wenna, as she likes to be called, is a dressmaker. She was on the edge of the Parklands, if you remember. She left her pack when she felt there was nothing for her to do there, as they already had a dressmaker. She was fed up with being ordered around by the Luna and the head housekeeper, so renounced her pack and left.”

“Thank you. I’ll go find her and see if she is interested in doing dressmaking for our pack.” I give a huge smile to Suella as I rush back into the packhouse and run straight into a hard chest.

Looking up, Baildon is scowling down at me. “I told you not to go out of the packhouse without me, or someone else, being with you.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I was going to walk over to the training area and see if Swift or Chief Oscar wanted me to do any more training.”

Laughing loudly, before he looks down at me again, frowning. “No point you training, Hope. To be honest, you are hopeless. It would be best to run for the packhouse and stay out of the way.”

Although I know he's right, I have to admit it hurts a little that everyone thinks I'm so useless at protecting myself. Maybe I can train on my own by copying what I've seen?

Sniffing with disdain, I ask between my teeth, "Do you know where Wenna is?"

"Yes, she's been helping in the kitchen and housekeeping."

Walking into the kitchen, I ask Nessie where Wenna is, and she points at the pantry. I wait until Wenna walks out carrying an armful of items and places them on the counter.

"Wenna, could I speak to you for a moment?" I ask and give her a smile.

"Yes, of course, Luna Hope."

"Let's go to my office, shall we?"

I push a box to one side on my desk and perch on the edge.

"Take a seat, Wenna. Is it alright if I call you Wenna?"

"Yes, Luna Hope, I prefer Wenna to Morwenna, which is my name. But it makes me feel like a witch."

We both giggle at her thought and I can't help but reply, "Yeah, it probably would be a name an author would call a witch, but I like Wenna. It's original, and it suits you." I pause a moment, then continue, "I've been speaking with Suella and she told me you are a dressmaker, and Wenna, we need one for the pack. But, if you'd rather not, then that is fine too. I just wanted you to know if you were willing, we would be delighted for you to hold that position in the pack."

"Oh, I'd love to." Wenna jumps from her seat onto her feet and wraps her arms around me, hugging me tightly. We both laugh when she realizes, and lets go of me, stepping back quickly with the reddest face I think I've ever seen.

"Okay, come with me." I walk out of my office and into Connell's, taking him by surprise as he looks up from where he is working at his desk. Beta Caleb is also in the room, but I pay him little attention.

“Connell, I’ve found us a dressmaker. Now we have little room in the packhouse with all the extra pack members. Some of the rooms have more than one or two sharing, but I’m thinking how about we place Wenna in the Luna House, where she can use one of the bedrooms to store all her stock, you know bolts of material, etcetera? Then she will live in the house, and can work, as and when she needs, or wants.”

Connell rubs his thumb along his chin and jaw before nodding and smiling. “That’s a good idea. You’d be responsible for the house and the small garden. We’ll rename it the Dressmaker.”

“Yes!” I squeal and grab Wenna’s hand, turn and rush out of the office. I notice Baildon rolling his eyes at Connell, who chuckles but says nothing.

Walking into the Luna’s House it’s easy to see the work is nearly completed. The difference in the house is staggering. It is brighter and fresher. The walls are a cream color and windows have been replaced with sash windows and they are open, allowing a slight breeze to enter.

“Look around, Wenna, and if you like it, then this can be your home and workplace. You’d be your own boss, mind you, so you’d have to make sure you didn’t work too many hours. Limit yourself to days of the week and hours you want to put in. But remember, you’d have to look after the garden too. Oh, and any maintenance you’d need to speak to Gaul, and he’ll take it from that point.” I grin as I see Wenna blinking hard, and when I realize she is trying not to cry I take her hand. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

“Oh, I want to Luna Hope. I’m just a little overwhelmed. I always wanted to be a dressmaker for my pack, but when it was obvious that wasn’t going to happen, I left the pack. Then helped you all the best I could in the Parklands. This is a dream come true for me, and that’s why I feel overwhelmed.”

“I’m so happy that you are going to get the dream you wanted. But I know nothing about dressmaking. You need to speak to some of the pack members, find out what they need making, what you need to keep in stock.

“If you write a list of everything you need, I’ll speak to Beta Caleb, as he’ll know where we can purchase everything and have it delivered.” I give Wenna a hug before taking my leave. I need to get to the garden. I’ve got things to do.

“Come on, Baildon,” I say as I walk past where he’s been waiting next to the front door.

I see Gaul walking toward me, and I give him a huge smile. “The Luna House sign needs removing and a Dressmaker sign replacing it.”

“Okay, Luna Hope.” Gaul flicks his eyes to Baildon, but I don’t wait around. I rush past and head to the garden, where I see Silas and Chester digging a vegetable plot.

“SILAS!” I shout, and when he looks up and sees me, he grins. “What can I do for you today, Luna Hope?”

“I wanted to know if you can get me a shed, a large one where I can make all my lotions, soaps and candles. I have the equipment, as you know, but it’s cluttering up your potting and equipment shed. I’d like it all in one place, and I want to teach one of your gardeners to assist with it, too.” I give him my most innocent look, and Baildon chortles while slapping Silas on the shoulder.

“How large a shed do you want, Luna Hope? As large as the equipment shed?”

“No, larger. That size and half again.” I grin when I see how shocked he is at the size I’m requesting.

“Hm, I think I’ll speak to Gaul about it as he may think it’s more viable to build you a building which would be far more fireproof than a wooden shed.”

“Silas, I used to make all my lotions and soaps in a shack that was falling down, had wind blowing through it, and was where I lived too.”

“Luna Hope, we are not going to allow you to be in danger, and we certainly are not having you working in a shack,” Silas

turns and storms away and I look at Baildon with a shocked face.

“Well, you are Luna to the pack,” Baildon gives me his famous half grin, before taking my elbow and leading me back to the packhouse and Connell’s office, where he reports on my shed request.

I leave the office and leave Connell speaking with Baildon, Caleb, and now Gaul about a shed or building. I head to the kitchen. But before I even reach the kitchen, I’m grabbed by Swift and dragged out the front door of the packhouse and over to the training area.

Chief Oscar is frowning, and Swift is grinning. Swan and Iona have sparkling eyes, so I know they are holding back laughter.

“What’s going on?” I ask suspiciously.

Swift steps forward and slaps a long piece of wood in my hand. It resembles a bat of some kind. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

Iona laughs, stepping forward, stands behind me and places my hands on the bat, then guides my hands back and throws them forward in a slashing action, with the bat making a whooshing sound.

“That’s what you do with that Luna Hope. You hit anyone that threatens you with it. Now let’s get some practice in.” Leading me over to the forest, they have pinned circles to the tree trunks. Some high, and some low. Pointing at one of the circles, Iona grins. “Hit it, Luna Hope. Not too hard or you’ll hurt yourself, but you need to learn how to swing it and hit where you need to.”

This is fun, and I’m getting the hang of it, hitting the targets more now than when I started. But I’ve a few blisters starting to appear on the palms of my hands, so I decide to stop this practicing.

Hearing a bell clanging, I turn to see what’s happening and where that noise is coming from. I’m taken by surprise when Chief Oscar throws me over his shoulder and runs for the

packhouse. Swift, Iona and Swan stay slightly behind us and are looking all around.

I'm being bounced around like a rag doll, and my breath keeps getting whooshed out of me as my stomach hits Chief Oscar's shoulder. But I at least can see behind us and so far, nothing seems out of the ordinary.

Baildon has appeared and is running to the side of us but stops at the front door of the packhouse when we all rush inside and then enter Connell's office.

Chief Oscar places me carefully on my feet, and Connell walks over and hugs me. But he takes the bat out of my hand with raised eyebrows, shakes his head and must decide not to ask.

"That is a drill. If you hear that sound, you make your way to the packhouse immediately. You do not stop for anyone; do you understand Hope?" Connell asks with all seriousness.

"Yes, I understand."

"Every pack member will know what that sound is and where they have to be when they hear it. It's an early warning system in the event of an attack," Connell informs me, and I can see from the look on Chief Oscar's face he knew what this was all about.

"It seems things are about to happen, and you need to tell me what is going on?" I look at Connell and he gives me a nod, a kiss on the tip of my nose, and simply says, "Later."

Chapter 29



CONNELL

I'm taken by surprise when Flint arrives with two council members and a council warrior. Porter and Lykos are here on an official visit from the council, and Roul is here as security because of threats that have been thrown around, or so Flint tells me.

"Come, follow me to my office." I hold my arm out directing them to follow me, and as we walk through to my office I notice Caleb and Walim standing close by. "Beta Caleb can you arrange refreshments for our guests please?" I add his title to show respect in front of the councilmen.

Giving me a nod, he dashes toward the kitchen while Walim stays with me and our guests. Entering the office, they all find a seat apart from Roul, who takes a stance behind them and with his back to the wall. I look at Flint and shake my head.

"Roul, go get refreshments. Be at ease while we have our meeting. Are you staying or leaving again today?" I look from Roul to Flint and on his 'Staying,' I continue, "While you are in the kitchen, ask Nessie to prepare rooms for you all, but you'll have to stay in the warrior building, I'm afraid Roul."

"Off you go, Roul, rest. We are all safe here and we're going to be in this meeting for quite a while," Flint states, and we all watch as Roul leaves and Beta Walim takes his place against the wall.

Taking a seat myself, I wait for someone to start the meeting. Lykos is a father to Tatiana and I know he's held a grudge toward me and the pack, but as a council member now, he has to put that aside, and I'm thankful to say that he has.

Porter is always aloof, and although he's always shown fairness in any dealings I've had with him, he gives me an uneasy feeling.

The door opens and Caleb enters, bringing a large tray with drinks, and behind him is Nessie, carrying another with an assortment of things to eat. "Thank you, Nessie."

"You are welcome, Alpha Connell." Nessie quickly places the tray down on the coffee table and leaves the office.

"Gentlemen, let me introduce you to my second Beta. Beta Walim, who is a new pack member, and one that came to us with other shifters from the Northern Parklands. I have had my eyes well and truly opened with the stories these members have told me of their past, and how they came to be rogues in the Parklands.

"I have a Gamma and a Delta who are newly joined members. Both are as solid as my new Beta. We have warriors, a dressmaker, kitchen help, housekeeping staff, and gardeners, along with those that are building new cabins. But the one that came to me and altered my whole life is Luna Hope, and you will meet her shortly.

"Let me warn you now. If you frighten her, nothing will save you from my wrath. She is the sweetest of females and everyone loves her. We have been blessed with a Luna who will help the pack grow and soften after the disgusting time it's had with the last Alpha."

"I'll look forward to meeting her, but before we do, tell us all about your new members. Because we'd like to help anyone that is still in the Parklands," Lykos states, and bites into the sandwich he's just taken from the tray.

The next hour I discuss each of my new pack members, and Beta Walim fills in some details as the meeting progresses. By the time we've spoken of them all, I can see Flint, Porter and Lykos are all willing to help others from the Parklands if it's required.

Flint speaks and has my undivided attention, plus Walim and Caleb's. "I have information back from my councilman friend. Alpha Soren is determined to come for Luna Hope. The Northern Sector Council has officially warned him that his daughter, if she is his daughter, as he has no proof, only the word of some spiteful she-wolf. If he makes a move of aggression, he will have the Northern Sector Council standing firm with us, and any of the packs that stand with you, Alpha Connell."

"Alphas Gabriel, Lyle and Chet have given me their word they will stand by my side as allies. Alphas Gabriel and Chet have Lunas, so they know what it means to have your soul mate threatened. Alpha Lyle, of course, will stand for anything that is good and honorable, and it's why I am more than happy to stand by his side as an ally."

"The Council has had a meeting, Alpha Connell, and we are more than willing to send the council warriors to stand at the side of you and your allies. The Northern Sector Council are not happy with the situation and are going to speak to Alpha Soren again and see if they can make him back down.

