



# PACK

SHADOW GUILD: WOLF QUEEN

# OF LIES

BOOK THREE

LINSEY HALL

# **PACK OF LIES**

---

## THE WOLF QUEEN BOOK 3

LINSEY HALL

# CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Thank You!

Acknowledgments

Author's Note

About Linsey

Copyright

*Eve*

I stared at the door that had just been closed in my face, shocked.

“She didn’t know anything.” My voice sounded hollow to my own ears.

“Someone else will.” Mac, my seer friend, wrapped her arm around my shoulders and drew me away from the house. It was located in a quiet London neighborhood, and we were alone on the early morning street.

My old friend Liora hadn’t slammed the door in my face, but it sure felt like she had. We’d come to her because she was the best potion maker in London, and I’d hoped she’d have something that would help me control my wild new magic.

Against all odds, she’d had nothing.

I rubbed my arms and stared out at the residential street. Two days ago, a mysterious foe called the Maker had torn my enchanted necklace away from my neck, releasing a powerful magic within me. Ever since then, I’d felt it roiling, wanting to burst free and wreak havoc.

“I need to gain control of it,” I said. “Fast.”

Mac nodded, her short blond hair glinting in the light. “That bastard was never trying to kidnap you, was he? He just wanted to ignite the power within you.”

“Well, his plan worked.” I could feel my newfound power sparking like a live wire. Suddenly, I had the ability to move massive things with my mind, but I had no idea *why* I could do that. It certainly wasn’t a shifter trait...not that I was a proper shifter.

We turned the corner toward a busier part of London. Big Ben rose in the distance, the iconic clock tower spearing majestically toward the sky. The early morning was still dark, the streets quiet.

“Why does Liora live out here?” Mac asked. “There’s just so many humans.”

I shrugged. “I don’t know, but—”

A figure ran out of a brick building about fifty yards in front of us, tall and familiar.

I squinted. “That’s no human.”

“Is that Lachlan?”

The flash of dark hair under a streetlamp had a slightly different shape, and I gasped. “Garreth.”

“Holy fates.” Mac turned to me, eyes wide. “Let’s get him.”

I was already running, my heart pounding in my ears as adrenaline surged through my veins.

Garreth had been missing ever since the fight down in the Clerkenwell tunnels last week. We thought we’d won him over

to our side, but the Dark Moon curse had stolen him back, and he'd disappeared. We hadn't heard from him since.

*This is my chance.*

If we could catch him, maybe we could cure him. But there was no known cure.

Didn't matter. We still had to catch him. For Lachlan. For Garreth himself.

But he was so damned fast.

The bastard was still lengths ahead of me and sprinting toward a corner. He neared the edge, and I knew that by the time I reached it, he would be gone—down an alley or through an door.

Panic flared. This could be our last chance.

My new magic surged inside me, seeming to have a life of its own. It roared, rising like a beast. Even though the telekinesis didn't seem like a shifter trait, I felt more like a wolf than ever.

I spotted a rubbish bin across the street from Garreth, right in front of a large lorry parked along the curb. I reached out, my magic surging effortlessly through my arm. An image flashed in my mind of me hurling the bin at Garreth and knocking him down. I hadn't used my magic since the fight in the Clerkenwell tunnels, and it exploded out of me, so powerful that my vision went blurry and I fell to my knees, a tearing sensation ripping through my middle. Agony flared as I gripped my stomach, trying to keep my eyes open through the tears.

Ahead of me, the lorry shot away from the curb, lifted into the air by my magic before hurtling across the street to slam



into the building on the other side. Bricks and glass shattered and flew everywhere.

“Holy fates.” Mac stopped abruptly.

I gaped.

The lorry had smashed side-first into the building, breaking away the wall so that debris lay scattered all over the pavement.

“Garreth,” I whispered, staggering to my feet. Had I killed him?

My insides felt like they had been torn to pieces, and I gasped, my head spinning.

Mac turned back to me, her face pale. “Are you all right? You look like hell.”

“Fine.” Dumbstruck, I staggered toward the lorry.

It was early, and no one was out of their houses yet, but they’d be here any second, roused by the sound of the collision.

“Garreth got away,” Mac said. “I saw him turn the corner right before the lorry hit.”

“Thank fates.” Kind of. We needed to catch him, but more importantly, I needed *not* to kill him.

As I staggered up to the lorry, I noticed the bin on the other side of the road. It had tumbled onto its side, but it hadn’t moved.

Damn it. My damned magic was so broken, and I hurt like hell.

Mac put an arm around my waist to help me walk. Gratefully, I leaned into her. We neared the building, and I

prayed that no one had been hurt. Fear turned my insides sour, competing with feeling of being ripped apart.

Fortunately, the sign above the door indicated that it was a dentist's office, closed until midmorning.

Thank fates. Gratitude welled within me. No one had been hurt.

"Did you mean to do this?" Mac asked.

"No." I looked toward the bin that had tipped over. "I was going to try to hit him with that."

"Shit." She turned to me. "You look bad."

"I feel bad."

"Oy, what's going on here?" A rough, masculine voice sounded from behind us, thick with a London accent.

We turned back to see a man in his dressing gown staring at us from his front stoop a few buildings down.

Mac and I looked at each other.

How to explain this?

The thing was...we couldn't. Humans shouldn't know about magic, but how else would a lorry slam side-first into a building?

"We need to get out of here," Mac murmured. "We can find a way to help pay for the damage once we're safe."

I nodded, wincing at the idea of how long it would take me to pay off this debt. I'd have to, though. I couldn't just leave this poor dentist up a creek.

Together, we turned and staggered off down the street. Every step was agony, and Mac had to put more and more strength into keeping me upright. Several blocks down, we

heard the sound of police sirens and ducked into an alley. They weren't likely to question us, but better safe than sorry.

Mac leaned me against a wall, and my chest heaved as I used all the energy I could muster to stay upright.

“What happened to you?” she demanded.

“Tore something.”

“Like a muscle?”

“Like...” I frowned, searching for the word. “My soul, maybe. Fates, I don't know. But it hurts.”

“Your soul?”

“Yeah. Like the magic went wild and something real bad happened.” I clutched my stomach.

Mac nodded, her jaw set. “We need to fix this shit.” She gestured up and down my body. “Whatever is wrong with you, we need it sorted.”

“Yeah.” The word escaped on a gasp. “I'm just not sure how much longer I'm going to be conscious.”

“You'd better not pass out on me.” She reached for me again, wrapping an arm around my waist. “Come on, we're almost to the Haunted Hound.”

“Sure thing,” I mumbled, but as soon as the words escaped my lips, darkness took me.



*Eve*

Awareness returned slowly, my vision going from black to gray to color.

A furry face stared down at me, nose twitching.

*You need vodka.*

“No, Ralph,” I croaked. “I’m pretty sure I don’t.”

Ralph patted my cheeks. *Well, Quinn doesn’t have chocolate. Which I’m planning to take up with his supervisor.*

I blinked and realized that I was lying on the bar at the Haunted Hound. No wonder Ralph had recommended vodka.

All around, my friends’ faces came into focus. Mac, Carrow, and Quinn all leaned way too close.

“The others are at the scene,” Carrow said. “Trying to sort things out.”

I groaned and sat upright, my insides still feeling like I’d been ripped apart. It was a physical pain, kind of. “How long was I out?”

“Twenty minutes since we brought you back,” Quinn said, his eyes dark with concern.

“We?”

“I couldn’t carry you on my own,” Mac explained.

“Thanks.” I looked at Quinn. “You?”

He nodded. “You were like a sack of potatoes the whole way back.”

“I’ve been called worse.” I climbed off the bar and sank onto a stool.

“You don’t feel any better, do you?” Mac asked. “Still look like warmed-up porridge.”

I grimaced. “And *that’s* the worst.”

*Friends tell the truth.*

“Thanks, Ralph.” I tried to catch my breath, but it was hard. I shouldn’t be panting. Not now. Not after resting for twenty minutes.

“I don’t have a ton of seer power,” Mac said, “but I can give it a try.”

“Do it.” I stuck my arm out toward her, hoping her magic would let her get a feel for what the hell was wrong with me.

As Mac rested her fingertips gently on my skin, I could feel the gazes of my friends. The worry radiated from them like the stink from an old gym bag, but nice. Kind of. While I appreciated that they were concerned, I wasn’t keen on them directing it at me. I’d prefer to pretend everything was normal.

My soul, however, wasn’t in the mood to pretend.

Mac rested her fingertips on my arm for the briefest second, then gasped and jerked her hand away.

I whipped toward her. “What is it?”

“Um...” She frowned. “You’re kind of...broken.”

“Broken?”

“Something inside you. Like your magic is trying to separate from your body.”

“Damn it, that’s exactly what it feels like.” I grimaced, wishing that I’d been exaggerating things in my head. “What do I do?”

“Get control of it,” Mac said. “Soon.”

Considering that I’d just thrown a ten-ton lorry across the street by accident, I could see the value in her words. And the

fact that I wasn't sure I could walk added an extra incentive.

The only problem was... "How? I don't even know what I am."

"We need to figure it out," Carrow said.

I frowned, thinking of Garreth. "That's not the only thing we need to figure out. What was he doing out in human London?"

"That's a problem for Lachlan."

"And me. It's my fault we lost him."

"Hell, no, it's not," Carrow said.

"It was my plan."

"And it was a good plan. But not your fault."

I shrugged. "Anyway, they're connected. I know it. He works for the man who incited this change in me. He'll have answers, or be able to lead me to them."

Carrow frowned, then nodded. "Fine. Point taken."

"It has to do with your past, too," Mac said. "It must. You need to figure out what you are."

*Easier said than done.*

I nodded. "I know. But first things first, I need to find a pain potion if I'm going to survive this."

Mac swallowed hard, her eyes dark with worry. "Yeah, you need to hurry."

I squinted at her. "What didn't you tell me?"

She drew in an unsteady breath. "You don't have a lot of time."

"What do you mean?" A chill raced down my spine.

“I mean that if you don’t figure this out soon, you’re only going to get worse. Your magic will tear you apart.”

*Lachlan*

Mordaca stared at me, her sorceress eyes flashing with irritation. “You look like hell.”

“I feel like hell.” I dragged a hand through my hair, feeling my very bones ache.