"If he had done the right thing by his true mate instead of rejecting her he would more than likely have had more pups and the son he desperately wanted. He has suffered with his Luna because she is not a nice she-wolf. She manipulates and lies to get what she wants. We have been told the council have been watching the pack for a long time, but as yet have done nothing. I think we can say we are going to war fairly soon," Porter adds to the conversation. We all turn and look at Beta Walim when he snorts in disgust. "What is it, Beta Walim?" Porter asks.

"If you want to know about the Wolfsong Pack, ask Delta Gamzin, or go to the Parklands and speak to some of the ones that escaped that pack. It's vile and twisted, and if they come for our Luna, we will fight to the death to stop them from getting her. She'd not live long among them because Luna Corinthia would make sure of it," Beta Walim snarls.

Knight takes me by surprise and nearly rips out, with a snarl so loud and vicious I'm sure I shake the packhouse. I've never had such a forceful reaction to anything in my life.

We will kill him; we will rip him apart piece by piece. I will kill his wolf! I'll rip his throat out, he will die!

'We will kill him, Knight. If he comes here for Hope, we will make sure he doesn't leave alive, or be so maimed he'll never come back.'

"Alpha Connell, I think you need to put some security in place, just in case he sends someone to sneak in and grab her," Lykos states, leaning forward in his seat.

"We have purchased night vision goggles and have them placed in the trees on the borders. It gives us extra distance than our wolves' eyes, and at night we can see the heat signatures of anything moving. I have concentrated more on the northern pack border between us and Wolfsfoot, because of the threat to Luna Hope, of course. But we've also placed extra on the eastern border to watch for rogues from no-man's-land."

A thought comes to me, and I turn to look at Caleb. "Beta Caleb, order me another eight pairs of the goggles, and get them ASAP."

Caleb gives me a nod, and a mumbled, "Yes, Alpha Connell." I'll fill him in on what I'm going to do with these goggles once they arrive.

"I've put a warning system in place, where a siren will be heard throughout the territory. We have had a drill with a large bell, one that we gained from, oh, I don't know where, if I'm honest, but it would only cover the packhouse area. Gaul, our builder, is installing the siren system and it will be up and running any time," I continue informing Lykos.

"Having an early warning system in place is good and one many of the packs may end up having to use if the rogues from no-man's-land continue with their aggression," Porter adds.

My phone has kept ringing, then stopping and starting again. I walk over to my desk and, seeing its Alpha Gabriel, I quickly take the call.

“Alpha Gabriel,” is all I manage to say before he speaks.

“Connell, get your warriors to your northern border. We’ve had a skirmish on the border between us and the Blood Pearl Pack. They didn’t say who they were, but my warriors were up for the task and whooped some ass, which had them running away. But, as they did, one turned and grinned, then said with spite, *‘Diversions are such good things.’* Check on your Luna, and make sure your border is tight.” Without giving me a chance to respond, Gabriel has gone, and I blink a few times.

“Beta Walim, get to the Luna, and you stay with her along with Gamma Baildon.” He doesn’t respond. He runs out of the office and mind links the border patrol, giving instructions to drench the border with warriors. The alarm siren blares out across the pack lands calling all to readiness.

I make my way out of the office as soon as Delta Gamzin has confirmed he’s on the case. Running from the packhouse once Baildon mind linked to say the Luna is safe and at the training grounds.

Behind me are Flint, Porter, Lykos and Beta Caleb, and, from where I don’t know, Roul has appeared. The council warriors are so differently trained that they seem to know something is going to happen before it actually does.

I come to a grinding halt when I see Baildon, Walim, Chief Oscar, and Iona all watching Hope. Now, I don’t know where she got a bat, but she is swinging it like she’s going to knock someone’s head off.

“Ahhhhhhh...” Hope bellows as she swings that sucker for all she’s worth. But I have to put my hand over my mouth when she throws her weight behind it so hard, she can’t stop and she does a full 360° turn, but gives the brightest smile you have ever witnessed. The smile shows how proud she is of

herself. I side-eye Iona, then Chief Oscar, as I don't know what's going on here.

Lykos steps forward, grinning, "Hello, Luna Hope. My name is Lykos and I'm wondering what you are doing with that bat?"

Stepping forward, still with the brightest of smiles, Hope giggles. "Well, I'm the worst fighter you can imagine. I just can't do it. My right hand and my left hand don't listen to orders well, and I get mixed up with what leg I'm supposed to kick with. Anyway, Swift, who is my friend, and my trainers, tried hard to teach me to fight, but they gave me a bat as a gift instead."

I'm blinking hard as I'm listening to what Hope is saying, and I look from Iona to Chief Oscar, then Baildon and lastly Walim, who I have to admit looks as astonished as I am.

"I'm getting better at it. I beat the tree up yesterday." Hope grabs Lykos' hand and drags him over to a tree on the edge of the forest and is pointing with the bat at targets that have been pinned. "I can show you if you like?" Hope asks and Lykos chuckles before giving her a nod of agreement.

Hope swings the bat and hits the tree trunk, causing wood splinters to fly, surprising me. I see Porter duck as a sizeable piece goes by.

"That is impressive," Lykos tells Hope and gives her tips on how to swing the thing with more force. I am not sure if I should stop this or just stand here like an idiot watching.

"I thought you said your Luna was a sweet thing. She looks fairly fierce to me," Porter states, folding his arms over his chest watching this show of bat skills.

I mind link with Delta Gamzin who informs me there was a brief skirmish at the border but nothing to warrant any major concerns. Knowing that the pack is safe, I turn as the siren sounds again. This time heralding the all clear. When Hope spins around, facing the forest, legs apart, bat over her shoulder, and looking like she's going to murder anyone that appears, I've had enough.

I storm over to Hope, push my shoulder into her stomach, and lift her over my shoulder. "I told you to get to the packhouse as soon as you heard the warning sound." I smack her ass fairly gently if I'm honest and jog to the packhouse, with everyone following behind.

I walk into the dining room and place Hope on her feet. I see the look on her face and I know she's spitting mad, but I didn't expect her to swing that bat. I drop to the floor just as it clears the top of my head. Shit, she could have killed me with that one if she'd hit my head.

"Don't you manhandle me like that again, Connell, or next time I'll make sure I hit you around the head. Make no mistake, I intended to miss you this time." Hope rests the bat on her shoulder, looks around at everyone, huffs and stomps out of the room. Leaving me, my males and the pack with mouths dropped to our chests and shock all over our faces.

Lykos laughs loudly, followed by Flint, a grinning Porter and Roul. "Well, that's a sweet Luna for sure, Alpha Connell." He continues to laugh as he heads for a table and takes a seat.

Gamma Baildon, chuckles. "Well, I have never seen Hope angry like that before. Maybe it's not a good idea to carry her like that in the future. You know she's good with her herbs and she once had Alan running to the toilet for days after he ruined one of her herb patches."

I gulp and am not sure if I should follow Hope to our apartment or allow her to cool down first!

Chapter 30



FLINT

Standing and looking out of the bedroom window, I see Hope and Silas fussing with the flower border they planted after Connell removed the whipping post. They are working well together, and it's more than obvious everyone loves Luna Hope. She is such a sweet female, and without realizing, cares about everyone, showing it in the little things she does for them.

I can't hold the slight smile back when I remember Luna Hope with the bat and the anger she had for Alpha Connell when he carried her in like a sack of potatoes. She was livid, and the shock on everyone's faces was hilarious. They had obviously never seen her lose her temper before, and it certainly shocked them all.

This morning at breakfast they were both back to their normal selves, although Alpha Connell was more attentive than you would expect at breakfast.

My eyes flick to the right, seeing two figures approach Luna Hope and Silas, but I relax when I see it is Porter and Lykos. Now these two have been smitten by the Luna Hope bug, and seeing them talking to her, then follow her to the garden is something I'd not expect. Maybe Lykos would enjoy seeing the vegetable and herb beds, but I'm not so sure it's Porter's thing. But he is going along with them and smiling while he's doing it.

Slightly behind the group is Gamma Baildon, who is looking around all the while. He is a good Gamma, and he's ensuring Luna Hope's safety well. I'm positive he's doing that because

he cares deeply about her as a sister, and not just because it's his job as Gamma, too.

Watching Alpha Connell taking charge of the situation with his high-ranking members shows me how well he has fit into the position of Alpha. A few council members had doubts he would be able to hold the pack together, but he has done, and continues doing, far more than that. He is building a pack family.

Hearing my phone buzz, I walk over to the dressing table, pick it up and see a message from Roman Walker.

Roman: We have heard again from the Northern Sector Council. They are getting no sense from Alpha Soren. He is determined to get his daughter, one way or another. The council has demanded he leave Luna Hope alone or Wolfsong Pack will find themselves in boiling water. They may even strip him of being Alpha.

Flint: Oh dear, I bet that didn't go down well.

Roman: Far from well. He basically told them where to put their orders and he'd do as he likes.

Flint: Trouble with that is, it throws down the gauntlet and as council members, it cannot be ignored. I think we have all been guilty of sitting back too long before intervening. Case in point: the Blackshadow Pack and the late Alpha Torrance.

Roman: I agree, and as I'm new to the council, I can see things you all are not. I will bring up issues as soon as we have this situation resolved. Warn Alpha Connell; he is at war, and Alpha Soren Wolfgang will come for Luna Hope. There is no doubt about that, and he needs to be ready to respond.

Flint: I will and keep me informed of any further developments.

Making my way quickly out of my room, I go in search of Alpha Connell. Not finding him in his office, I ask the females in the kitchen if they know where the Alpha is. Being told about the Warrior building, I quickly make my way out of the packhouse.

Walking into the warrior building, I hear voices speaking and walk toward the sound. One of the doors is open and standing in the doorway I watch Alpha Connell, Beta Caleb, Chief Oscar and the warrior council discussing what happened yesterday and the alarm system they have in place.

“Councilman Flint, please come in,” Alpha Connell says.

Taking a position next to him in front of the warriors, and the inner circle Alpha Connell keeps, I greet them before starting to speak.

“Good morning everyone. I have some information that I think you all need to keep your Luna safe.” I feel Alpha Connell stiffen when he hears me mention his Luna. “Roman Walker has contacted me with the confirmed knowledge that Alpha Soren Wolfgang is at war with this pack. He is determined to get his hands on his daughter one way or another.”

When Alpha Connell punches a hole in the wall, we all stand and wait for his temper, and Knight’s temper, to cool enough for me to continue. When he has calmed, he gives me a look filled with the desire to murder, and I can understand why he feels this way.

“The Northern Sector Shifter Council has made a stand on this issue. They know he’s had no contact with his daughter and that he didn’t even know about her until recently. But they see that Hope is your Luna, and you will never allow her to leave you,” grinning as I continue speaking. “We all know how possessive, jealous and asshole Alphas can be, and will do anything and I mean anything to keep their Luna safe.”

Alpha Connell isn’t embarrassed or upset with my small comment about Alpha behavior. In fact, he is finding it humorous, much to everyone else’s amusement.

“As I was saying, the Northern Sector Council will stand at the side of us, and by us, I mean the council, your pack, and all the packs that will stand with you. I will speak again to each of the Alphas, being sure we have their support. Do not count on the Blood Pearl Pack. We are getting no responses from Alpha

Aurora. She has locked down her territory apart from a strip on the western side where she's allowing passage to anyone that wants it.

"Every warrior needs to be alert and ready to move out to the Northern border of Wolfsfoot, as that is where we are making our stand. Alpha Gabriel already has warriors on the border. They are not patrolling at this point; they have created a battle line of defense."

Alpha Connell stands firm, looking his warriors in the eye. "I will send a message to you all later today. Be ready to move out, and when we do, we'll move fast. Chief Oscar, select all warriors that will go to stand alongside Alpha Gabriel. We can count our own northern border as safe at this time. Make sure Delta Gamzin knows what is happening and that the coverage on the Eastern border has to stay in place. We cannot defend the other three borders as tightly, but we need to make sure rogues from no-man's-land will not infiltrate while we are fighting this war. Everyone get ready for war."