She leaned against the table and folded her arms in front of her chest. Her black silk robe seemed to absorb all the light, and her ebony bouffant looked like she hadn’t just been asleep. “Hellish enough that it was worth waking me up at this godawful hour?”

“I thought you’d be awake.” It was midnight, and she was generally a night owl. I also hadn’t cared. “I was desperate. *Am* desperate.”

“Does it have anything to do with the weird black eyes thing you’ve got going on?”

I raised a hand to the corner of my right eye. “It’s back?”

“It’s not permanent?”



“Oh, it’s permanent. But I’m doing what I can to fight it off.”

“You’re losing the fight.” She looked me up and down. “I always knew you’d fall to the curse one day. A shame.”

“Always knew?”

“Come on, Lachlan. A guy like you was eventually bound to fall for someone.”

Not someone. *Her.*

It had always been her, from the moment I’d seen her. It was why I’d tried to drive her off. It was why I hadn’t been with anyone since I’d met her.

Fat lot of good that restraint had done me. I’d still succumbed to the curse.

“Well? Can you make anything to hold it off?” I asked.

“Can’t Eve do that?”

“Of course. But I can’t be near her right now.”

“I suppose that makes sense.” She turned to the shelf behind her and studied the vials of ingredients. The glass bottles glittered under the light, their rainbow contents gleaming. “I can’t make anything to prevent the curse, but I can make something that buys you a bit of time. A bit of sanity.”

Thank fates. I had too much to do before I succumbed. Once the Dark Moon curse stole my loyalty and my soul, it’d be necessary for my pack to put me down. I didn’t want to curse them with that burden. Once I’d stopped the one who was after Eve, I could disappear. Put myself out of my misery.

Save them from that, at least.

I pulled the flask from my pocket and raised it. “Any chance you could increase the strength of this?”

She looked over her shoulder and raised a brow. “It’s completely stopped working?”

“How do you think I got the eyes?” My feelings for Eve had overcome the potion that repressed them, igniting the Dark Moon curse.

I was lucky to have made it as long as I had. If she hadn’t been wearing the charm that repressed her shifter side, I’d have lost control much sooner.

“Good point.” She looked me up and down. “Do you love her?”

The question hit me like a freight train.

Did I?

No. Not yet. But there was enough between us that I couldn’t fight it.

It felt inevitable that I would.

“My wolf senses its mate,” I said, knowing that was the bulk of it. “It was enough to ignite the curse.”

“Lie.”

My brow creased. “It is not.”

“Lie by omission, then. I believe that your wolf senses her. But I also think you care for her. And *that* is why my potion has stopped working for you.”

She was right. There was no point in fighting it. “Which means you can’t increase the strength of it.”

“Correct. I can give you something to hold off the madness from the curse. Probably the same thing Eve would make, a

little extra powerful due to my blood. But you're going to keep feeling those pesky feelings of yours."

*Pesky feelings.* An understatement in the extreme. I nodded to her. "Thank you. I'll take whatever you can give me."

"And pay nicely for it as well."

"Of course." I leaned against the shelf behind me and watched her work, my mind spinning over the problem of Eve.

We'd avoided each other since the fight in the Clerkenwell tunnels, but I'd had guards on her every second of the day. Well-hidden guards, but she'd likely seen them at some point. Their reports had been both a torture and a pleasure to hear.

Though I knew it was bad for me, I was ravenous for details of her. I couldn't help myself.

I tilted my head back against the shelf, memories of our last kiss flashing through my mind.

No matter what I did, it was imperative that I resist more of that.

But how?

I shook my head, driving away the thoughts. If there was one thing I couldn't afford to think of, it was the sweetness of her lips.

"All done." Mordaca held up several small vials. "Use them whenever you feel the need, but use them wisely. If you can space them out, you'll have longer."

I nodded, walking over to take the vials and hand her the substantial payment.

She stared hard into my eyes, searching. “Be careful, Lachlan.”

“Always.”

She huffed out a small breath. “Somehow, I don’t believe you.”

Without another word, I turned and departed her workshop, striding down the dark hall to the exit. As I stepped out onto the quiet street that ran through the center of Darklane, I searched the pavement all around me, looking for Garreth.

He wouldn’t be here, of course, but I’d found it impossible not to look for him everywhere I went.

My brother was out there somewhere, cursed by the same thing that was about to take me.

I’d failed him.

I tucked the vials of potion into my pocket. I could spare a few more hours before I was forced to take one, and I should.

As I stepped onto the pavement, the air around me vibrated with magic. I stiffened, my senses going alert. The wolf inside readied for battle.

In front of me, the air shimmered, and a figure appeared.

The seer. Her white hair was pulled back in a long braid, and her floral dress swept the grimy street.

I blinked, shocked. I’d never seen her outside of her cottage before. Hadn’t even been sure she could leave it, in fact.

“Don’t look so surprised,” she said.

I felt my eyebrows rise. “Really? You’ve never left your cottage once—we need to make a blood sacrifice to even try to see you—and I shouldn’t be surprised when you appear on the other side of the world?”

“It was important. Vitally so.”

“Is Eve all right?”

She frowned. “Define *all right*.”

Fear chilled my skin. “Just tell me, damn it.”

“She’s alive. Mobile. Mostly healthy—physically, at least. Though she feels like hell, I imagine.”

I hated the idea of it. “What’s wrong with her?”

“That, you’ll have to ask her. I am not here to discuss Eve, but rather your brother.”

“What about Garreth? Is he safe?”

“As safe as you are.”

“Not good, then.”

She shrugged. “That is for time to determine. But I am here to tell you that you must pursue Garreth. The vision was very clear. What he seeks—what *they* seek—is still bound to Eve.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot see the details, but I know that they are twisted together like a rope. What they seek is part of her past. Part of her.”

“Why didn’t you tell her this?”

“She is in her tower, protected from the outside world.”

The protections, of course. The Shadow Guild had increased their security after Eve's stalker had started getting bold. "What else can you tell me?"

"Just that they are not done with her yet. You must stop them if you hope to save her."

"I can't be near her."

"The curse." Her eyes swept me up and down. "I can see it starting to take hold. You care for her."

I stared at the seer, not needing to confirm it.

"Well, get it under control. You can't afford weakness."

Story of my life.

"Go now," she said. "You must work together. Only with both of your skills will you be able to save her. Fate demands it."

Damn it, that would be difficult.

"Do as I say." She stared hard at me, her glare even flintier than mine. "This is the only time I will visit you in this fashion."

With that, she disappeared.

Damned elusive seer.

I turned back to Mordaca's house to find her peering out the window, her pale face alight with curiosity. She raised her hand and waggled her fingertips, her black, pointed nails gleaming.

"Nosy sorceress."

She grinned.

I turned away and drew a transport charm from my pocket. Quickly, I hurled it to the ground. The silver cloud burst upward, and I stepped into it, letting it suck me through the ether. I envisioned the alley near the Shadow Guild tower and arrived a few moments later in its shadowed recesses.

The buildings rose tall on either side as I looked toward the narrow exit. I reached into a pocket and withdrew one of Mordaca's vials. I'd wanted to save them until I really needed them—I just hadn't expected to need one so soon. But there was no question that seeing Eve would be risky.

I uncorked the vial and tossed it back, grimacing at the sour taste. A moment later, a sense of calm shivered through me.

Suddenly, I felt more like myself. The dark shadow that the curse had cast over me felt distant.

Grateful, I heaved a sigh and started toward the end of the alley. The protections on the courtyard fizzed against my skin but didn't repel me. They'd clearly included me in the exemptions to the spell, thank fates.

The Shadow Guild tower soared overhead, the silvery gray brick gleaming in the early morning light. Roses climbed the walls, the vines curling around the windows protectively. As I neared, the main door opened.

Carrow stood in the doorway, her right eyebrow arched as she looked at me. "Well, look what the cat dragged in."

Eve's familiar appeared at the woman's side, its little masked face staring speculatively at me. The raccoon's black eyes glittered with suspicion, and I vowed to bring it a chocolate bar next time to try to win the creature to my side.

*Win it to my side?*

*Next time?*

What the hell was I thinking? Those were ridiculous fantasies that would never come true.

“I’ve come to speak to Eve,” I said.

Carrow crossed her arms. “She’s not accepting visitors.”

“I’m not a visitor.”

“Considering that you’re standing out there and I’m standing in here, you definitely are a visitor.”

I sighed. “I appreciate that you’re being protective, but I have a message from our most revered seer. It will be important to her.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Well, perhaps that changes things.” She spun around. “Wait here. I’ll check with Eve.”

The door slammed in my face, but not before Ralph scurried out. He sat on the stoop, staring up at me.

“Hello, Ralph.”

Ralph frowned. *I’m not sure about you.*

“Neither am I.”

*You’re dangerous.*

“I am.”

*I like dangerous. But not when it comes to Eve. Her life has been too hard.*

Fates, this raccoon. “I’ll bring you a chocolate bar next time.”

I couldn’t help but try to win him to my side.

*I am not so easily bought.*



I gave him a skeptical look.

*I just make people think I'm easily bought. So make it a big one, and I'll pretend you're not the worst.*

I nodded.

The door finally opened, revealing Carrow. She looked down at Ralph. "Bargaining?"

He nodded.

"Take him for all he's worth." She looked up at me. "Eve will see you."

"Thank you."

As soon as I stepped over the threshold, I felt Eve. My heart clenched, and the wolf inside seemed to sigh with satisfaction.

My mate was near.

Absently, I rubbed my chest. How the hell was I supposed to resist this? Just being near her felt good. I could feel her presence like a part of me, and I craved it.

"She's in her workshop," Carrow said.

"Thank you." I strode across the sitting room and took the stairs two at a time, barely restraining myself from running.

When I reached Eve's workshop, I spotted her immediately. She stood over a small silver cauldron, stirring with a long wooden spoon. Her silver and pink hair gleamed in the light, and she looked tired. The shadows under her eyes only served to highlight her delicate beauty, and I couldn't look away.

My palms itched to pick her up and pull her toward me. Desire surged inside me, commanding me to crush my lips to

hers and taste her.

*No.*

It was the worst thing I could do. Especially when she looked so tired. When she might be ill.

The thought made it easy to shove the beast back down.