I'm not at all surprised that Alpha Connell doesn't go deeper into what is happening, as he has more than likely done it already. The meeting was well established when I arrived, and not one of the warriors looked surprised by my comment that Alpha Soren wouldn't be backing down.

"Alpha Connell, I'll contact Alphas Chet, Gabriel, and Lyle. Then I'll be leaving to ready myself for this war."

"If you would contact Alpha Chet and Gabriel, I'm going to see Alpha Lyle as I have something for him. Come along for the run. It'll be nice to stretch our legs, well, our wolf's legs," Alpha Connell chuckles.

"Yes, I would like that. Bruno has not been out and had a run for quite a while apart from the jaunts around my home. When are you going?"

"Be ready in half an hour. I just need to speak to Hope before I go."

"Okay, I'll meet you out in front of the packhouse."

Back in my room, I pack my few items and mind link Lykos and Porter that we'll be leaving when I get back from this run. Then I mind link Roul and tell him we are going with Alpha Connell and to be in wolf form out the front, ASAP.

Picking up my phone once more, I send a group message to Alpha Chet and Gabriel.

Flint: Alpha Chet, Alpha Gabriel, it has been confirmed we are at war. Alpha Connell is sending warriors as I speak to you. Alpha Gabriel, he will be with you, with extra warriors soon. Also, the council will stand on the line with you, along with the council warriors. This is not just a war about Alpha Soren and his daughter, this is about right and wrong, and making a stand when our neighbors are threatened.

Alpha Chet: My warriors are prepared and will be with Alpha Gabriel in just a few hours. I will be with my warriors, of course.

Alpha Gabriel: I will prepare refreshments for your arrival. We have a large tent erected where warriors can rest, eat, or sleep. It's not ideal, but it is better than nothing at all.

Flint: I will see you soon.

I'm not sure what Alpha Connell has his Beta carrying in a custom-made backpack for a wolf. But it looks like there is plenty in it. Not sure it can be heavy, as Beta Walim isn't slowed down at all.

Bruno is enjoying the run, stretching his legs and keeping up with Knight, who I have to say is fast.

We are going to war, Bruno. Are you ready to show some of the young wolves how it's done? Knight teases.

I've not had a good fight in a long time, so I'm ready and I'll rip them apart. Bruno gives a wolfish chuckle, which has me smirking in the back of his mind, which is where I'm resting while he does all the running.

Alpha Connell had contacted Alpha Lyle to meet us at the adjoining border and when we arrive he is relaxing against a

tree trunk with four warriors laying in wolf form around him.

“How are you Alpha Lyle?” I ask as I shift quickly back from Bruno.

“Fine, Flint, I’m fine, but I hear the area is going to war,” standing and walking over to myself and Alpha Connell.

“Yes, we are going to war. But you have to maintain the eastern border of your pack because we cannot fight this war on Alpha Gabriel’s northern border and leave you wide open to attack from no-man’s-land. We are not removing any of the warriors we have sent to you. Just keep the eastern side safe and after this war, we will see about even more warriors to help you.” I can see the tiredness and tension in his face, but as an Alpha would, he makes no comment on it, or complaint as to what he has to do.

“Lyle,” I hear and turn at the familiarity with which Alpha Connell speaks to Alpha Lyle.

“Connell, how is your eastern border?”

“My eastern border is tight, and I’ve brought you a gift. Something that your warriors will find very useful.” Holding his hand out, Beta Walim passes him the backpack and, while handing it to Alpha Lyle, I notice Alpha Connell’s huge smile.

Opening the backpack, Alpha Lyle’s eyes round with surprise, then a delighted smile crosses his face as he takes out a pair of night vision goggles. “Goddess, are these night vision goggles?”

Alpha Connell crosses his arms over his chest and chuckles. “Sure are, and my warriors love them. They have made what you can call hides in the trees where they hang the goggles. Watching our borders closely, you can see further than our wolves’ eyes, so it’s like having an early warning system.”

Alpha Lyle passes the backpack to his Beta, who was hovering over his shoulder, and itching to get his hands on a pair of goggles. I can’t help but think they are like pups getting gifts on the birthday celebration days.

Settling on the ground, we discuss all that is happening, and what it is we all have to concentrate our time and effort on. We all have the same issue, which is keeping our packs safe. Although I am not in a standard pack like the Blackshadow, my pack is the shifter council, but every pack in our area is ours to protect, too.

After quite some time, we take our leave and make our way back to the packhouse. Porter and Lykos are ready and waiting to depart. I give Alpha Connell a slap on the back, and much to his disgust, I give Luna Hope a small hug, which earns me a heavy growl.

Arriving back at my home, which has been a long journey, I get some rest before meeting all the council members. I fill them in on what I know, and they inform me of updates I've not heard yet, then I stand and give each a serious look before stating in a blank tone.

"War, council members. We are going to war."

Chapter 31



CONNELL

I know I'm going to have to leave for the war soon. Needing everything to be as it should be here before I go is my worry. I'm also worried about Hope when I'm not here, but I have to put my faith in Gamma Baildon. I'm sure he'll keep her safe along with his mate, Isla.

I'm leaving a skeleton force of warriors behind, because this is my war, and I cannot expect all the other packs to fight it with all they have, and not do so myself.

There is some excitement in the air from the warriors as they have trained all their lives for this type of thing happening, and they are more than up for the fight.

I am leaving Beta Caleb, who, in case of my death, will take over as the Alpha. I've given that instruction to Flint, but I've no intention of dying in this fight. I have every intention of coming home the victor and having pups with my Luna. I plan on filling the halls of the packhouse with laughter and love, and seeing my males do the same.

Warriors Halleck and Iona are remaining much to their disgust, but they are mates, and I won't have one dying and leaving the other to either die, or become a shell of themselves.

Swift, Noah, and the building crew are remaining, as will the garden and house staff. But otherwise, all will come to the border and fight alongside me. Gamma Baildon is under strict instruction to watch Hope closely, and if anything has happened to her when I return, he'll wish it had happened to him instead.

Mind linking Silas, *'Silas, come to my office.'*

It only takes him ten minutes to appear, and I point to the seat in front of my desk. "Update me on everything."

Silas takes a breath, then speaks, "The shed Luna Hope mentioned, I discussed with Gaul. He said it would be better to be a building. I've left that in his capable hands. The orchard is now in good repair, and we'll have a good harvest when the time comes. Vegetable plots will also have a good yield, and if the weather remains on our side, we'll have more than enough to provide for the entire pack. Luna Hope's herb garden is struggling a little and we've had to sow some extra seeds, as we see some of the herbs dying. But Luna Hope is optimistic she can get both the herbal gardens up to scratch for their purpose. Other than that, Alpha Connell, I have nothing to report."

"Thank you, Silas. While I am away, please watch your Luna closely." I hold my hand out and Silas takes it, giving it a shake, but holds it a second longer than you would expect, which has me looking directly into his eyes.

"I will do everything in my power to keep her safe, and I will die doing so, if that is required."

"Thank you, Silas," I give his hand an extra squeeze to show how his words affect me.

Mind linking Gaul, '*Gaul, to my office.*'

It takes probably fifteen minutes for Gaul to arrive at the office, and I point to the seat. "Update me Gaul."

"The lodge and Merry's cabin are in full use now by the patrol warriors. Delta Gamzin has kept control of who is using them, and that they use them correctly. What was the Luna's House, is now the Dressmakers, and Wenna moved in yesterday. Luna Hope has her supplies arriving tomorrow and then Wenna will start making whatever she's going to make," giving a shrug of his shoulders as he obviously does not know what Wenna is going to be making. "Oh, I've made a start on the safe room, and it was surprising because there was nothing in the basement whatsoever. I expected things to be stored, but it

was empty. It made my job so much easier as we had nothing to sort, clear, or dispose of, and I'll have that project finished as quickly as I can.

"I've divided the building workers into teams and they are working well. We'll be starting on the cabins soon. I have plans drawn for the Luna's herbal room as I am calling it, but the Luna has to approve before we start. Is there anything else you want me to add to my list of work to be done?"

"Don't forget the school." I see him rub his forehead and he gives me an apologetic look, which tells me he had. I give him a nod before speaking once more. "Watch over your Luna while I am away."

"Alpha Connell, we will fight to the death if anyone comes here to hurt or take our Luna. She isn't only yours she is ours too, and we love her, we'll do whatever it takes to keep her safe." Giving me a nod, Gaul turns and leaves the office. But he also leaves me with a warm feeling in my chest, because everyone has shown they love their Luna and will keep her safe until my return.

Beta Caleb enters my office, takes a seat and gives me a heart wrenching look. "Are you sure I cannot come with you? My place is by your side."

"No, your place is here, keeping the pack safe, keeping your Luna safe. I have made sure, as best I can, all is running smoothly and if anything happens to me, you'll be able to step in easily without causing undue upset to the pack. Now, tell me, did you inspect the accounts? Will the pack remain financially stable?" I didn't add if I didn't come back, but he understands what I am saying.

"The company is Petersfield and Border Trading Company. They have a solid reputation, and they have been providing the pack with a payment every three months for years, with no break in the payments, and without a dip in the amount of the payment. The pack has a substantial bank balance and even if we didn't receive more payments, we will be financially viable for years to come."

Caleb is looking defeated by my decision, but he has to abide by it, and I want him to take on this role with honor if he has to.

“Good. Now, listen and listen well. I have every intention of kicking this asshole all the way back to his pack’s land, if I have to. I have no intention of dying and leaving my Luna to live the rest of her life broken, or to die from the loss. You will make sure she stays safe, and if the Goddess decides it’s my time, then you will look after my mate the best you can until her time comes to be back in my arms. You will do it with your head held high, you will run this pack with honor and respect and Caleb, I will meet you in the afterlife to give you my thanks.”

Caleb takes a knee and murmurs, “Alpha.”

Squeezing his shoulder before he takes to his feet once more. I wrap him in a brotherly hug before stepping back and giving him a nod. I watch him walk out of the office with his head held high and his shoulders back. Pride runs through my veins knowing if I have to, I’m leaving my pack in expert hands.

Walking over to the safe, I take out the journal and sit behind my desk. My hands shake a little as I know this could be the very last time I make an entry into it. I take a deep breath, calm myself, and open the journal.

Entry, Alpha Connell Torrance.

This may be my last entry as today I leave for war. Alpha Soren Wolfgang has declared war on the Blackshadow Pack, and also our area as a whole.

It seems he will do anything and everything in his power to get his hands on Luna Hope. Learning he has a daughter has him determined to take her to his pack, and for his Beta to mate her, so his blood will rule the pack at his demise, or when he stands down from his position.

I will not ever allow him to take my mate and Luna, and neither will the pack. Everyone in the pack adores Luna

Hope and they will fight to the death to keep her, and to keep her safe.

The shifter council, Alpha Chet Blueblood, Alpha Gabriel Goldman and Alpha Lyle Walker, are all standing by the Blackshadow Pack's side. For some reason, no one seems to know why Alpha Aurora Pearl is not standing with us, has closed her borders, and is not communicating with anyone, not even our shifter council. I'm sure in time it will be revealed why.

Standing together alongside the Northern Sector Shifter Council, I'm positive we will triumph, but I hope that we do not lose many shifters in the process.

I have ensured all building work will continue. I have assigned warriors, and other pack members to keep the weaker pack members as safe as they can. Gaul has his orders and will fulfill them.

Silas will continue to maintain the vegetable, fruit, and herb gardens. Making sure that the pack will have supplies of food throughout the coming winter and spring.

Finances are good, and the income from the trading company will continue to build the pack's financial security. I have nothing else that I can do to provide for the pack at this point.

Last, I want it known that I love my mate deeply, and I will do everything in my power to come back to her. Knight, my wolf, is strong and angry at the position we have found ourselves in, and all because of greed. If Alpha Soren had mated his true mate, none of this would be happening now. Instead, he has no heir and is desperate to take his only child to help fulfill that purpose.