*Eve*

I stared at Lachlan as the potion spread through my system. I'd just made a batch of powerful pain reliever, and I'd drunk the dose as I'd heard him climbing the stairs. The medicine couldn't make me forget the pain of my soul being torn in two, but it did make me functional.

For now.

Like all good things, it wouldn't last forever. I'd need to be quick, solving my problems before I was in a puddle of agony on the floor.

But Lachlan was *here*.

I stared at him, hardly able to believe my eyes. It hadn't been long since I'd seen him, but it had felt like an eternity.

I'd missed him.

I knew I shouldn't, but I had.

And now that I could feel the bond between us...

It was hard not to walk up to him and press my lips to his. The mate bond didn't make me love him, but it did draw me to

him. He was magnetic enough without it. With it...all I could do was think of our explosive kiss.

It was my damned wolf.

I'd thought I hadn't had one, but my visit to the stone circle on our ancestral grounds had proved me wrong. I still couldn't shift, but there was definitely something inside me.

Now that I couldn't hide as a fae, my latent wolf wanted him. I wished she would make an appearance so that I could run beneath the full moon, but instead, she only showed up to pant after the Alpha.

"You're different," he said, his eyes shadowed with worry.

"Of course I am. I don't have my charm."

"That's not what I meant."

"I'm fine."

"Tell me what's wrong."

"Don't you think we shouldn't be doing this? Talking in a room like nothing is weird?"

"You have a point, but this is important. Are you well?"

"Your eyes aren't black." I'd been so swept away by the sight of him that I hadn't realized he no longer had the black eyes of the Dark Moon curse.

"It's temporary. A potion from Mordaca to help me fight off the effects of the curse. Similar to the one you made Garreth. It won't last forever."

"A bit stronger, though?"

"How'd you know?"

“Mordaca is powerful, and you’re the Alpha. You’d need a stronger potion.”

“It will work for a while.”

Could he still feel emotion? Or had the potion in his flask stopped working entirely? Did his new potion suppress emotion?

I found that I could not ask. “Why are you here?”

“Our seer visited me on the streets of Darklane.”

“Whoa, hold up. She *visited* you?”

He nodded. “I found it shocking as well. But she had a message that could not wait.”

“About me, I assume.”

“Whatever Garreth seeks—whatever the Maker seeks—is tied up with you. Bound to you.”

I shivered, afraid of something like that.

“It’s part of your past, according to the seer. Part of you. And the ones who have been seeking you are not finished with you yet. We have to work together.”

I frowned. “That’s dangerous.”

“And that’s what I told the seer, but she insisted. It’s the only way we can stop them.”

I leaned against the table behind me and sighed. I trusted the seer—of course I did. It would be foolish not to.

Could I work with Lachlan, though? I had no idea...but it sounded like I would have to.

“The Maker must know what’s happening to me,” I said. “He tore my charm off on purpose. The change was already

starting inside me—new magic surging to the surface. A beast I thought I didn't have. But when he ripped the necklace away, he knew that it would be the final straw."

"How do you feel?"

"Like shit. If I don't sort this, it won't go well for me." I told him what I knew, but I didn't want to discuss it, so I finished with, "I saw Garreth this morning."

Horror flashed on his face. "Did he come for you?"

"No. Didn't even see me. I spotted him in London, and I mistakenly threw a lorry at him."

"*Threw* a lorry at him?"

"I'm more powerful than I realized." I shivered, remembering the tearing pain. "But it broke something inside me. My magic or my soul. I don't know which. But I need answers. It sounds like Garreth or the Maker will have them."

He nodded, his lips tight.

"We'll get him back," I said. It was another reason we needed to find Garreth. We owed him. We'd almost got him away from those who were using him, then we'd chucked him right back into the fire.

Lachlan nodded. "Where did you see him?"

"Like I said, out in London. I'll take you there. We can ask some questions, hopefully. Get an idea of what he was doing in the building I saw him leave."

"Let's go."

"Give me a moment." I bottled up more of the pain potion and tucked it in the pocket of my jeans. Ready, I grabbed my

slim-cut leather jacket off the back of a chair and shrugged it on, flipping my hair out from underneath the collar. “Ready.”

Together, we descended the stairs. He let me go first, but I was aware of his every movement. Knowledge of him sent heat racing through me.

In the main sitting room, Carrow stood from her chair by the fire. Cordelia was stretched out in front of it, warming her belly, but Ralph was nowhere to be seen.

“Can I help?” Carrow asked.

I considered the offer, wanting to take her up on it. But depending on how this thing with Lachlan went—depending up on how my health deteriorated—I might need her assistance much more later on. Better to save it.

“Not at the moment, but I’ll let you know. You’re a life saver. Thank you.”

She nodded and watched Lachlan warily as he exited the tower.

“I’ll be fine. Promise,” I said to her.

“Take care of yourself.”

“Of course.”

I followed Lachlan out into the courtyard, and he turned to me. “Where are we headed?”

“Westminster.” It wasn’t far. “Let’s go through the Haunted Hound.”

He nodded, and we set off across town. Guild City was quiet at this time of morning, most of the residents having found their way into offices and shops for the workday. When we passed through the Haunted Hound, Mac was on shift.

“Headed back to the scene of the crime?” she asked.

“Yep.” I didn’t know if she meant Garreth’s crime or mine, but both fit.

“Be careful out there.”

I nodded and waved, then slipped out the door, Lachlan behind me. We hurried into Covent Garden and caught a cab, then quickly made our way toward the part of town where I’d last seen Garreth. Though we rode in silence, tension prickled the air between us. How long could we stay like this? Near each other but unable to do anything about it? *Forbidden* from doing anything about it?

It would drive me mad.

When the driver stopped and let us out, Lachlan paid. I stepped onto the pavement and walked up to the narrow brick building that I’d seen Garreth leave. The long stone plaque over the door had been inscribed to read *Museum of Ancient History*.

Lachlan joined me, a frown on his handsome face. “He was in there?”

“Ran out like his arse was on fire.”

“He had to have been stealing something.”

I nodded. “Information at the very least. Artifacts at worst.”

“Let’s find out.”

We climbed the short steps to the front door. I gripped the handle and felt the prickle of magic under my palm. If I’d been human, I’d have been filled with an irresistible desire to turn around and walk away. As it was, I knew what was going on and pushed my way through into a quiet marble foyer that had



been decorated with blue silk wallpaper long ago. This was one of the rare supernatural properties hidden within London itself, though I'd never heard of it before.

“Hello?” a harassed voice sounded from the top of the gleaming wooden stairs. “Who’s there?”

“Lachlan MacGregor.” His voice echoed in the foyer.

I considered announcing myself, but it wouldn't make a difference. A few moments later, a slender old man appeared at the top of the stairs. He raced down, quick for his age, and skidded to a stop in front of us on the marble floor.

“I am Aeneas Threadgill.” His white hair was wild around his head, and his clothing reminded me of the dwarves' usual attire, brilliant and perfectly tailored. The suit was a bold blue, the waistcoat neon green silk embroidered with tiny snakes. “What are you doing here?”

From the accusation in his tone, he wasn't going to buy that we'd come to peruse the collection. That kind of ruse wouldn't get us what we wanted, anyway.

“I saw a man run out of here very early this morning,” I said. “We're looking for him.”

Aeneas scoffed. “So are we, the bloody thief.”

“What did he take?” Lachlan asked.

“Are you his friends?” Aeneas's gaze skipped over me and landed on Lachlan. “Are you related? You share similar features.”

“Distantly,” Lachlan lied. “But we seek him for the same reasons you do. He's wronged us. If you can help us find him, we'll return whatever he's taken from you.”

“Can I trust you?” He searched our faces.

“We don’t want the artifact, just the person who took it,” Lachlan said. “We’ve been hunting him for a long time.”

The desire in his voice was palpable, and Aeneas could clearly hear it. He nodded, seemingly satisfied. “Fine. Come with me.”

He turned and hurried down the hall.

We followed. As we walked, I peeked into the rooms that split off the main hall. They were stuffed to the gills with ancient artifacts, so full that they almost made me itchy to look into them. So much dusting. How had they acquired all of these objects?

In a room at the back, Aeneas stopped in front of a broken display case. He looked at us, his gaze heavy. “Ours is the foremost collection of artifacts related to the supernatural world. Highly valuable.”

“But not well secured?” I asked, looking at the broken glass.

Anger flashed in Aeneas’s eyes. “*Very* well secured. In all two hundred fifty-six years of our history, we have never suffered a theft.” He tapped the iron edge of the display case. “This has been enchanted to repel the attacks of all living things. And yet, the thief still managed to break in.”

“How?” Lachlan asked.

“That, I do not know. A spell that shouldn’t exist, perhaps. Or he’s more powerful than any species we’ve ever seen, able to resist the magic that bound this case.”

“He’s not,” Lachlan said. “He’s very powerful, but he’s not capable of something that unusual.”

“Magic, then.”

“It makes sense,” I said, and looked at Lachlan. “Garreth might not be that powerful, but the Maker could be.”

I could feel Aeneas’s attention sharpen. “Garreth is his name?”

“One of them,” Lachlan said. “An alias.”

He was protecting his brother, even though he knew he’d done wrong. I couldn’t blame him.

“Can you tell us what you saw? What you heard?” I asked Aeneas, and looked at the case. An empty patch of navy velvet revealed the imprint of the missing object. “What was taken?”

“I saw nothing.” Aeneas frowned, clearly bitter. “But I did hear a commotion. Two, actually. One after the other.”

“Two people?” I asked. Did Lachlan have a partner that I hadn’t seen?

“I do not know. By the time I came downstairs, it was over. The artifact was gone, and the museum was empty.”

“What did he take?” Lachlan asked.

“An artifact called the Moon Stone. It has been in our collection since the founding of the museum.”

The Moon Stone? I shivered. Could there be a connection between that and the crescent moon mark on my palm?

After what the seer had told Lachlan, this couldn’t be a coincidence.

I *was* connected to whatever Garreth was doing, and I wanted to find out what the hell that was.

“Where did it come from?” I asked. “What is it?”

“Wait here, and I will bring you what information we have. You’ll need to know what it looks like if you’re to return it to

me.”

The old man disappeared, and I whispered to Lachlan, “He trusted us quite quickly.”

*It's me.* Ralph's voice sounded from the ground. *I'm very trustworthy.*

I looked down at him and grinned. “Thank God you're here.” Actually, I mused, I shouldn't joke. My familiar could be useful. “Why don't you go sneak around and see if anything else has been disturbed?” I knelt and picked up a piece of broken glass, then handed it to him. “Careful with this. Take it to Carrow when you're finished here.”

Ralph gently gripped the glass and nodded, then scampered off, clearly enjoying having a task.

“Carrow?” Lachlan asked.

“She can read information from objects. Perhaps if she touches the glass, she'll get an idea of what happened here. Maybe see if Garreth had a partner that I didn't see.” He could have been just ahead of Garreth, already around the corner by the time I'd spotted him.

Aeneas returned a moment later and handed me a simple cardstock folder. “That is all the information we have on the Moon Stone.”

I flipped open the folder and looked down at the paper, then frowned at how blank it was. There were only a few sentences, along with a picture of a glowing white rock that looked smooth as glass. “This is it?”

He nodded. “Records were not always very good in the past.”

“Perhaps the antiquarians should have left things where they found them,” I said.

“There is an argument for that, yes.” He nodded to the folder. “But as you can see, we don’t know much about it. I’ve got no idea why the thief would want such a thing when we have so many more valuable items here.”

That was what frightened me. Quickly, I scanned the document. The Moon Stone had been found in the center of an ancient building on the Isle of Wyre, one of the Orkney Islands in far northern Scotland. A man named Sir Lawrence Keith had discovered it on an antiquarian expedition. He’d dug it out of the center of the building’s floor, apparently.

“Wyre is one of the little islands, isn’t it?” Lachlan asked.

Aeneas nodded. “Barely inhabited, but it is home to only supernaturals.”

“What kind of supernaturals?” I asked.

“I do not know. But I would announce myself before stepping ashore.”

I nodded and raised the folder. “Thank you for this.”

“You’ll have to give it back.”

“Of course.” There wasn’t a lot of info on it, but I didn’t want to leave that behind, either. I pulled my mobile from my pocket. “May I take a photograph, at least?”

“Fine,” he grumbled. “But be quick about it. And be quick about returning the Moon Stone.”

I nodded. I didn’t mind his grouchiness, and I knew I didn’t want Garreth to have the damned stone. Aeneas could have it back, for all I cared.

But then the cluttered glass cases caught my eye. Perhaps the stone didn't need to be here, after all. Perhaps I needed to return it to its rightful resting place.

I shook away the thought. First things first, I needed to find the bloody thing and figure out why Garreth wanted it.

And I needed to find out if it could fix my magic. At the thought of it, pain sliced me so fiercely that I nearly went to my knees. I gasped, pressing a hand to my abdomen.

Something was very wrong.

I swallowed hard, knowing that my face was far too pale.

"Are you all right?" Lachlan frowned, worry flashing in his eyes.

"Fine." My voice was reedy as I stood upright.

The Moon Stone had to be connected to whatever was wrong with me. *Had* to be. The coincidence was too much, and the seer said Garreth's goal was connected to my magic.

*Wishful thinking.*

Fates, I prayed not.

Quickly, I handed the folder back to Aeneas. "We'll be in touch."

He nodded.

Together, Lachlan and I left the museum. On our way out, I saw Ralph rooting through a drawer in one of the side rooms. I had no idea if he was still on the mission I'd given him or if this was something personal, but I left him to it.

Outside, we paused on the pavement, and I looked up at Lachlan.

"Are you all right?" he asked. "Do you need to rest?"

“I’m fine. No time.” I frowned. “Strange that he trusted us right away. We’re not with the police or government.”

“Perhaps he doesn’t want them involved.”

I thought about the collection. It wasn’t usually illegal to have an old collection like that, no matter how ethically questionable it might be. As long as the artifacts hadn’t been taken recently—now that it was *definitely* illegal to take artifacts from ancient sites—he should be in the clear.

“I bet a lot of that stuff was bought on the black market,” I said. “The core of the collection is old enough to be within the laws, but there was a *lot* in there.”

“So he’s just grateful we might return the thing to him without asking too many questions.”

“I think you’re right. Have you heard of this Isle of Wyre?”

“Only in passing. It’s supposed to be dangerous.”

“It doesn’t matter. We have to go.”

*Eve*

Lachlan escorted me back to the Shadow Guild tower. Though he had to return to his own place, he insisted on walking me up to the courtyard where our protections began. We made the entire journey in silence, as if by unspoken agreement we could only communicate about Garreth and the Moon Stone.

We were halfway across the courtyard when the air in front of me shimmered.

“Do you see that?” I asked.

“See what?”

A moment later, the Maker stood in front of me. He wore the same dark, simple clothes that he’d worn previously, and an unholy fire burned in his eyes.

I lunged backward, my heart shooting into my throat.

Lachlan grabbed me by the shoulders, supporting me from behind. “What is it?”

Holy fates, Lachlan couldn’t see him.



“You,” I breathed, reaching frantically for a tiny potion bomb on my wrist cuff. “You’re not really here.”

“No, but I’m with you,” said the Maker. “Always.”

The words sent a shiver down my spine.

“What do you want from me?”

“Checking your progress. The answers are waiting for you, but you must keep going.”

“Just tell them to me, damn it. You must know them.”

“Even I do not know them all. *You* must make the discovery. If you don’t unravel the lies about your past—about *yourself*—then you will shatter inside.”

*Shatter inside.* I already felt like I was.

The vagueness of his words enraged me. Unable to stop myself, I hurled the potion bomb at him. It flew through the air, shooting straight through his ghostly form and exploding on the ground behind him.

He disappeared, leaving no trace, and I gasped and collapsed against Lachlan. Pain tore through my middle, a feeling like my magic was trying to part ways with my body. Cold rushed over me, followed by terrible heat.

Lachlan swept me into his arms, concern on his face. “Are you all right?”

“Fine.” I bit out the word, hating that he was seeing me like this. Hating the display of weakness. “You can put me down.”

“I really can’t. You look pale as a ghost.”

“I saw one.” I shoved at his chest, and he scowled. “Lachlan, put me down.”

He did as I asked, clearly not liking it. When my feet hit the ground, I staggered. He reached out and gripped my arm with a gentle hand, and I leaned against him.

“I’ll be fine.” I reached into my pocket and withdrew one of the pain potions. “Just a little weak after seeing the Maker.”

“You saw him? That’s who you were talking to?” His gaze went alert, every muscle stiffening. I saw the wolf behind the green of his eyes, protectiveness rising inside him.

I nodded as I uncorked the potion and tossed it back. Pure relief shot through me, and I sagged against him, grateful. “That’s better.”

He wrapped an arm around me, keeping me upright. I knew it was a bad idea to lean into him, but I couldn’t help myself. He was just so warm and strong, and it felt so right.

After a moment, I steadied myself and told him exactly what I’d seen. When I was done speaking, he nodded. “Right, let’s get you inside, and I’ll go learn what I can about this Isle of Wyre. Then we’ll head up there.”

“Thank you.”

He escorted me into the tower. No one was in the main room when we entered, but I could hear someone upstairs.

“Eve?” Carrow shouted.

“Down here!” I turned back to Lachlan. “You can go. I’ll see you soon.”

“Be safe.”

I nodded.

He turned and strode across the courtyard. I watched him leave, unable to look away.



*Lachlan*

I left Eve at her tower, making sure that she shut the door before I exited the courtyard.

My mind spun as I made my way home.

Eve had just seen the Maker. He'd appeared to her using some kind of magic, but her potion bomb had flown right through him.

What the hell was happening? Why was he stalking her?

Inside me, my beast growled. Eve was at risk from a threat we couldn't see. The idea of it made me want to howl.

I had to protect her. But *how*? Even *I* was a threat. And I knew what I would do if I became too dangerous for her.

But there was even more than that, and asking my pack to put me down wouldn't save her from the Maker.

I dragged a hand through my hair and climbed the stairs to the main door of my tower. As I entered, I could feel the gazes of the people inside. Their faces betrayed their emotions: worry, fear—but underneath it all, trust.

They still trusted me, even after I lost Garreth. Even after my eyes had gone temporarily black.

I didn't deserve such faith, but I'd have to find a way to earn it.

As I passed through the great hall, I nodded at each of them. Kenneth would likely be in the back, and he was the one

that I sought.

I found my right hand in the armory, taking stock of the armor we hadn't had cause to use in years. It was a blessing that these were relics of the past. Though we still fought, there was no more large-scale war. Long ago, the packs of Europe had clashed on the field of battle. Such frays had required armor, sleek and fitted to a wolf's body. These days, packs didn't always get along, but we managed to hash out our disagreements around a table instead of on the battlefield. There might be the occasional one-on-one clash, but nothing that required armor.

I'd consider it a success if this room stayed quiet and unused during my tenure.

When I stepped inside, Kenneth turned, his face relaxing. "Alpha."

"Kenneth." I nodded.

He tilted his head, frowning at me. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." The words came by instinct, but they were a lie. "Actually, of course I'm not. You know what's happening."

Kenneth's jaw tightened, as if he didn't like to speak of it. "I..."

"Ignoring it won't help, you know that."

He heaved a sigh and dropped his clipboard by his side. "You're going to ask me to do what needs to be done."

"If you must, yes."

Pain flashed in his eyes. "Can't we find a cure?"

“Perhaps.” *Probably not.* “More likely the best that I can promise is that I take care of the grisly task for you.”

Horror twisted his face. “No, you mustn’t.”

“Don’t worry yourself over it. I’ll do it somewhere you’ll never need to know.”

“This is too morbid, boss.”

Yes. It was.

“All the same, you must be prepared to act without hesitation should my eyes go permanently black. I would take myself out of the equation now, but there’s something I need to do before that’s a possibility.”

“Eve.”

“Eve. We need to find out what’s happening to her. The Maker is still after her, but like a spider spinning a web. He won’t approach yet, but he’s just as dangerous. And I must find Garreth. Can I count on you?”

He hesitated, then nodded, clearly hating every moment of this conversation. My second’s loyalty should warm me—and it did—but there was little room in the coldness of my heart just then.

“We’ll stop this,” Kenneth said. “Somehow, I know it.”

I felt a small smile tug at the corner of my mouth. “Perhaps. It would help if you could tell me everything you know about the Isle of Wyre.”