If this is my last entry I wish my successor the best, and that the future of the pack will flourish.

Signed - Alpha Connell Torrence

Closing the journal gently, I run my hand over the cover before picking it up and placing it in the safe. After locking the safe, I write the code onto a piece of paper and place it in an envelope in the top drawer of my desk, where I know Caleb will find it if I don't come back.

Walking out of the office, I go in search of my mate, and as I hear laughter in the next office, it is easy to know my mate is in there with her committee.

"Hope, come. I need to speak to you a few moments." I hold my hand out and she rushes over, placing her hand in mine and we walk back into my office, where I close the door behind us.

Taking a seat on the easy chair, I pull Hope onto my lap and run my fingers through her hair. "I am leaving as soon as I have had this moment with you. We need to end this before your father somehow gets to you and takes you. Chet, Gabriel, Flint and the council warriors will all stand together to beat this alpha.

"Now, while I am gone, you are in charge, but listen to Beta Caleb and Gamma Baildon. They will keep you safe, and they will watch for anything untoward. Promise me you will stay safe until I come back."

Hope has a tear running down her cheek and I use a thumb to gently catch it before sucking it into my mouth. "I will do everything to stay safe, but you have to come back to me, Connell."

"I will do everything in my power to come back, and when I do we are going to make pups, lots and lots of pups." I give her a cheeky smile, the one I know she loves me to give.

"Oh, lots and lots of pups," Hope smiles, but her eyes are still on the brink of overflowing with tears.

"Don't cry, I will be back. It will take more than this crazy alpha to prevent me from coming back to you." I kiss her gently, before taking her mouth for the kiss that could be the last we ever share.

The journey to Wolfsfoot is somber for me, but the warriors are doing their best to lift my spirits. “Come on, Alpha Connell, we are going to kick some wolf ass,” William laughs, and he’s been in my inner circle for a long time. He knows me better than most. I give him an eye roll that I’ve seen Hope give to Swift frequently, before chuckling.

Arriving at Wolfsfoot’s northern border, I am greeted by Gabriel and his two Betas. “It’s good to see you, Connell, although under dangerous circumstances.”

“It’s good to see you also, and I want to take this moment to thank you for standing with me.”

“If it was my Tati, I would hope you would have stood up with us,” Gabriel looks at me fully.

“I would have stood for Tatiana without her being your mate or Luna. I feel my pack owes her far more than we could ever repay, and Gabriel, I am thrilled that she found you as her mate. It’s something I’ve never said to you but wanted you to know. I am ashamed of the treatment that Tatiana received, and I’m doing everything in my power to ensure it never happens to another. Ever.”

Gabriel can see my honesty, and his wolf Phoenix can smell it. Slapping me on my back so hard I take two steps forward with the surprise of it, he chuckles, then leads me into the large tent that he has had erected.

In one corner of the tent is a table where Alpha Chet, his Beta and some others are sitting and as we get close, we all welcome each other. But we also quickly get down to the business of why we are all gathering.

Chapter 32



HOPE

I didn't like my first night without Connell at the packhouse, and everyone is tense. You can feel the worry in the air and Briar is pacing in the back of my mind.

'Briar, please settle. You are giving me a headache, and we cannot do anything to help Connell, and our pack, at Wolfsfoot.'

I don't like it, Hope. We should have faced our father and told him we are not interested. We are Luna. We are stronger than you think. I am stronger than you think.

'I know Briar, but you know I try to use my brain and not brawn. I'm sorry I'm not more of a fighter, but I'm trying to obey Connell as my mate. He is doing this to keep us safe, and with both the councils involved, it is not just about my father wanting to get me anymore.'

If you need to let me out to fight, then don't hesitate. I am a good fighter and I will rip them apart with my teeth and claws.

'Oh, my Goddess, Briar, settle down.'

I cut the link to Briar because she's in such a mood it will flow to the pack members. The last thing I need to contend with is the pack in fighting mode.

Walking into Connell's office, I smile at Caleb, who is behind the desk with a pile of paperwork in front of him. "Good morning, Beta Caleb."

"Good morning, Luna Hope." Caleb stands from behind the desk and shows me the respect as you'd expect. "How can I

help you?”

“I am looking for an assistant. Someone who would enjoy helping me with making my lotions, soaps, candles and other things I want to try. Things that will save the pack expenses.” I take a seat in the easy chair and Caleb walks over, taking a seat near, and giving me all his attention.

“What sort of things?”

“Shampoo, conditioners, infused oils for the kitchen, scents, scented paper and envelopes. There are so many things we can make, and we can rent a store in Wolfsfoot if we get too much.” I know I’m over excited, but the way Caleb’s eyes are getting rounder and rounder tells me to pull my excitement back somewhat. “I’m sorry, Beta Caleb. I got a little carried away.”

“Luna Hope, I think it’s a great idea, and I know Alpha Connell will be okay with this as he is all for bringing anything good to the pack. Anything that helps create an income and pride in the pack will be grasped with both hands, and you could get inundated with offers of help.”

“I want one assistant I can train at this point, but they have to have an interest in herbs and craft making. Someone that is mellow, because I’ll have to work with them for hours at a time. I can’t work with someone who has a temperament like Swift, because although I adore her, and love her dearly, she gets me in a tizzy with her non-stop talking and rushing around.”

Grinning, I see Caleb understands what I’m saying. Tapping his chin with a forefinger, he stops and looks at me. “What about Lorna? She works in the kitchen and you’ll have met her? She is a great female, kind, gentle, and not a chatterbox.”

“Can you call her to the office so we can speak to her?”

“Of course, Luna Hope.”

I see Caleb’s eyes go blank, which is what happens when you mind link and then they clear and flick to me. “Lorna is on her way.”

“Thank you.” I settle back in my seat a little more and allow my mind to wander to Connell and I hope he is alright. I’m not mind linking him, as I don’t want to distract him if he’s in a meeting or fighting.

I jump when Caleb speaks. “Come in, Lorna. The Luna wanted to have a few words with you, if that is okay?”

“Of course, Beta Caleb. Luna Hope.” Lorna tips her head slightly, baring her neck in a show of respect.

“Please, take a seat, Lorna.”

I explain what I would require from her, what she would learn, what responsibility would come with it, and more than likely she’d have to leave working in the kitchen.

Caleb has stepped back and retaken the seat behind the desk, and although he is working, I can tell he is keeping one eye and ear on the conversation.

“Luna Hope, I would love to assist you with this. I enjoy making things, but I have to admit I have felt that I’m in a rut in the kitchen even though I enjoy making the meals and desserts. Nessie is great in the head kitchen position, and I know she’ll more than likely pass on the housekeeping head to someone else, but it leaves me not having a position to aim for. I hope that doesn’t sound selfish.” Lorna looks like she is trying to be as honest as she can be but is worried that I will think less of her for having ambition.

“Okay, let’s get something straight. I totally understand what you are saying. Without a goal, it is like you are wandering in the dark. What I’m asking of you has unlimited prospects. I spoke with Beta Caleb about my idea and thoughts, and if we make more than we need for the pack, we can lease a shop in Wolfsfoot and offer what we have for others to benefit.” I can see the excitement and ideas flowing and smile broadly. Turning to look at Caleb, he gives me a small head nod, which I know is his way of saying, *‘I told you so.’*

We wrap up the meeting and will start Lorna’s training on Monday. Today being Saturday, gives me two days to get an

idea of what to teach first and from where, because my building is only in the starting phase.

Smiling as I watch Lorna leave the office I turn to Caleb, but before he can speak the phone rings on the desk. I wait quietly while Caleb speaks, but I'm surprised when he holds the phone out to me.

"Luna Hope, it is Luna Tatiana wanting to speak with you."

My heart jumps because I know from what Connell has told me that Luna Tatiana is Alpha Gabriel's Luna, and that is where Connell is at this time.

I take the phone and sit because my legs have turned to jelly with worry. "Hello, Luna Hope speaking." I'm pleased my voice came out with more than a squeak.

"Hello Luna Hope. I just wanted to reach out and introduce myself. Nothing is wrong here. In fact, nothing has even happened, as yet."

"Oh, thank the Goddess. I thought you were calling to tell me something bad had happened."

"Luna Hope, if something bad happened to Alpha Connell, you would feel it through your bond. But I wanted you to know that if he or any of your warriors get hurt, I will do everything I can for them. I have a team of healers standing ready, but Gabriel's men are well trained warriors, the shifter council's warriors are fighting machines, and your warriors are excellent fighters. Please do not over worry, you are in the same position as myself and Luna Sage. We keep the pack safe and calm."

"Thank you, Luna Tatiana, for calling and putting my mind at ease."

Laughingly replying, "I know that's bullshit Luna Hope, but it's how we react as Lunas. Please call me Tati. All this Luna business is long winded and over-the-top for me."

"Okay, Tati, call me Hope. If you need anything or you need me to come, I will be with you as quickly as I can. I am a

healer myself and have a supply of lotions that help with the healing process,” I add, and twist my hands together because I gave some lotions to Beta Walim, but I have more if they’re needed.

“Oh, that’s good to know, Hope. We have enough, I think, but I’ll keep it in mind. Now, I’ve got to rush, but Luna Sage will more than likely contact you, too. We have a nice relationship building and hope all Lunas in our area will end up with friendships that are good for us and good for our packs.” Tati sounds so sincere that I find myself nodding, even though she cannot see me doing it.

“Oh, I will look forward to speaking to her later. Again, if you need me, call, and thank you for contacting me.”

I look at Caleb when the call ends and I pass the phone back to him. “That was nice of Luna Tatiana to call and assure me she’ll do anything for Alpha Connell and our warriors.”

“It was. Luna Tatiana was from the Blackshadow Pack originally, but it’s not my story to tell. Alpha Connell will tell you if you ask him.”

Rubbing my hands together, I smile. “Okay, I am going to look at the basement, and yes, I’ll take Gamma Baildon with me.” I just cannot stop the eye roll as I turn to walk out of the office. I don’t contact Baildon as I know Caleb will be mind linking him already.

The basement is a dark, cold, and dingy place. It would have been a very good dungeon in the past, I can’t help but think. Gaul, and three of his workmen are busy and don’t see me watching them to start with, but as soon as they do Gaul walks over and gives me a tip of his head showing his neck in respect.

“What can I do for you Luna Hope?” Gaul asks, wiping his hands on a rag he had hanging out of his back pocket.

“I wanted to check on how you are coming along with the safe room?”

“We have all the walls in place, as you can see. We agree with the plan you put forward and will do all that once the room is secure. After speaking with Alpha Connell, it was agreed that we secure the room because if you ever have to use it, it’s better to be in it safe and have to sit on the ground, then have a seat but not secure.”

“I agree with that Gaul. Now what about the cabins? How are they coming along?”

“Very well, but first we want to get your building finished. I’ve moved more males to that so we can get it done quickly. Once that is finished all males will work on the cabins and school.”

Hearing a sound behind me, Baildon steps out of the shadows, giving Gaul a stare that has me feeling a little uncomfortable. “Stop that,” I tell him before I think twice and change my mind. “Gaul is giving me updates. Now be quiet and stand back.”

Baildon gives me a look of shock that I’ve used a Luna order on him. Something I didn’t realize I could do until this moment, and by the grin slowly appearing on his face, he can tell I’m shocked about it, too.

“Thank you for the update, Gaul. Now, I have to move along to do other things.” I spin around and walk away before either of them can speak.

“Gamma Baildon, please have Berrick and Theda report to the Luna office immediately.”

“Yes, Luna Hope,” Baildon replies and I inwardly smirk at his submissive tone. Now anyone that knows Baildon knows he is not submissive, so to give me that tone means something special.

An older female walks into my office, followed by Berrick, who I know from the Parklands. “Please, both of you, take a seat.”