His eyes brightened. “Of course. That’s something I can do, no problem.”

Kenneth was our resident historian, knowledgeable in all areas of shifter and supernatural history.

“I’m going to get some transport charms from my quarters,” I said. “Will you meet me there once you’ve collected whatever you need?”

He nodded. “I’ll be there soon.”



*Eve*

After a quick shower and meal to recoup my strength, I joined my friends in the main sitting room. Beatrix and Seraphia had returned from their work at the dentist’s office, smoothing over the mess I had made.

They sat by the fire, Beatrix with her bright purple leggings and wild dark hair, Seraphia curled up in a long, flowing dress in a spring green that made her look like the earth goddess she was.

I sank into the chair across from them. “Thank you so much for taking care of that. What do I owe you?”

“Still sorting that out,” Beatrix said. “But you might get lucky.”

“Lucky?”

“Insurance!” Seraphia said.

“But the van hit the building in a way that is basically impossible via the laws of physics,” I protested.

“That doesn’t mean we could tell them it was magic,” Beatrix said.

“Good point.”

“We’ll keep you updated,” she replied.

“Thank you.”

Carrow and Mac came in from the courtyard and took their seats in the other comfy armchairs.

“Lachlan is coming,” Carrow said. “Just saw him enter the courtyard. Quinn is still on shift at the Hound.”

“Good timing.” I nodded, trying to play it cool even though my heartrate had just picked up the pace in a big way.

A knock sounded at the door a half second later. Even from here, I could sense that it was Lachlan.

Something stirred, somewhere in my soul. I rubbed my chest, frowning at the unfamiliar feeling. I’d thought I hadn’t had a beast. How wrong I was.

Carrow called out for Lachlan to enter.

He stepped inside, as handsome and powerful as ever in his jeans and a thin, dark sweater. It pulled at his shoulders, emphasizing his muscles in a way that I was sure was unintentional but certainly worked on me.

I looked away.

“I’m just in time?” he asked.

“Yes.” I nodded, trying not to make eye contact. It was imperative that I keep my distance.

He took a chair next to me, stretching his long legs out in a relaxed fashion that I knew he couldn’t possibly feel. There was far too much at stake.

“Well, I can start, since I didn’t find much.” Carrow leaned forward. “The glass that Ralph brought me had almost no information that I could read. It was broken by a hammer.

Even though the glass was enchanted to protect the contents of the case, Garreth seems to have had a potion or spell to counteract that. I just couldn't read it from the glass."

"You saw him?" Lachlan asked.

She frowned. "Actually, no. But Eve saw him running away from the building, correct?"

"Yes," I said, "but if he had a partner, I didn't see them."

Carrow nodded. "We can canvass the street that he ran down, see if anyone saw which direction he went. And it's a long shot, but I can see if he touched any lampposts or anything on his way. Might give me some insight."

It was definitely a long shot, but I appreciated that she was trying. Her skill was a valuable thing for hunts like this.

I turned to Lachlan. "What did you find?"

"Kenneth was familiar with the Isle of Wyre. He gave me directions. We can't just transport, but we can get close and hire a boat."

"Can't go directly there?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It's a quiet island of only supernaturals. It would be considered a threat if we just showed up via magic. Better to follow the usual protocols if we want them to help us, or at least not attack."

"Of course." I turned to my friends. "Thank you for helping."

"Duh." Mac grinned and hopped up. "Let's get started."

I nodded and rose, joining Lachlan. "Shall we go?"

He stood, and my breath caught when a hint of his forest scent reached me. It wrapped around me, nearly making my



head spin.

How the hell was I going to survive a trip with just him?

*Eve*

Lachlan and I used one of his transport charms to reach the village of Brinian on the shore of Rousay, one of the larger Orkney Islands. When the ether spat me out onto the quiet street, sea air whipped across my face.

I breathed deeply and turned around, inspecting my surroundings.

It was midday, and the sun gleamed brightly overhead, peeking through massive white clouds. Muted green hills rose behind the town, and I could hear the sea crashing against the shore somewhere behind me. The village itself was built entirely of austere gray stone, but it was something beautiful in its simplicity.

Lachlan turned toward the sound of the sea, which I could glimpse in the space between the buildings.

“Wyre is supposed to be only a few miles off this coast. We need to find a ride.”

“Did Kenneth have a suggestion?”

He shook his head. “We’ll ask in the pub. I’m sure a lot of local business happens there.”

“Good plan.”

We set off down the street, headed closer to the water. There weren’t many buildings in the town, and most of them looked residential. More likely than not, the public spaces were gathered around the wharf, as was common on most of Scotland’s smaller islands. For much of our history, the sea had been the primary form of transport in places like this. Still was, actually.

We passed a tea shop and several stores before finding a little pub with a chimney that wafted thick gray smoke. The sign over the door read *The Fin and Folk*.

Lachlan opened the dark door and ducked under the low lintel. I followed, stepping into the dim, smoky interior of a pub that had probably been there since the town’s founding. A hearth blazed along the right wall, with the bar on the left. Little round tables filled the space, each crowded with a fisherman in a heavy knit sweater or a rosy-cheeked person with wet hair and a bulky rubber suit lowered to their waist. Thick jumpers covered their top halves.

Scuba divers?

Perhaps. Orkney was known for its impressive underwater scenery and shipwrecks. So much of this place revolved around the sea that it should have been no surprise we needed a boatman as our first order of business here.

I gave each person in the bar a quick look, but it didn’t take long to determine that they were all human.

Lachlan approached the empty bar, and I followed, taking one of the empty barstools while he remained standing. He

towered over everyone else, the sheer magnitude of his presence making him stand out like a sore thumb.

The bartender was likely somewhere in the back, so I took the opportunity to yank on Lachlan's arm until he sat next to me. At his questioning look, I whispered, "You look threatening."

He frowned. "No, I don't."

"You do, and you needn't even try."

"Should I hunch my shoulders?" The corner of his mouth tugged up slightly, making him look so handsome that I had to turn away.

"You're fine." My voice was stiff, but it was for the best. We couldn't be joking with each other.

Thankfully, the bartender chose that moment to step through the door behind the bar. He was a middle-aged man with bright eyes and round cheeks.

"Visitors, aye?" he asked.

"Aye," Lachlan said. "Was hoping you could help us hire a boat to Wyre."

The man stepped closer, his eyebrows raised. "Wyre, you say?"

The interest in his eyes was too avid, and now that he stood closer, I was able to get a hint of his magic: seaweed, salt air, and something unfamiliar. He was the only supernatural in the place, but I couldn't pin down what type he was. That in itself wasn't unusual—some species played it close to the vest—but I knew without a doubt that I'd never met something like him before.

“You know what you’re getting into if you head over there?” he asked.

“A bit,” I said. “Anything we should be aware of in particular?”

He looked us up and down, and I could feel him trying to get a hint of my magic. “You seem like you can handle yourselves.”

“I like to think so,” Lachlan said. “Is there anything you can tell us about Wyre?”

He shrugged. “More Vikings than Scots over there. But we’re not far off, either.”

Of course. I’d forgot the history of the northern isles. They’d been settled by Vikings nearly a thousand years ago, and the people here had as much—if not more—Norwegian ancestry than Scottish.

I leaned closer to him, desperate to get an idea of what he was. Some kind of Nordic supernatural I’d never heard of, perhaps?

He raised a curious brow at me, and I found myself unable to stop from asking. “What are you?”

The friendly twinkle in his eyes disappeared. “I could ask you the same.”

“You’re right. Neither of us is normal,” I said. Lachlan was an Alpha, to start—unusually powerful. And I was a... whatever the hell I was.

At that moment, the door creaked open behind us, and the bartender’s gaze moved toward it. His eyes brightened again. “That’ll be Colm. He’ll take you in his boat if you pay him.”

“Thank you.” Lachlan pressed a twenty-pound note to the bar and stood.

I followed, giving the bartender one last look as I left, wishing I could figure out what the hell he was.

When I approached Lachlan and Colm, I spotted the older man’s mouth turning down in a frown. He wore a bulky knit jumper with a waterproof jacket over top.

“Dangerous to go there,” he grumbled.

“You won’t even have to land,” Lachlan said. “Just pull alongside the shore and let us out, then head off.”

“Can’t use a transport charm to get off,” he said. “Anyway, it’s not just the island that’s dangerous.”

“We’ll make it worth your while.”

His eyes narrowed. “How worth it?”

“Name your price.”

The man’s wrinkled face creased even more deeply as he thought. “You’re either stupid or desperate. My money is on a bit of both.”

Lachlan just smiled at the insult, unbothered by the crotchety old boatman. “What’ll it be?”

“Five thousand across, then five thousand back. Can’t in good conscience leave you there.”

But he’d charge us for the privilege of the return.

“Can we call you when we need to leave?” Lachlan asked.

Colm shook his head. “No signal. But a flare gun will do you. I’ll give you one.”

“Thank you. Can we go now?”

Colm shot a longing glance at the bar behind us, no doubt wanting his lunch and a pint. Then he nodded. “Your sort is always in a rush.”

“True enough,” Lachlan said.

Together, we left the bar and headed down to the small wharf. It was little more than a concrete pier reaching out into the gray sea with small boats tied up alongside. In the distance, I could see the larger fishing vessels bobbing on the water beneath the swooping gulls.

“That’ll be me.” Colm pointed to the small fishing boat tied to the end of the dock. It was probably twenty feet long, with a closed-off pilot house and bright red paint on the hull. Colm saw me eying the garish color and said, “Don’t want Poseidon mistaking me for his own and dragging me under.”

I nodded. “The Greek gods get a lot of consideration out here?”

“Not much, no.” He stopped next to the boat and began to untie the lines.

I climbed onto the deck, followed by Lachlan. Colm jumped on after us, then held out his palm to Lachlan. “Payment first.”

Lachlan nodded and pulled a thick wad of notes out of his pocket. He’d clearly come prepared to buy our way onto Wyre, and I was grateful.

Colm took the cash and handed Lachlan a short, blunt flare gun. “You’ve got one shot.”

“Thank you.” Lachlan pocketed the gun.

With the practicalities finished, the boatman fired up the engine and cast off the final line. Within seconds, we were

puttering away from the dock and headed out to sea.

I stepped up to the bow of the boat to get a better view and could see a low-lying island in the distance. Lachlan joined me and murmured, “It’s Wyre.”

Halfway across the water, a ferocious current began to pull at the boat. It moved so swiftly that I could see it rippling the water.

From behind me, Colm cursed. “Blasted currents.”

The boat’s engine roared as he tried to push through the water. I gripped the railing tightly, hoping that the little boat could keep up. Through the waves, I spotted something bobbing in the distance. When the water dropped low enough to give a good view, I gasped and pointed. “It’s a person!”

This was way too far from land for a person to be safely swimming.

“Nah,” Colm barked. “No such thing.”

“It is.” I leaned over the bow and squinted, trying to get a better view. When the waves dropped a second time, I spotted a seal. Its gray head bobbed above the waves, and its black eyes stared hard at me.

I rubbed my eyes. “I’d swear I saw a person.”

“Trick of the light,” Lachlan said.

I looked up at him. “It’s not. There’s something funny going on here. I sensed it with the bartender, too.”

He gave me a long look, then nodded. “All right. I’ll stay alert.”

“Good.” I turned back to the waves, searching again for the person.



I never saw them, and a half hour later, Colm's boat was close enough to shore that I could see dozens of seals on the rocky beach. Damned place was littered with them.

Maybe I *had* imagined things.

Then I felt the magic that vibrated from the island. A protective charm, for sure. But something else, too. Something familiar and strange.

What the hell was up with this place?

I rubbed my arms. This was all very weird.

"I'll pull alongside those flat rocks," Colm shouted from behind. "You jump off."

I spotted the rocks he was talking about and moved to the midsection of the boat where the railing opened to provide an exit. Lachlan followed.

"When you get on land, go to St. Mary's church. Old thing, you can't miss it."

"Do people live there?" I asked.

"No. But if you go there, it will announce your presence. Best way to avoid trouble."

"Thank you."

The boat slowed as it pattered near, waves knocking against the hull.

"Almost there," Colm said. "Be ready."

Right before we were close enough to jump, I heard Colm say, "Trust your eyes, lassie."

I wanted to ask for more detail, but the boat was already skimming alongside the rocks, a foot between us and the island.

“Go!” Colm shouted.

I leapt off, landing with a slight skid on the wet stone.

Lachlan followed, and we hurried onto solid ground. When I turned back, Colm was already moving quickly for deeper water.

“He really doesn’t like it here,” I said.

Lachlan turned toward the quiet, barren island. “I don’t blame him.”

“Really?” It felt a bit strange to me, but also somehow comforting.

“Don’t you feel it? This place doesn’t want visitors.”

“I can feel the protection charm. It’ll keep us from transporting off, just like Colm said. But I don’t feel much more.”

He gave me a considering look.

“What?” I asked.

“Nothing. I don’t know. Let’s go.”

He turned and began to climb the small, gradually sloping hill above us. I followed, keeping my eyes peeled for the sight of St. Mary’s.

“There’s not much on this island.” As far as I could see, there were two sections of stone ruins, each on a hill about a mile from the other. Some smaller, roofed buildings sat near the shore on the left side of the island.

“Which one is the church?” Lachlan asked.

I studied them, then settled on the simpler, rectangular ruin and pointed to it. “I bet it’s that one.”

He nodded and set off. We cut across the boggy ground as the sun sneaked behind the clouds. I stayed alert to the presence of others but felt no one.

When we reached the church, I entered through the open doorway. Whatever wooden door had once been there was long gone. Same for the floors, pew, and roof. It was just a shell now, and had been for hundreds of years.

The strangest sense of kinship washed over me. “I’ve never been here before, but it all feels so...familiar.”

Lachlan turned to me, brow furrowed. “Really?”

I nodded. “It’s the strangest feeling.”

“The seer said that this mystery was tied up in your past.”

“And you think this place is part of that?”

He shrugged, turning to inspect the back wall of the church. “Probably.”

“I don’t know much about my past. Just my mother. My father is a blank. Same for Mum’s extended family.” It had never bothered me much before now, but suddenly, it was like a hole in my heart. This lack of knowing could be problematic.

Lachlan looked my way again, his lips parting to say something, but instead, his gaze went to the door behind me.

“I don’t suppose you’re here to pay your respects,” a crotchety old voice said.

I wheeled around and spotted a stooped old man with brilliant red hair that couldn’t possibly be natural. Not given the lines on his face, at least. Like the bartender, he had a magical signature that I couldn’t place.

“No,” I said quietly. “We’re seeking information about the Moon Stone that was found here.”

“Stolen.”

“Stolen?”

“Aye, stolen.” He pounded his cane on the ground. “Do you think it just jumped out of its holy resting place and into the greedy hands of the Englishmen who took it?”

“No, I suppose you have a point,” I said. “If it makes you feel better, it’s been stolen from those same greedy Englishmen.”

A smile creased his face. “Indeed it does.”

“Can you tell us about it?”

“Who’s asking?” He inspected us, his gaze flashing suspiciously.

“Lachlan, Alpha of the Guild City Pack.”

The old man grunted and turned his gaze to me.

“Eve. Just Eve.”

“Not just Eve.” His gaze swept me up and down.

“Do you know me?”

“Know *of* you.”

Excitement thrummed in my chest. “What do you know? Tell me, please.”

“Come.” He turned and left the church, and I hurried to catch up, with Lachlan on my heels. “We’ll go to my house,” the old man said, moving swiftly across the boggy ground, as nimble and agile as I was. Despite his age and the cane, he was far sprier than he should be.

Something was off about him. Off about this whole place, in fact. I hadn't felt it when Lachlan first mentioned it—I'd been too enraptured with the familiarity of it. But beneath that, there was a threat here. Something happening.

We reached a slate-roofed cottage a moment later. The chimney billowed smoke, but the interior was relatively fresh smelling, with a vase of purple heather decorating the small wooden table near the kitchen.

"Sit." He gestured to the table, where a kettle and tea mugs were set out at three spaces.

"Were you expecting us?" I asked. This man clearly lived alone, but he'd set the table for three.

"Aye, saw the boat coming. Knew it was time."

"Time? For us to visit? How could you possibly know that?"

He shrugged. "Fate turns, as it does."

All right, that was cryptic. But enough to make it clear that he might have some kind of seer's gift.

I sat at the table as he poured the tea, and Lachlan joined us.

"So." He leaned forward. "You're here about the Moon Stone that was stolen from this place."

I nodded, guilt suddenly streaking through me. I cared about the Moon Stone for my own purposes, but it clearly was a sacred artifact here. If we recovered it, it really shouldn't go back to that stuffy museum.

"If you help us, I'll do what I can to return the Moon Stone," I said. I felt Lachlan's surprised gaze on me, but I couldn't help the words that escaped my lips.

“Will you, now?” the man said.

“It seems obvious that it should come back to the people who rightly own it,” I replied.

“Ah, now *there* is the tricky bit.” His eyes glittered as he raised a gnarled hand to emphasize his point. “That stone isn’t technically ours, either. It’s the last artifact from a wolf pack that’s now long gone.”

“A wolf pack?” My heartbeat raced. “It’s not your pack?”

He scoffed, sounding almost disgusted. “I am no wolf. I’m Finfock, another type of shifter, hated by humans. Hidden here, by our design.”

I wanted to ask him what Finfock were, but suspicion flashed through me, directing me toward a more important question. “Hidden here, on an island that once belonged to a wolf clan that is now gone?”

“Now don’t go thinking that.” Annoyance cracked in his voice. “We didn’t replace them. Didn’t drive them off or nothing. Came here hundreds of years after they were gone, we did. Knew of them from their castle—a strange place, if you ask me.”

“The ruins that we saw from the church?” I asked, thinking of the other hill with the pile of broken stones.

“Aye. Carved things into the walls, they did.”

“And buried the Moon Stone there?” Lachlan asked.

“Indeed.”

“Can you take us to this place?” I asked.

“Aye.” He looked us up and down. “Haven’t seen a pair like you before.”

I frowned at him. “A pair like us?”

“Fated, yet so torn.” He shook his head. “You can’t fight the hand of fate.”

No, but I could sure as hell try. Especially since it meant that our lives were on the line.

*Lachlan*

The old man led us from his cottage and across the hills, heading toward the coast on the other side of the island. We passed a few cottages on the way, small things like his own.

“The people who live there”—Eve pointed to one of the cottages—“are they your family?”

“Aye, more Finfolk like myself.”

“What are Finfolk?”

“Shifter. But not like him.” He nodded at me. “Different, like you. Rare.”

“Rare?” Eve frowned. “You think I’m a rare shifter?”

“Ain’t you?”

“I suppose so. Do you know anything about what I am?”

He gestured to the broken stone castle that rose against the skyline in front of us. “One of these lot, I assume.”

“What made those wolves different?” I asked.



He shrugged. “Don’t know. Never saw one myself, now did I? But different they were. This island is home to the different. That’s the reason the Finfolk came here.”

The man spoke in obscure, broad statements, but he did reveal gems of information.

I gave Eve a considering look. The wind whipped her pale hair back from her face, the pink tips glittering in the sunlight. She was beautiful out here. Beautiful everywhere, but particularly here.

Hell, it didn’t matter where I saw her. I always thought she was beautiful. Part of it was how different she was from everyone around her.

Though I knew that she considered herself to be a failed shifter, I never had. I’d known she was different, of course, but never had the ability to put my finger on it. Perhaps this was part of it.

We reached the castle, which towered thirty feet overhead. Piles of broken stone sat around the base, and we found the entrance into the tower. All of the walls had been covered by inscriptions, which looked good as new. Though many of the stones appeared broken and ancient, the stones with carvings looked like they’d been made yesterday.

Eve held her hand near the surface of one. “Protected by magic.”

“Of course.” The Finman sounded shocked. “Of course protected by magic. The residents of this island are no weak humans, leaving our relics to rot in the elements.”

Humans didn’t have access to the tools that supernaturals did, so it was hardly negligence. At least, not on the part of some of them. But they didn’t need me sticking up for them.

“Well, I’ll leave you here,” he said. “Best be gone before dark, or you’ll regret it.”

I turned to him, but he was already disappearing through the door.

“We’ll regret it?” Eve asked.