I wait until they are settled in their seats, and Baildon is standing guard at the door once more before I continue speaking. “I understand that you both are or were teachers. Is that correct?”

Berrick looks shocked but speaks first. "Yes, I was a teacher, Luna Hope."

"I was a teacher as well," Theda replies giving me a suspicious look.

Clapping my hands together with excitement, I continue. "That is good. Now I know that we don't have a school at the moment, but we are having one built. Both of you will be needed to teach any pups that we have. Now even if they are not school age, we need a room in the school as a creche, somewhere parents can leave their pups while they work. Do you think you are both capable of organizing, running, and fulfilling this important role?"

Together, they both excitedly reply, "Yes, Luna Hope."

"Okay," grinning as I allow my excitement to flow over to them both. "I don't want any arguments about how things will run. You decide together, but if there is a disagreement come to me and I will have the deciding vote. I know you were retired, Theda, so if you would rather not work, then I understand."

Theda gives me a serious look, replying with so much honesty I can feel it in my bones. "Luna Hope, I've been bored out of my skull. I have been stagnating, and I would love to be involved with a school again."

"Good, good. Now, you also have to think about training some new teachers for the future, because we are going to be finding mates for our males." I give a huge grin, then sneakily look at Baildon. "Oh, and of course, our Gamma will be providing his mate with pups soon, so that will be your first pup to look after."

Baildon splutters, gives me a filthy look, then walks out of the office, much to our amusement as we all laugh at his expense. Bringing the meeting to a close, I mind link Wenna about a dress for the mating ball, and when she arrives I close the door and we discuss style and color.

"I want nothing too fancy because I'm mated. It is just that as the Luna of the pack hosting the mating ball, I need to look

presentable. I do not want to look like I'm on a pedestal, I want to fit in, but look classy enough for all to know I'm a Luna. Oh, and I want Connell in a tie that matches my dress." I tell Wenna, who is writing down everything I'm saying.

"I'll do some drawings with ideas, but nicely fitted without being revealing. A pale blue that won't have you standing out too much because it's about finding mates. Floor length as it is a ball. Have I covered everything Luna Hope?" Wenna asks.

"Yes, let me see a few ideas, just three, because I'm not the most decisive of people and the more you give me, the more I'll struggle to make a choice. In fact, you decide on the style, color, material and make it. You have my size, so you do it, and I'll wear it." I give a giggle at the look of shock on Wenna's face. I tap her hand and walk away, grinning to myself.

"Luna Hope?" I hear and turn to see Caleb rushing toward me, holding the phone in his hand. "Luna Sage Blueblood wishes to speak with you."

"Oh, thank you, Beta Caleb." I take the phone and walk back to my office. "Hello Luna Sage, it is lovely to hear from you. Is everything alright?"

"Yes, everything is good Luna Hope. I wanted to touch base with you, and let you know you are not alone in the worrying department. Both myself and Luna Tatiana are worried about our mates, but we trust that they know what they are doing, and they will come out of this safely."

"Once this is over, we will have to meet, along with Luna Tatiana. We can support each other, if and when, it's needed," I add.

"Exactly, Luna Hope. I am looking forward to meeting you in the future. But I am here if needed, and I wanted you to know that." Luna Sage sighs, "Let's hope we don't need each other for any serious reason."

"I agree, and I am here if you need me as well." Not lingering with the conversation, I return the phone to Caleb and rush to the kitchen, where I'm aiming for the urn with the boiling

water. I need to make a chamomile tea as I can feel my stress level rising.

Chapter 33



HOPE

I have had my chamomile tea, chatted to the kitchen females a while and am now walking back to see if I can do anything for Caleb when the warning alarm sounds.

Now, I know that Swift, Baildon, and Chief Oscar have been thinking of me, because I've noticed wherever I go there is a bat leaning against the wall, and knowing this I grab the one near the front door and test its weight in my hand.

Shift Hope, let me out.

Briar screams in the back of my mind, but I slam down the wall to shut her out for a while, or until I know what is happening.

'Caleb, what is happening?' I mind link.

'Rogues have breached the eastern border. They are heading this way, and fast. We have no one between them and us. I've called the pack to arms,' Caleb responds, but he appears at my side before he has even finished the link.

I follow Caleb out of the packhouse, even though he is telling me to hide in the Alpha apartment. I give him a filthy look because I may be a rubbish fighter, but I'm not a coward.

"Go hide, Luna Hope," Caleb snaps, but I'm well ready. I waggle my bat in front of his face and walk past him, where I come to a halt next to the last row of the defense.

My eyes run over everyone who is standing in front of me. They are standing in rows facing the east. Swift, Noah, Halleck, and Iona are all standing ready.

Behind them, holding axes, hammers, and other tools that I cannot even describe, are the building crew led by Gaul. Berrit, Graham, Lonnie, Mortas, Ronnet, Stein, Yarrow and Ruston. Mostly all males that I know and care about.

Then we have the gardening staff, standing with shovels, rakes and other equipment in hand. Silas, Cyd, Nikko, Chester and Baron.

But what surprises me more than anything is the kitchen and housekeeping staff. Females standing tall and firm, some holding knives, cleavers or shifted to their wolves.

Pride flows from me and I allow it to seep into everyone standing at the ready. As one, everyone's head turns to look at me, tipping their heads in respect before turning back to the coming fight.

"FIGHT WELL, KILL THEM FAST, PROTECT THE PACK!" Beta Caleb shouts and again as one the pack raises their faces and howl...Ahwoo...Goosebumps run through my body and I raise my bat ready to do my part.

The noise of rogues grunting, growling, and stinking as they reach us is tremendous. There must be thirty of them, but it doesn't faze our first line. They throw themselves onto the rogues, and take out one each before I have time to say '*defend yourselves*'.

Baildon and Caleb are with them, killing as many as they can, as fast as they can. I know Baildon is protecting his mate and me with everything in him.

I notice Silas out of the corner of my eye smack one over his head with his spade, then again, once he was down. Finishing with a third hit to cave in the rogue's head. I feel bile rise but don't have time to vomit because one of them has gotten through the first three lines and I lift my bat and swing.

Aster, who works in the kitchen, has changed to her wolf and jumps on the rogue, because I'm embarrassed to say I swung my bat and missed his head. I spun around fully and saw Aster take him down and rip his throat out.

LET ME OUT!

Briar doesn't give me time to agree. She rips out of me and launches herself at the nearest rogue. I retreat to the back of her mind and close my eyes because I can feel the aggression that Briar is throwing and I don't want to see us ripping rogues or anyone to pieces.

I can hear rogues screaming, growling, and dying. I, as yet, thank the Goddess, have not felt the pack lose a member. Linked to everyone in the pack as Luna, anyone that dies, I will feel the loss, and it's something I don't want to happen.

TAKE THAT!

DIE YOU STINKING ASSHOLE!

YUCK, YOU BLEEDING BLACK!

GRRRRRRRRRRRR....

Oh my, I have my eyes closed still, but can hear all the fighting, although it sounds less than before. But I can also hear Briar gleefully chanting out all these things. I never knew she was so bloodthirsty!

"Briar, calm down. There are more." I recognize Swift's voice, but I also can hear the amusement in it too. My eyes snap open and I see through Briar's eyes the carnage that has taken place. There are dead rogues everywhere.

Nikko has one around the neck, and with a sharp twist I hear the crack as he snaps the neck and drops the rogue to the ground, before spinning around to find the next he can kill.

Briar allows me to shift back and I'm standing with my bat when a last rogue rushes toward me. I grit my teeth and swing that bat with everything in me. I hit him on the side of his head so hard everyone hears the crack of his neck, but the angle his head is at now shows I snapped his neck with the force of the hit.

Beta Caleb in wolf Magnum's form lifts his head and howls. Ahwoooo. To which everyone responds, even as I throw my human head back and let a howl fly from between my lips.

“Swift, Noah. Run to the eastern border and check the patrol warriors. If they need help, link and let me know.”

“Yes, Beta Caleb.” Both Swift and Noah reply and shift to their wolves, taking off in a full run.

“Everyone, let’s get a pyre built and get this garbage burned.” I’m amazed at how quickly everyone is responding to Caleb’s orders.

“Was anyone hurt?” I ask Baildon, who has walked toward me with Isla tucked into his side. I can tell he isn’t going to let go of her soon, as his protective instinct has kicked into place.

“Only cuts and bruises. I’ve told them you have lotion and they will apply it between themselves. Silas is fetching what you have from the potting shed, and will take it to the warrior building, where everyone will get seen.” I give Baildon a tap on the forearm but walk past him toward the warrior building because I’ll be checking all the injuries.

Finding only a few in the warrior building, I’m more than a little relieved. I clean and apply lotion, speaking gently to everyone. I get quite a few jokes at my expense about my missing with my first swing of the bat. But, it’s nice for them to be laughing and safe now it’s done.

“Your last swing of the bat was very accurate, Luna Hope.” Stein grins, and I nip the cut on his shoulder tightly together, causing him to wince.

“I’m getting better. But that first swing was way off the mark. He didn’t have to duck his head when he did though. I mean, he could have let me kill him,” I say and somehow keep my face straight.

Stein gives me a blank look, then a grin appears, before he throws his head back in a full out laugh. “Oh my, that would have been something to see.”

The laughter and jokes flow for a while, and as I dismiss the last of them I walk out of the building and back to the packhouse where I’m being followed, I notice, by Hallec and Iona.

“I’m okay. You two don’t have to follow me around.”

“We wouldn’t leave you to walk alone, Luna Hope. We don’t know for sure we got them all. Berrit, Graham, Lonnie and Mortas have all taken off checking the area. We need to know we don’t have any stragglers,” Hallecc states.

“I see all the bodies have been taken care of.”

Iona replies, “Yes, Beta Caleb, Silas, and the gardening crew have a pyre and will make sure we have no dead, rotting bodies lying around.”

The next two hours I spend checking on every single member of our pack. Walking into Connell’s office, I throw myself into the easy chair and turn my head tiredly to look at Caleb.

“Any news on the border warriors?”

“Yes, they are okay. It seems the rogues waited for them to leave their position and move along the border. Then they had to have moved over the border and made their way here. But thankfully the border patrol got back in time to sound the alarm.” Caleb looks as tired as I feel.

“Come on Caleb, let’s go find something to eat. I see you’ve washed up, but I never got blood all over me as you all did. I’m happy I didn’t knock that rogue’s head clean off because I’ll let you in on a secret. I would have vomited and more than likely fainted.”

Caleb’s face whitens at the thought, then he replies, “We’ll have to toughen you up a little. Maybe we’ll use pig’s blood, and rabbit’s guts in the garden, then you’ll get used to the sight and smell.”

I must have a look of horror on my face because Caleb throws his head back and laughs at my expense.

Sitting in the dining room later, I am more than amazed that everyone is back to acting normally. The atmosphere has returned to its calm state, and they are all eating their meal, laughing and talking as though we’d not just been attacked, and had to defend ourselves.

As the Luna of the pack, I feel I need to say something to these amazing pack members. The border patrol I mind linked a moment ago, and I know they are all fine, and that they are thought of, even while out of sight.

Standing, I wait while everyone realizes I wish to speak, and when the room quietens, I place my hands together and rest them in front of my body, giving a relaxed aura to everyone.

“Blackshadow Pack, I want to say that you ALL have shown your value. You each stood up for the pack, stood up for each other and stood up for your Alpha, who is not here to honor your bravery.

“I honor your bravery. I am proud of each and every one of you. All of you who have never had to face anything like this before, stood up beside your fellow pack members and fought. Thank you. I will report what you all did when your Alpha returns home, and I am positive he will want to honor you himself.

“Now, do you think you can keep it a secret that I missed with my first swing?” I say the last with a huge grin on my face, and the pack laughs, hoots and enjoys the moment.

“You did good, Luna Hope. I’m very proud of you as our Luna.” I look over at Caleb, who is giving me an honest and very serious look.