I nodded, still able to feel the threat on the air. “This place isn’t keen to have us here, even if you are somehow related to the people who once built this castle.”

She nodded, her gaze bright and her face pale. “I can’t believe these might be my ancestors.”

“Let’s find out.” I walked toward one wall of carvings but was dismayed to find that I couldn’t read any of it.

“They must be runes.” She ran her fingertips over some of the carvings. “But I can’t read them.”

I pulled my mobile from my pocket. “I’ll photograph them so we can have them interpreted.”

She nodded and turned to inspect the rest of the space. It was empty save for the broken bits of the wall that had tumbled inside the structure. The ground was grassy and damp, scattered in places with sheep droppings that she carefully avoided.

“There’s no evidence of an excavation here,” she said. “But it would have been done so long ago that the land had time to recover.”

“I can’t imagine they were particularly careful with their efforts.”

“No, most antiquarians weren’t known for their scientific methods. Not in the early days, at least.” She pulled her bag from the ether and began rooting around.

“What are you looking for?” I didn’t stop taking photos as I asked, making sure that each one was clear enough to study later.

“Something that will show me if there’s anything still beneath the surface.”

“What can it detect?”

“Anything of value, though that’s subjective. In this case. I’m just trying to find anything manmade. Maybe the original excavation missed something.”

Clever.

She pulled a vial from her bag and decanted it into a spray bottle like she’d used back in The Bonnie Thistle to find the entrance to the Clerkenwell tunnels. Seeing me eyeing the bottle, she said, “It’s similar to that potion, yes. A slight modification of my own design. Packed it just for this purpose.”

She truly was extraordinary. She had a gift for potions, no doubt, but she hadn’t been born into that form of magic or trained from an early age. She’d picked it up all on her own out of necessity.

I often felt guilty that she’d felt the need to run from our pack, but she’d had no trouble handling herself in the outside world, that was for damned sure.

She sprayed every inch of grass with the sparkling silver potion as I finished taking photos. When she completed her task, she stood back and surveyed the ground.

The air buzzed with power, and I looked at her. “Is that your spell?”

She frowned. “Shouldn’t be.”

I turned to the door and looked out onto the rolling hills that fell toward the sea, searching for an external threat. Every inch of my skin prickled with wariness.

Something was happening here. I'd been feeling it ever since we arrived, but this was more than just a vague discomfort.

This was a distinct threat.

"The sun is going to set soon," she said. "The Finman did warn us."

I nodded. "Be quick, then. How long for your potion to work?"

"Almost there, I think."

I stood guard at the door, watching the horizon for anyone who might approach. The threat might not be from the living, however. There could be any manner of spells on this island that could create trouble for us.

With every moment that passed, the threat seemed to grow stronger. It vibrated against my skin like the sting of bees.

"They took everything," Eve said.

I turned back to look at the ground. It glowed with a faint light from her potion, and I could somehow see through the dirt. There were places where the earth seemed disturbed, but there was nothing beneath the soil that had been manmade. The bastards had cleaned the place out.

A moment later, she gasped.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The moon has risen."

"You feel it?"

She nodded.

It wasn't fully dark yet, but at certain times of the month, the moon could rise early.

"Let's go. We have everything we can get from here."

She nodded and hurried toward me. We left the castle without a backward glance, heading for the shore.

"I can feel them now," she said. "Someone is coming."

The sky was darkening, the sun having finally set. I scanned the horizon and spotted figures rising up over the hill. They were pale-faced, nearly dead-looking, with dark green weeds for hair and ragged clothes.

"Twenty pounds those are the Finfolk in their not-so-pleased form," she said.

"Aye. I think you're right." There were a dozen of them, possibly more, and they stood between us and the beach where Colm had dropped us off. I turned to head to the other shore. "Colm will have to pick us up from over here."

She nodded and followed me. We ran, sprinting across the hills. I looked back over my shoulder and spotted the Finfolk running after us. We might be able to fight them—there wasn't much that I couldn't take on in my wolf form—but Eve probably wasn't at full strength, and we had no idea what the Finfolk were capable of.

As we neared the sea, I drew the flare gun from my pocket.

"It's going to take him too long to get here," Eve said.

She was right. "We need to find another way off this island. We just have to get far enough away that the transport charm isn't blocked."

“Can we swim?”

I looked back at the Finfolk. “Probably not smart, given that they’re creatures of the sea.”

“Shit, good point.”

I scanned the shoreline, finally spotting a small rowboat in front of a little stone house. I pointed to it. “Head for that house.”

As we veered left to go straight toward it, six pale, green-haired figures rose from the sea and climbed out of the waves.

“More Finfolk.” Eve drew her potion bag from the ether.

Inside, my wolf growled, struggling to break free. The threat moved between Eve and the safety of the boat, and my beast grew even more enraged. With the moon in the sky, it was impossible to fight.

And I shouldn’t. We’d need that strength.

“I’m going to shift.” As soon as the words escaped my lips, the wolf burst free. Magic swirled around me as my beast took over. Bloodlust and rage flowed through me, followed by cool cunning.

I hurtled across the grass, putting myself between Eve and the Finfolk who were closest. We just had to break through them to get to the boat before the other attackers reached us from behind.

A red glass orb arced high overhead and slammed into one of the Finfolk at the far fight of the crowd. The bomb exploded against him in a fiery blaze, and the creature shrieked as it sprinted back into the sea.

I was nearly to the closest attacker, and I leapt forward, already imagining the crunch of bone beneath my jaws.

*Protect Eve.*



*Eve*

Ahead of me, Lachlan leapt onto one of the Finfolk, his massive form gleaming dark black under the moonlight. He was power and grace incarnate, viciousness in living form.

Awe filled me, chasing away some of the fear.

Lachlan's jaws clamped into the Finman's shoulder, and he shook him before tossing him aside.

Desperate desire flared inside me. Not for him. No, I wanted to *be* him. It was like there was a wolf awakening inside me who wanted nothing more than to join her mate in the hunt.

My muscles burned, and my heart ached. The moon called to me, the pale light reaching inside my soul and trying to draw the beast out.

But nothing happened. Nothing but pain.

It sliced me, fiercer than before, and I nearly went to my knees.

What was wrong with me?

I'd felt nothing inside myself for so long. No hint of a wolf. Now, there was something desperate to come out, but I couldn't make it.

Through a veil of tears, I reached for another potion bomb and hurled it as an attacker headed for Lachlan. I had no idea

why we were being attacked—the Finfolk clearly weren't friendly after dark—but I didn't want to kill them if I could help it.

We were the invaders here. And we'd been warned.

My potion bomb smashed against the chest of the Finwoman who was nearly upon Lachlan. She lit up in flames, screeching. It wasn't my hottest fire and wouldn't leave too many burns, but a little fire would send them back into the sea to recover.

My heart pounded violently in my chest as I looked behind me and spotted the second line of Finfolk growing closer.

I so wished I could shift.

Instead, I drew another potion bomb, feeling the warmth of the moon on my skin. It called to me, reaching deep into my soul, soothing and ravaging at the same time.

More and more, the feeling was growing. Ever since I'd been in the stone circle at our headquarters in the Highlands, I'd felt it inside myself. I still didn't understand it, but I wanted it.

And something about being here made the feeling rage all the stronger.

It was the moon, this island—a past I didn't know and feared was fraught with lies.

I shoved the thoughts away. There were still two Finfolk between us and the boat. Lachlan lunged at one, and I hurled my third potion bomb at another. I was using my weakest magic, now, but my most reliable.

The bomb exploded against the Finman's chest in a fiery blaze, and he ran screaming into the water. Lachlan dispatched



the last of our attackers, then we raced for the boat.

He shifted in midair and braced his hands against the bow to shove the boat out to sea. “Get in!”

I leapt into the boat, then grabbed the oars and settled them into their sockets. Lachlan heaved us off the beach, and the waves rocked our little craft as I pulled on the oars, giving it my all.

“Let me take over,” Lachlan said. “I’m stronger.”

It was true, but we were almost there. I could feel the barrier weakening. “Just a few more strokes. Get the charm.”

At my words, hands appeared on the sides of the boat, pale and gnarled. Finfolk heads appeared from beneath the waves, green hair waving in the water as their eyes gleamed up at me.

“Hurry!” I shouted.

Lachlan pulled the charm from his pocket, smacking one of the Finfolk off when he tried to climb into the boat. My heart shot into my throat as a hand gripped my leg. I kicked out, breaking the grip, and pulled hard on the oars to drag us over the line and out of the barrier of the protection charm that trapped us.

“Now!” I smacked another Finfolk with my oar.

Lachlan hurled the charm to the floor of the boat, and a silver cloud burst up. We dove in at the same time, just as the boat was overrun by Finfolk.

*Eve*

The ether spun us through space, making my head whirl and my stomach lurch. The pain inside me grew, as if my wolf didn't like being parted from Wyre.

By the time the ether spat us out in the courtyard in front of the Shifters' Guild tower, I was gasping, my muscles weak. I knelt on the damp green grass, the pale moonlight bathing my skin in warmth.

Somehow, it burned.

"Eve." Lachlan knelt at my side, his hands hovering gently over my shoulders. "Are you all right?"

I nodded, trying to force myself to my feet. Every muscle shook, and the pain was excruciating. With a shaking hand, I reached into my pocket and withdrew a potion. I gulped it back, sighing with relief as it soothed.

I staggered upright, then nearly keeled over. At Lachlan's look, I waved him away. "Don't worry about me."

He hoisted me into his arms, clutching me to his chest as he strode toward the tower. "Of course I worry about you."

“You shouldn’t.” I looked up into his handsome face, my heart breaking. “You really shouldn’t.”

“I know.” His voice sounded rough, and he *did* know. He could already feel the effects of the curse. Of course he knew. “I can’t help it.”

“That’s the problem.” I wanted to rest my head against his shoulder, but I knew that I shouldn’t under any circumstances.

Exhaustion tugged at me, a soul-deep ache that demanded I rest. I needed his help now, but I couldn’t take more than the bare minimum. I couldn’t take what I really wanted.

My gaze flicked to his lips, then away.

Definitely not.

Lachlan climbed the steps to the tower two at a time, sweeping through the doors and ignoring the looks of the people in the great hall. I could feel their gazes burning into me, each of them ravenously curious. I made sure not to make eye contact. I had as many questions as they did—there was nothing I could say to them.