“Thank you, Beta Caleb.” I lean forward and kiss his cheek, much to the pack’s amusement and lite-hearted threats of telling Connell.

Later, when I’ve showered, readied for bed and am sitting looking out the bedroom window. I breathe the night air that is gently blowing through the open window. I’m relaxed but feel the worry starting to creep to the front once more. It’s while I’m sitting here keeping myself calm that I hear Connell in my mind.

‘My mate and Luna, how are you?’

‘Connell, are you okay? I’ve been so worried. What is happening?’

I cannot help but let the worry flow through our link, and I feel his worry for me. But I also feel his love, and then calm flows through our bond.

'We are all okay. Nothing has happened as yet, but we have news that Alpha Soren is on the move toward the border.'

'Please stay safe. If you need me, I'll come.'

'I know you will, Hope, but you don't need to. We have enough warriors and healers. I need to be able to concentrate, and to do that, I need to know you are safe.'

'I'm safe.'

'I know you had an attack. Beta Caleb filled me in and I'm proud of you, Hope. You have held them together, then checked they were all alright. That will mean a lot to the pack, and they will love you the more for it. Stay alert. If the rogues know a war is starting, they may take advantage and send more to attack you and Alpha Lyle's pack.'

'We will stay alert, I promise.'

'Oh, practice your swing because I hear it could be better.'

Hearing Connell chuckle through the mind link, and feel his amusement through the bond, I can't be angry that I was outed. But I describe it for him regardless, and tell him all that I saw and heard. I also tell him Briar is a bloodthirsty she-wolf, to which he laughs and says Knight can be like that too, so they are well matched.

We speak for quite a while, but when I start to yawn, I know I have to get some sleep.

'I have to go to sleep, my love. Be careful, come back safely.'

'I will, sweetheart. Good night and know I love you.'

'I love you too.'

My head touches the pillow and I know no more, but Beta Caleb, who is standing outside listening to the night for any sign of danger, hears the soft snores coming from his Luna, bringing a smirk to his face.

Chapter 34



CONNELL

Someone shaking my shoulders wakes me, and I sit up fast, startled somewhat. Looking into Beta Walim's face, I shake my head to clear the sleep and run the palm of my hand down my face.

"What's going on?"

"Sorry Alpha Connell, but Alphas Chet, Lyle, Gabriel and the council members need you to attend a meeting."

"Okay, thank you, Walim. I'll be there in a few minutes." Dragging myself over to a table where bowls and jugs of water for washing are laid out. I pour some of the water into a bowl and splash my face to clear the sleep from my fogged brain.

After finding the portable latrine, I again rinse my hands, then quickly make my way to where everyone is waiting. Walking into the tent, I give the alphas and council members a nod of respect, before taking a place next to Alpha Lyle.

Behind the alphas are their betas and chief warriors. Everyone here has to know what is going to happen if we can't control the fight that is to come.

Alpha Lyle has left Beta Earl in charge of his pack, and to maintain control of the borders. He has brought warriors, but only a handful as the rest are needed at his pack. We all understand that. Lucas and Eli are two of his warriors that are known to be amongst his best, and they stand behind their alpha.

Alpha Chet has Beta Xavi and Chief Warrior Dixon behind him, both looking ready to rip apart whoever nears their alpha

with any show of aggression.

Alpha Gabriel has Beta Thomas and two warriors standing silently behind him. I recognize them as Rathor and Drake, but I'm surprised to see Wallace, the town advisor, standing next to them.

The shifter council is represented by Flint, Ulmer, Porter, Roman, Cinder and Eve. They have warriors with them, but Roul is standing strong behind them, and I grin at Gerry, who had retired. At my questioning look, he grins and states for everyone to hear. "If you think I'm not coming out of retirement to have a good fight, you have to be kidding. We've not had an uprising in years, and I'm wanting in."

We discuss positions and I check the map in front of us, pointing out a weakness on the eastern side. "Here could be a problem, especially if the Blood Pearl Pack doesn't protect their border as they should."

Flint growls and we all know Bruno, his wolf, is agitated as we can smell and sense his anger. "She'll protect her border even if she's not standing with us on this issue. Trouble being, if she has any issues in the future, she will have to stand alone."

One of Alpha Gabriel's warriors runs into the tent and whispers in his ear. Giving him a nod, he runs back out, and we all stand waiting for whatever he is going to enlighten us with.

"The northern border between Blood Pearl Pack and the Northern Sector is under fire. On the sector side, the sector council has their warriors making a stand. From what has been seen, no other packs have joined the sector council. We need to move from our position here and make our way to our side of the border, making sure that Alpha Soren does not break through," Alpha Gabriel snarls, and before anyone can say or do anything he shouts to his warriors as he leaves the tent, "Warriors, to arms."

I look at Walim, giving him a nod, and he knows that now it has become real. All the Alphas are marching forward with

their warriors behind. The council has taken the lead position, and we, as one, shift to our wolf forms and run for the border.

It has to be a sight to see, and something I hope will never be seen again, because some of these wolves will not be returning and for that I'll always be beholden. They fight for my Luna, and they fight for freedom, but they also fight for the future of our she-wolves and their fated mate's bonds. Sacred to us all.

Knight speaks to me quietly in the back of my mind. *We fight for mate. Nobody will take her from us. I'll tear him to pieces and he'll regret thinking of taking what's ours.*

'Yes, we will, Knight. Nobody takes our mate, our heart,' I respond and push forward as we near the border, ready to rip anyone apart.

As the council shifts back in the front of us all, it takes a moment for me to understand what we are all seeing. There are bodies lying in front of the sector council warriors. But looking closely, they are all from the Wolfsong Pack. How an alpha can put his pack through this I don't understand, and for another alpha's fated mate, and another pack's Luna.

We all understand that Hope is his daughter, but he has never met her, and did not know of her. This is greed of the worst kind. It's not even for the survival of the pack, because the sector council would make sure a suitable alpha took over if it came to that point.

Flint addresses Councilman Ward, who has stepped over to us, covered in blood and looking feral from the fight. He has two other council members with him who Flint informs us all, are Marshall and Bane.

Ward speaks freely, allowing all to hear his words. "Alpha Soren and his Luna are not going to stand down. We have to decide if we kill them or take them into custody. If you can all stand down until we've made that decision it would be appreciated. At the moment, please do not cross into our sector."

We all stand waiting, but the suspense is agitating our wolves. We are killing machines, after all, when we are defending what is ours. Nothing more aggressive than an alpha wolf when in full protection mode.

My eye catches a warrior breaking through the line of sector warriors and heading straight for Councilman Ward's turned back. Before I can do anything, Knight forces his way forward, and we shift. Taking an enormous leap, we knock the warrior away from his intended target and rip his throat out, spitting a chunk of his trachea onto the ground.

Knight is bristling, and has our body so puffed out that we must look twice as large as normal.

Councilman Ward gives a nod of thanks as I push Knight back and shift. Walim is grinning broadly and slaps me on the back. "Nice move, Alpha, nice move."

"Asshole was going for his back. Nothing worse than underhanded moves like that. But we need to either start fighting, or get the stand down that the sector council are trying to push for."

Walim's wolf, Trick, growls, taking Walim by surprise, but he recovers quickly, grinning at me. "Trick is ready to rip someone apart. We've had to fight to protect before, and he's fast with his moves, taking people off guard. I think that's why he's called what he is, as he tricks people into thinking he's doing one thing, but he does something else."

Before the councilmen can decide Wolfsong surge forward, pushing into the warriors hard. Councilman Ward looks at Flint and nods.

Flint turns to us and bellows, "FIGHT!"

Everyone, including myself, pushes forward, crossing the borderline into the Northern Sector. Some shift to wolf form, others remain in human form. What has me tripping over my own feet, is seeing Luna Corinthia head straight for Gabriel, but before she reaches her destination, Tatiana's wolf Ebony runs into Corinthia's side, knocking her away from Gabriel.

My attention is snapped back when I grab the nearest enemy and twist his neck, hearing the snap before throwing him to the ground.

Chuckling to my left has my eyes flick, and Delta Gamzin is laughing as he slashes his claws across the chest of the warrior fighting him. "Good kill, Alpha, keep it up," he laughs and continues the fight.

I'm trying to keep my eye on Ebony as I fight, but she's more than holding her own against Corintha's wolf. Running in, taking chunks out of its side, then dodging the snapping mouth. But the way she rolls over to come back onto her feet at the ready is amazing and if I wasn't busy staying alive, I'd be happy to stand and watch this play out.

Knight again surges out of me and takes off to the left. 'What are you doing?' I ask, and the low growl that is thrown out takes me by surprise.

Kill enemy, now. Knight snarls, and looking through his eyes I see Alpha Soren in front of me, also in wolf form. He's not as large as Knight and looks like he is not well. His coat has no shine. He isn't as muscled as you would expect for an alpha, either.

'Something is wrong with his wolf,' I say to Knight, but before he replies he has us jump forward snarling, snapping and grabbing hold of the Soren's back leg. Shaking it hard, we hear a snap and a scream of pain.

I can feel the satisfaction flow through Knight's form. That's when I know if he gets the opportunity, he will kill this alpha for daring to threaten our mate and Luna.

Snarling, the wolf takes a stand, eyeing Knight carefully, now knowing he has a formidable opponent. He isn't sure who we are, but he knows we are an alpha.

Jumping forward, Knight goes for the wolf's throat but it moves at the last moment, jumping to the side and snarling back. The wolf knows it cannot beat Knight. We can sense and

smell its nervousness. But what we don't expect is for him to shift back to his human form.

"Who are you?" Soren snarls, but he doesn't faze us.

Shifting back, we take him by surprise at the speed that we do so. "I'm Alpha Connell Torrance and I'm here to kill you. You will never take my mate and Luna. You lost any chance of having your daughter when you threw away your fated mate and took the chosen mate, someone not destined for you. This is the Goddess' way of retribution; you will live or die not knowing your daughter."

"I don't think so," Soren smirks, and as he lifts his hand, I feel a pain so bad in the middle of my chest that I look down and see an arrow sticking out of my body.

Falling to my knees, I look up with shock on my face before falling to my side. The last thing I see before everything goes black is a male walk up behind Soren, grasp his head and twist hard, snapping his neck before throwing his head back and letting loose a victory howl.

I don't know how long I have been unconscious, but when I come around, I'm in a tent with a healer looking at my chest. Seeing my eyes open, the male gives me a serious nod, "You will be alright, Alpha Connell. The arrow missed anything vital, but you need to shift into your wolf to speed up your recovery."

Walim, William, Gamzin and Bladrick are all standing around where I've been laid on a table that has been used for seriously injured warriors.

I shift to Knight, 'Are you alright?' I ask.

Yes, I will heal you quickly. We need to go to the meeting.

'What meeting?'

The one that will explain who that male was, and the fact he is now the Alpha of the Wolfsong Pack.

I shift back as soon as Knight feels he has healed me enough, and I thank the fact that shifters heal faster than humans.

Looking at Walim and Gamzin, who are my official high-ranking officers, I wait for them to fill me in.

Beta Walim speaks, "You were shot with an arrow, but as yet, we don't know who fired it. Hopefully, the meeting will inform us of what the hell is going on. As soon as Soren was dead every one of his warriors stopped fighting and stepped away, showing defeat, disgust to the body of Soren, and relief that the war was over."

I walk rather steadily from the medical tent, which I realize is the Northern Sector, to another tent that has the alphas and councilmen all in attendance.

Stepping inside, Flint gains my attention. "Alpha Connell, it's good to see you are on your feet again. Come, take a seat here." Waving to a chair next to him. I walk over and sit, giving everyone a courtesy nod as I do so.

The man who I'd seen snap Soren's neck is standing next to Councilman Ward, looking relaxed, I have to admit. Flint pats my leg, gaining my attention.

"Dirty trick that got you. But we have him and he'll not walk away from it." Flint winks and I blink because I've never seen him do that before and it's such a shock that I don't even know how to respond.

Councilman Ward speaks, gaining everyone's attention. "This is Falan. He is the illegitimate son of Alpha Soren. Apparently, Soren wasn't particular about where he mated and to whom he mated. By mating, I don't mean bite and claim.

"Falan's mother was full sister to Luna Hope's mother. Hence the reason he was able to impregnate her. Once he had had his fill of her, he threw her to the side and went back to his chosen mate.

"Now Falan has grown into a powerful male. Trained to be a warrior and although he has been alone for a lot of years, he has survived within the pack by keeping his head down and nose clean.

“How it wasn’t found that Falan was Soren’s son, I don’t know, but he has killed the Alpha of the Wolfsong Pack. The Northern Sector Council has spoken, and we are happy for him to take his place as the Alpha of the pack.”

I take to my feet, stepping over to Alpha Falan. I hold my hand out to shake, and as he takes it, I can’t help the shit-eating grin that crosses my face. “Thanks for stepping in when you did, and as you are family, I want to be the first to congratulate you on becoming Alpha.”

“Family? What do you mean? I have no family,” he replies.

“Oh yes, you do. My mate is Luna Hope, and she was the daughter of Alpha Soren, which makes you a half-brother, and you’d have been a cousin even if you had different fathers.” I watch the play of emotions cross his face, and seeing his eyes glaze I know he’s speaking to his wolf.

“This is awesome. I can’t wait to see Luna Hope’s face when she finds out. She’ll be stoked, and you won’t be able to hide from her as she’ll want to know you,” Beta Walim gushes. Delta Gamzin laughs. I know we’ll all see this happen in the future.

“So, who shot me?” I ask.

“The Beta, he was lying in wait. We have him in custody, and he was under alpha command that as soon as Soren gave him the signal he was to shoot anyone he was fighting with. But he fought the command to give a kill shot, and that’s why you live, and that’s the only reason I haven’t ripped his head off,” Alpha Falan states as a matter of fact.

“What happened to Luna Corintha, and Luna Tatiana? I saw Ebony fighting, and I’ve got to say she was magnificent.” Hearing a growl, I look over at Alpha Gabriel, who is glaring at me. “Hey, it’s a compliment. Luna Hope can’t fight for nothing. All her trainers gave her a bat to fight with instead.”

“Then she missed with her first swing when she was being attacked,” Bladrick laughs.

“Maybe so, but she broke his neck with the second,” I proudly state.

A deep chuckle has me looking at Alpha Falan. “A bat?” he asks, then throws his head back, laughing loudly. The room laughs with him, and I’m thinking how nice it is to see all the Alphas come out of the fight intact.

“Well, Luna Corinthia is dead. She went for a last bite of Ebony, and that was her last opportunity because Ebony, slid under her belly, ripping her claws through her, then latched onto her neck and held on until she stopped breathing.” Alpha Gabriel has his arms folded over his chest, and we can all feel how proud he is of his mate.

“So, are we done? Can we go home now?” Alpha Lyle asks as he starts to walk toward the exit.

“Yes. The Northern Sector Council will sort out what happens next, but the Wolfsong Pack has a new Alpha, and with it, I’m positive will be a new way forward,” Flint grins.

After thanking everyone, we make our way home, and I’m more than grateful we had no losses in our pack, and any injuries were minor. I’ll have to thank Chief Oscar for the training he has given, because it is his work that has everyone coming home safely.

Chapter 35



CONNELL

Arriving home was the most satisfying feeling. I never leave Blackshadow Pack for any reason other than the normal humdrum of pack life. But to arrive home after being in a war, and with everyone safe, I have a feeling of euphoria.

Picking up a squealing Hope, I carry her right to our apartment and we don't leave it for two days. Only opening the apartment door to take the food from an amused Nessie and closing it again.

Now it's time to get back to normal, pull the pack forward, and get myself updated on what happened at the pack while I was gone.

Walking to the apartment door, I come to a stop, drop my head in shame, then turn to Hope, who had been walking behind me.

"Hope. I'm sorry, I'm an idiot. I had something important to tell you and with everything else, I forgot. I apologize."

"What did you forget? You told me my disgusting father is dead, and his evil Luna. She was like the Wicked Witch of the West from what I've been told." Hope gives me a grin, and I know she's trying to gloss over that I've not told her something.

Taking Hope's hand in mind, I lead us to a couch in the living area of the apartment and take a seat, but I keep hold of her hand. "There is no easy way to say this, so I'll just blurt it out. You have a half-brother."

"What?"

“It comes to pass that you had an aunt who your father impregnated. The result is Falan. He was within the pack but had been kept well away from the Alpha and Luna. He has seen the atrocities they committed over the years, and he saved my life. He killed your father.”

“Oh, my Goddess.” Hope is looking shocked, and I’m not surprised, but I give her a moment to recover. But then she giggles before looking at me with a sparkle in her eyes. “I have a brother, a real one. Maybe he is only half, but he is my brother. Can I speak to him? Will he meet me? Oh, did he kill Luna Corinthia too?”

“I will contact and see if he will speak to you, and meet with you. But he is now the Alpha of the pack, and I’m positive he will be swamped with things he had to get control of and clean up. No, he did not kill the Luna, because Luna Tatiana did, and I have to say spectacularly.” I’m stroking Hope’s wrist hoping it will keep her calm and connected to me.

“Was Luna Tatiana alright? I thought she was supposed to stay in the town?”

“Well, she was, but it turns out she isn’t good at following orders, as she is an alpha female. But from what I saw, Alpha Gabriel is okay with the fact she does things her own way at times.”

“You knew her, didn’t you?”

“Tatiana was part of this pack, and if I’m honest, the best thing that ever happened to her was leaving. My eyes were opened to the evil in this pack when she left, and the extent of how feral my father was came to light. I vowed to myself that I would *never* be like him, and if I found I was, I would leave the pack and become a rogue.”

“You are not like your father. Pack members have spoken to me about what it was like before you were Alpha, and Connell, they all love you and see what you are achieving for the pack.” Hope kisses me gently, then squeezes my hand. “Come on, let’s not dwell on the past. We both have pasts

that leave a nasty taste in the mouth. But let's leave it where it belongs, in the past."

"You are so clever, mate." I kiss her gently and pulling back, she giggles before jumping away from the couch and running for the door laughing.

I watch as Hope runs into the kitchen and I walk over to my office. Taking a seat, I mind link all my officers to come to the office. Picking up paperwork on the desk, I can see Beta Caleb has done a fine job and grin as that means I won't be swamped with things, and can get back to Hope earlier than I thought.

Betas Caleb and Walim walk into the office first and take a seat positioned on either side of my desk but facing the room. Gamma Baildon and Delta Gamzin enter and give me a show of their necks in respect. Chief Oscar enters and takes a seat after closing the door behind him.

The next hour, we discuss what happened and the threat to Hope being resolved. Everyone is more than shocked that Hope has a half-brother, but we all know that she will embrace that fact if Falan will allow it.

Our discussion leaves the war and turns to the rogue issue along the Spirit Walker Pack border and edging onto our eastern border. Something is seriously wrong in no-man's-land, but anyone that has been sent to look into it has never returned. Not something any of the packs want to try again. Losing pack members is never easy, but to lose them in that manner is a bitter pill to swallow.

'Alpha, someone is at the Northern border wanting permission to enter.' I'm mind linked by Warrior Weldon, who is on the northern border patrol.

'Who is it?' I ask.

'Said he's called Raymer, and he has a female with him. She looks in a bad way, Alpha.'

'Okay, bring them toward the packhouse and I'll have Delta Gamzin meet you.'

“Gamzin, your friend Raymer, is entering the territory from the northern border. He has a female with him. Go meet Warrior Weldon and retrieve the two of them so he can get back to his patrol. Oh, and you best take someone with you, but bring them both here.”

“Yes, Alpha Connell.”

I watch as Gamzin leaves the office, then turn back to continue the meeting. We discuss the issue with the border and decide for now to maintain the patrol as we are doing, but I'll speak to Alpha Lyle once more for any information he may be able to add to what I know already.

The meeting closes and everyone returns to their normal duties while I sit behind my desk wondering what has happened with this female and why they have both ventured to my pack.

'Alpha Connell, we are entering the packhouse now. The female is Molly Goodfellow. We, from the Parklands, know her. She has been hurt fighting a rogue as she tried to leave and come find Hope, Walim and all of us.'

'Take her to a room, and I'll have Hope come look at her.' I reply and then continue mind-linking to Hope and Beta Caleb.

Entering the room, I look at Delta Gamzin and give him a nod before stepping closer to the female, who is now unconscious on the bed. She has scratches, cuts and bruises all over her face and arms. Goddess knows what her body looks like.

Hope dashes into the room, quickly stopping at the side of the bed. Lorna rushes in carrying a bag which smells of lavender and chamomile if my sense of smell is correct.

“All you males, out!” Hope points at the door, and we all step outside the room. I can't help but grin at the command with which Hope demanded, and she didn't have any idea she'd just given a Luna command.

“Did you feel that?” Gamzin grins.

“I did, but she had no idea she did it,” I chuckle, then turn to the male standing next to Gamzin. “So, you must be Raymer?”

“Yes, Alpha Connell.”

“Are you wanting to be a pack member? I have heard good things about you, and some of the new pack members vouch for you.”

“I was leaving the Parklands to come here and see if there was a place for me in the pack when I heard a fight. Turning back and running to see what was happening, I saw Molly fighting with two rogues who, from the smell of them, were from no-man’s-land. She wasn’t doing too badly, but they were much larger than her and it was two against one. I launched into the fight and between us, we killed them, but Molly was injured. We both would like to join the pack if there is a place for us here?” Raymer, I can sense is being honest, and forthcoming, and from what my pack members tell me, he is a good fit for the pack.

“We have a place for you both if you want to be a part of the pack, but be sure because once you join, you will be a full member. We don’t hold back once you are a member. You’ll be included in everything the pack does.”

Gamzin is standing quietly, and when Raymer gives him a questioning look, I wait for what he’ll say.

“I’m the Delta of the pack. Walim is second Beta, and Baildon is the Gamma. Hope is the Luna, and everyone else chose what they wanted to be involved with. Some joined the team that are constructing new cabins, others work in the kitchen, or housekeeping. We even had gardeners and warriors. We all have melded into the pack structure and are more than happy with our lives.” Gamzin is standing proudly and I’m feeling a sense of achievement hearing his words.

“We both would like to join the pack. We discussed it as we made our way here. Staying undetected through the Blood Pearl Territory, and remained on the Wolfsfoot general areas, so avoiding any conflicts of any kind.”

Raymer looks exhausted, and I slap his shoulder, giving it a friendly squeeze. "Let Gamzin show you a room, so you clean up and rest. Then you can eat and come to the office where we can bring you into the pack. I'll go check on Hope and see how Molly is doing. Now off you go, and don't worry about Molly. She is in excellent hands."

Checking that Hope has everything under control, and Molly is resting easily now. I leave them to their healing ways and make my way back to my office. I know the quicker I make them pack members, the better. The last thing I need is two rogues loose within the pack. My new members who know them will be okay with that, but my older members will not welcome them as easily if I don't do this quickly.

Walking over to the safe, I take out the journal, as I need to make an entry covering the war.

Entry, Alpha Connell Torrance.

The threat to Luna Hope has ended. The war with the Wolfsong Pack was over quickly. The Northern Sector Council, our Shifter Council, and all packs apart from the Blood Pearl Pack stood side-by-side facing the wrath of Alpha Soren Wolfgang and his Luna Corintha.

It came to light that Alpha Soren did not associate with his lower pack members, only his Beta and what he called his inner circle. Because of that, he missed the fact he had a son. Falan Whitestar. Falan, as did Hope, has his mother's surname with being illegitimate. But I have to admit I am more than happy she was not named as a Wolfgang. I'm not sure how Falan feels about that, but he easily, it appeared, killed his father and then moved on to catch the Beta, who I heard was as evil as his Alpha and Luna. He did, for some unknown reason, decide not to kill me with the arrow he fired, but we may never know the reason why. I wash my hands of this as it's now the Northern Sector Council's problem.

Hope and I will do our best to build a familial relationship with Falan, but sadly, his mother died, so he

is the only blood family that Hope now has. He didn't seem averse to knowing Hope, so I'm going to wait and see what develops.

The threat now gone leaves us with our minds centered on the rogue attacks from the east. No-man's-land is becoming more of a problem all the time. Hitting our border more than ever before and it's along the eastern border where my territory meets theirs.

Everything else is as my last entry and I don't feel I have to elaborate on anything at this time.

Signed - Alpha Connell Torrence

The door of the office opens and Hope walks inside, giving me a smile before she throws herself onto my lap and places her head on my shoulder.

I wrap my arms around her, and take a deep breath from her neck, licking my mark on her neck. She shivers and I smile against the mark, knowing I'm being sneaky.

"Stop that. I wanted to tell you Molly is resting now, and her injuries are healing steadily. Her wolf is tired and stressed, but once she is a member of the pack, she'll fully heal and be happy, the same as we all have become."

"I'll bring them into the pack this evening. I'll do it quietly without making a show of it because they both are exhausted. I could sense and smell it, but as you say, once in the pack the security they will feel, the belonging will help them tremendously."

"Molly is a good person. She was thrown into the Parklands by her father. When her mother died, he met another she-wolf, and she wanted nothing to do with Molly, although she was only fifteen at the time. How she has survived I don't know, but we all tried to help each other, so I hope that was a factor in her not dying at a young age."

"What pack was she in?" I ask, because if she was from our area, I'll be seeking this father out.

“She was from the Northern Sector, but I don’t know what pack.” Hope kisses my chin before climbing from my lap and holding her hand out to me. “Come on, let’s go for a walk and make sure everyone is good.”

This is why Hope is such a good Luna. She considers everyone and wants everyone to be happy and well. “Okay, let’s do that.”

We walked the pack, speaking to everyone that passed us, then made our way to Raymer and Molly, who I made pack members. Raymer wants to be a carpenter. He loves making furniture, designing anything that can be made from wood. I’m okay with that and he will be useful once the cabins need to be fitted out. Molly always wanted to be with children, so Hope informs me of her idea for a creche, and Molly being the ideal person for that position.

Retiring to our apartment, I’m surprised when my phone rings and it’s Falan calling. I pass my phone to Hope, who cries with happiness that her brother has reached out. They speak for nearly an hour and agree that they’d like to get to know each other. I’m sure this is going to turn out well, as he has an aura that you can’t miss. That aura smells of honor and he throws strength alongside it. He is going to be a hell of a good alpha, and I’m sure a loving brother.

Chapter 36



CONNELL

It has been two weeks since peace prevailed, and although no one seems to know what is happening within the Blood Pearl Pack, everything else is quiet.

At the moment, the Spirit Walker Pack seems to be faring better, as the rogues from no-man's-land are taking a break. I know that Alpha Lyle is giving his warriors extra resting times, but he has stepped up the hours he is patrolling.

I have been over to the Spirit Walker Pack and spoken with Alpha Lyle, and will take a few days patrolling with Beta Walim, Delta Gamzin, Warriors Armon and Rune to give him a rest.

Alpha Chet is also coming along to take a few tasks off Lyle's shoulders. He has his son home from the Alpha training camp that the shifter council started. It is a college where alpha heirs can be sent to learn all aspects of running a successful pack. Of course, I was never enrolled to the college, but I would have been happy to attend.

I have heard good things about Alpha Chet's son and heir, Bronze, and I'm sure Chet is proud of, and will be more than happy, to leave the pack in Bronze's hands when the time comes.

Mulling over everything seems to have become a pastime for me, and my mind wanders from one thing to another. The main thing that worries me is the sudden seeming retreat of the rogues from no-man's-land. We are all watching and waiting for whatever they do next.

“Connell, will you get ready? People will arrive shortly and you need to be with me to greet everyone at the front of the packhouse,” Hope whines, but I know she has every reason, and I give her a kiss on the forehead before running to our apartment and getting showered and changed in record time.

We greet Alpha Chet and Luna Sage along with Bronze and four pack members. Two males and two females, all looking eager to get inside and see if their mates are here.

Hope had no response from Alpha Aurora regarding the invitation, and we expect no attendees from the Blood Pearl Pack. It seems something dire is happening within the pack, and the council has not been able to enter the territory or speak to Alpha Aurora since before the war.

Alpha Lyle is not in attendance, but his Beta, Earl, along with six pack members, has arrived, bringing four males and two females, who are also keen to get inside the ballroom to check who is attending.

Alpha Gabriel is here too with eight members of his pack, all bustling to get inside, and so eager they give a quick nod of respect, then rush inside. I chuckle and look at Gabriel, who has Luna Tatiana tucked into his side.

“What can I say Connell? They are eager to find their mate, if they are in attendance. I had to give a firm order that no more attended because most of the damn pack wanted to come,” Alpha Gabriel laughs.

Luna Tatiana steps away from Gabriel, loops her arm with Hope’s and they both walk away with Gabriel and me behind them. We keep pace with them, and I have to admit I’m enjoying the sight of Hope’s hips swaying from side to side.

A small growl erupts from between my lips, and I rub my chest as I look over at Gabriel. “Sorry, it just escaped.”

“Oh, I know the feeling well, Connell,” Gabriel chuckles.

Walking to the front of the highly and beautifully decorated ballroom, I hold my hand out for Hope to join me. When Hope

is standing beside me, looking beautiful in a long pale blue dress, I start to speak.

“Welcome everyone to the mating ball. I hope some of you will find your mate, and also the happiness that brings to you. I can attest that there is nothing better in this world than finding your mate. It completes you in a way nothing else can.

“If you find your mate, you will have to decide between you which pack you will stay a member of, whether it be the male’s or female’s. It doesn’t matter which, it is up to you to decide.

“Now, enjoy the food and dancing. May the Goddess be with you.”

Music starts and people start walking around, sniffing and looking for their person. The one that makes you whole. I look at Hope as she tugs on my hand.

“Follow me, Connell.”

I do, of course, but what she shows me has me stunned and unable to find a single word. We have walked into the garden my mother designed and worked in. The Luna Garden. It has been brought back to its original, stunning beauty. Someone has worked nothing short of a miracle. I can see Silas must have had a hand in this. It smacks of his attention to detail and care in the renovation.

A deep, luscious, red carpet stretches from the doorway into the garden itself. Beautiful roses are in bloom all around the flower beds. There are so many different colors and varieties, it’s hard to know where to look first. The soil looks rich and damp. It adds to the overall beauty of the garden. There are ground cover plants, climbers, and scented blossoms throughout the area.

In the center, however, is the water feature. It has been sympathetically cleaned so as to look worn, weathered, and not look new. The water tinkles as it flows from the vase that the female is holding while she is entwined with her lover. Two pups frolic and gambol around the lovers’ feet. Their

tongues lolling and the eyes have been colored and polished to look almost real. I can't help but notice that they resemble Hope's and my eye colors.

After the delight of seeing all the garden, and the joy the memories bring to me, we re-enter the ballroom just in time to see William stop dead in his tracks, turn slowly and shout, "MATE!"

Looking in the direction he is looking, a small female with red hair, green eyes and with the largest smile I think I've ever seen responds, "MATE!"

This female takes off running across the ballroom and launches herself into William's arms, wrapping her legs around his waist, arms around his neck, and kisses him thoroughly.

Giggling has me looking down at Hope, who is struggling to hold back the full-on laughter that wants to escape. "Do you think she's happy to find her mate?" Hope giggles again.

"Not really," I grunt, but we both know I'm joking.

We hear 'Mate,' 'Mate,' and 'Mate' five times throughout the evening. I'm not sure who is finding who at this point, but the ballroom is missing a few couples, that is for sure.

By morning I will either have gained a member or members or lost some. I hope it's gained, because I don't want to lose William or anyone else.

"What did you say?"

Both Hope and I turn, seeing Gamma Baildon looking down at Isla with shock all over his face. I take a step forward, thinking something bad is about to happen. But when Isla mumbles, 'Pup,' I stop and grin.

"A PUP, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A PUP?" Baildon yells, but his face is bursting with love and pride.

Hope laughs, claps her hands together and shouts, "I'M GOING TO BE AN AUNT!"

My oh my, this is a good mating ball.

The next morning, we only see William has found a mate and his mate Lucretia wants to stay here at the Blackshadow Pack. She had been with the Eclipse Pack, and Alpha Chet was more than happy to allow Lucretia to leave his pack.

Alpha Chet, Luna Sage, Bronze along with myself and Hope, remove Lucretia from the Eclipse Pack and officially make her a Blackshadow Pack member.

To Hope's delight, Lucretia is a healer too, and has studied surgeries when broken bones have not mended correctly, and the like. But she has an understanding of herbal medicines as well. I can tell Hope, Lorna and Lucretia are going to be the best of friends.

Lucretia quickly became Lucy, and everyone now calls her by her shortened name. She is bubbly and funny but works hard wherever she is needed. She is not one to wait for a pack member to be sick. She rolls her sleeves up and helps in the kitchen, housekeeping, and even harvesting in the orchard.

The pack has a great feel about it now. We are all committed to the betterment of the pack and the pack members. All helping each other whenever needed and in any way that we can.

Six months after the mating ball, Flint arrives unannounced. He does this whenever he feels he wants to be involved with a pack. I'm not sure he cares which pack as long as it's a pack, and finds the fellowship he needs.

"What can we do for you?" I eventually ask as we are walking around the pack grounds.

"I just wanted a bit of time away from the council. I don't enjoy being stuck in my office all the time. It's damn depressing. I wanted to see your new cabins and the school. Your updates are refreshing Alpha Connell." Flint stops walking and turns to me, giving me a serious look.

"You are welcome here any time. I think you know that without me having to tell you," I say, but I'm unsure what he's

wanting to hear.

“I wanted you to know that I’m proud of what you have achieved. You have taken a broken pack and turned it into a highly productive one. You’ve taken in rogues who had lost hope of ever being anything other than that. You have, and still are, building cabins for your pack members that want to move out of the packhouse, for one reason or another. You’ve built a school to encourage any mates to have pups, and know they are provided for.”

Turning, we continue walking whilst viewing the new cabins and passing the school. “You knew I wanted to make the pack a better place for everyone. After what my father did, I had to do something good, or I would have felt the rot in my soul.”

Slapping my shoulder, Flint nods in understanding. “Beta Caleb tells me you have a safe room, too. Wise, Connell, very wise.”

Continuing our walk in silence we arrive back in my office where we take an easy chair each, settle back and sigh. In my case, I’m sighing with satisfaction, but when Flint speaks, I know that is not true in his case.

“We have news that Alpha Aurora Pearl is under some kind of threat. Somehow, one of her she-wolves got out of the pack’s territory and made her way to the council. I need you to be very careful of your borders and for your pack members. From what we are told by this female, ten of Alpha Aurora’s pack members are being held hostage.”

Sitting up quickly in my seat, I look Flint in the eye. “Who has done this? Why?”

“We don’t know who, but whoever it is takes more than half the food they produce, the funds that they make, and threatens if anyone finds out about the situation, the ten hostages are dead.”

“Have you come for my support?”

“If we need it, will you give it?” Flint asks.

Without hesitation, I reply, "Yes."

"Thank you. We have everyone's support if needed, now that you have agreed. I just hope we are not too late."

Before Flint can say anything else Hope runs into the office smiling. "Come on, you two, we are having the 'Harvest Thankfulness Ceremony', and then we are going for a pack run."

That's all it takes for us to follow my beautiful Luna out of the office, enjoy the gathering, and then head into the forest. Life has never been better and I can't thank the Goddess enough for the blessings that she has brought to me.

Throwing my head back, I start the thankful howls.

Ahwooooooooooooo



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