Lachlan reached his quarters a moment later and lay me in the bed. It felt divine, my aching bones sighing at the welcome of the soft mattress. But the location...

I looked up at him. “This is your room.”

“Ah—” He looked briefly surprised, as if he hadn’t realized and had just brought me here on instinct. “You’re right. It is. But I’m not staying.”

I blinked at him. It was the first time I’d ever seen him look anything close to embarrassed.

He stood abruptly and went to the door. “Get some rest.”

“What are you—”

But he was gone, and exhaustion was already pulling at me. Whatever had happened back on Wyre had sucked the strength from me, and the only solution was to sleep.

Didn't matter if I didn't want to—my body was making it clear. Within minutes, I was out.



*Lachlan*

*This is your room.*

Eve's words echoed in my head.

Idiot.

Why had I taken her there? I hadn't planned on anything other than laying her down to rest. For that, I should have taken her to a nearby guest suite.

Instead, I'd brought her to my room, instinct driving my motions. That was exactly the kind of thing I wasn't meant to do. I was supposed to be putting distance between us, not putting her right in my bed.

Frustrated, I dragged a hand through my hair, then reached for the flask in my back pocket. As I palmed it, I remembered that there was no point. It would do me no good. I could no longer rely on that crutch to suppress my emotions.

I just had to feel the damned things.

Terrible.

I had no experience with that. Not anymore.

Annoyed with myself, I shook away the thoughts and found Kenneth in the library, where he usually was at that time of night. Despite his broad stature and warrior's eyes, Kenneth had a fondness for books.

My second looked up when I entered, his gaze brightening. "Any luck?"

"Yes. We have more information." It had been deadly trying to get it, but we'd be nowhere without the photos I'd taken. I drew my mobile from my pocket, pulled up the photos, then handed it to him. "Can you read that?"

He squinted at it and zoomed in on some of the carvings. "Old Norse. Kind of. Slight variations. Those, I can't read. But I can decipher the Norse bits."

"Will it take you long?"

"A few hours to do it all." He tilted the device. "A lot of it isn't legible—at least, not to me. But I should be able to get something helpful."

"Good, make it a priority." I explained to him what we had just been through, along with what we were looking for. Not that I had much idea, but it might provide some guidance.

"I can do that." He turned to the table and picked up his pen, already into the job.

I was grateful to have a second like Kenneth, skilled and loyal. But as I turned to go, his voice stopped me: "This was left for you at the front door."

I looked back, and he handed me a sealed envelope. I pulled it open and read the short note in a too-familiar hand:

*Give me time.*

Garreth.

I blinked. What the hell was he doing writing to me?

“What is it?” Kenneth asked. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“The man who delivered this...did they see him?”

“Wasn’t a man. Courier service from London. The fae one.”

“Send someone there to see if they can get information on who sent this.” Even as I requested it, I feared it was pointless. Garreth would cover his tracks. Still, we had to try.

But what the hell was he up to?

I tucked the note into my pocket and left.

As I made my way out into the main part of the castle, I realized that my bed was occupied. I certainly wasn’t going to join Eve there, even in sleep.

I went to the chair in my living room instead, resisting the urge to check on Eve. She deserved privacy, and I needed to keep my head in the game. Every time I looked upon her, it threatened the little sanity I had left.

In fact, as I settled into the chair in front of the cold hearth, I realized that the curse was rising within me. I could feel it like a stain upon my soul.

It was time for another potion.

Quickly, I drew one from my pocket and gulped it down, feeling the rush of magic through my veins as it went to work.

What a pair we were, Eve and me. Both of us relying on potions to keep going, fighting what we were and what we wanted.

But I could see no other way. This was it for us.



*Eve*

I woke feeling much better...with the exception of the fact that I couldn't breathe.

I gasped, barely able to drag air into my lungs, and opened my eyes.

Ralph stared down at me, a flaky chocolate croissant gripped in his little hands. His big arse pressed into my chest, restricting my breathing.

My gaze fell to the croissant, and my stomach rumbled. "Is that for me?"

*No.* He took a big bite, letting the crumbs fall all over my neck.

"Ack! Get off, you little monster." I shoved him away, and he rolled to the side, protecting his treat with his furry body.

With the two-ton raccoon off my chest, I could suddenly breathe again. My gaze landed on a tray of breakfast pastries near the door, and I realized where Ralph had got his croissant.

"I see you found the good stuff." I rose, feeling a hell of a lot better than I had the night before.

*I needed my strength for my bedside vigil.*

“Of course you did.” I turned back to him and spotted him leaning against the pillows, shoving the pastry into his mouth. “Have you seen Lachlan?”

He shook his head. *Came right to this room a few minutes ago. Might have heard him out in the main room, though.*

Damn. I ran my hands through my hair, trying to flatten it, and vowed to hold my breath if he got too near.

There was no en suite bathroom that I could see, which meant I’d have to do the walk of morning breath shame.

Idiot.

It shouldn’t matter, of course. If anything, I should take this opportunity to drive Lachlan farther away. Despite the curse, he still looked at me with heat in his eyes. Heat that it was impossible for me not to feel right back.

“Lachlan?” I called out.

There was no response. Despite my vow to not care, gratitude surged through me. Privacy.

I hurried out into the living room but found it empty. Thank fates. I beelined for the bathroom, where I cleaned up. Ralph appeared while I was sitting on the toilet, and I hissed, “Have you no shame?”

He shrugged. *No.*

I scowled. “Did you bring me fresh underwear this time?”

*Of course. What do you think I am, a monster?*

“You’re the best. Truly. Now go get them.”

He trundled off, returning a few minutes later with the biggest, ugliest pair of underwear that I owned. Just like last time. Little bastard had an eye for the laundry-day pairs.



“Seriously, Ralph?” I held them up. “These?”

*They suit you.*

“You’re a dick.”

He grinned toothily, then wandered back out, most likely in search of more pastries.

Once I was clean and dressed, I went out into the main room. Lachlan had appeared at one point, and I prayed it hadn’t been while Ralph was walking across the living room with my granny panties in his little hands. I shot him a look but didn’t spot anything out of the ordinary, thank fates.

“How do you feel?” he asked, concern in his gaze.

“Fine. A lot better. You?”

He nodded. “The same. Kenneth has translated some of the writing on the castle walls.”

“Really?” Hope flared. “Has he told you?”

“Not yet. Just got the message. We can go speak to him.”

“Great.” I darted into the bedroom and snagged one of the pastries off the nearly empty tray. Ralph lay on the floor in front of it, looking like he’d been on a bender. I grinned at him. “That’s what you get for eating too much.”

*Worth it.*

I left him to it and returned to Lachlan. We made our way quickly through the castle, heading toward the rear. I searched my memory for what was back there. “Are we going to the library?”

Lachlan nodded. “He’s been there all night, I think.”

Of course he had. Lachlan’s people were loyal to him, willing to go to the end of the earth if he needed it. Staying up

late to translate something would have been a no-brainer for Kenneth.

We found his second leaned over a table, studying some printouts as he drank from a steaming mug. As we entered, he looked up, his eyes shadowed. “Good timing. I’ve just finished.”

“Anything useful?” Lachlan asked.

“Yes. I know you should go to Shetland.”

“Thank fates.” If Kenneth hadn’t been able to translate some of the inscriptions, we would have had no idea where to go next. “But why Shetland?”

“These people came from there, it looks like. Much of the writing is in a dialect I don’t recognize, but it’s clear that they were in Shetland before Orkney.”

“And Norway before that?” I asked.

“Most definitely. They left with the Viking expansion in the eighth century AD, some of the first to go. Maybe *the* first, but they kept themselves out of the monks’ history books by not pillaging churches like the human Vikings.”

I nodded, wishing I knew more about the period. “Did it say where in Shetland?”

“I’d start with Lerwick. Main city, all supernatural, and most likely to have answers.”

“Anything in particular we should be looking for?” Lachlan asked.

“History,” Kenneth said. “Whatever you’re looking for is ancient.” He pushed a printout toward us. “They brought the Moon Stone with them from Shetland and buried it in the floor of the castle for safekeeping.”

I leaned over the paper and studied it, unable to understand what the markings meant. At least we had Kenneth.

Lachlan nodded at his second. “Thank you. Good work.”

“Anytime.”

The Alpha looked at me. “Ready to go to Shetland?”

“After I check in with my friends, yes.” I felt guilty for not calling them immediately upon arriving home. In my defense, though, I’d been unconscious.

“All right. I’ll meet you out front in ten minutes.”

“Great.”

We left Kenneth, but I stayed behind near the library to call my friends on my comms charm. The conversation with Carrow was swift and disappointing—they hadn’t found anything yet, though not for lack of trying.

They wouldn’t give up, but it just meant that success in Shetland was more important than ever.

*Eve*

Lachlan and I arrived in Lerwick at midmorning, appearing on a street corner in the quiet town. Like Brinian, it was constructed primarily of somber gray stone. Unlike Brinian, the sky was also gray, giving the place a romantic, dreary feel. None of the buildings were from this century or even the last, and it felt like stepping back in time.

Until a tiny red Porsche screamed down the street, a young woman at the wheel. She was gone in seconds, but I was left with the impression of someone important.

In the distance, I heard the faint sound of police sirens. I turned to Lachlan. “Something’s going on.”

He nodded, spinning in a circle to inspect the street. Glass-fronted shops filled the bottom levels of the three-story buildings, though the tops floors were quiet. Flats, no doubt.

There weren’t many people on the street, and those who were out and about were all headed in the same direction—following the red Porsche.

I looked at Lachlan and shrugged. “Follow them?”

He nodded. “It’s as good as anything.”

Lerwick wasn’t huge, and fifteen minutes later, we’d reached the back edge of town. Though I could smell the sea, we had walked away from it, toward the interior of the island. When we reached the end of the street, I got an expansive view across the rolling hills of Shetland. A circle of standing stones stood about a mile away, directly on top of a hill. Dozens of people crowded around—probably hundreds, in fact.

A young boy appeared at my side, clutching a football, his face slack as he stared at the stone circle.

“Is this normal?” I asked. “People gathering around the stones?”

“Not today, no. Today is for the ship.”

“The ship?”

“It’s Up Helly Aa.” He looked at me like I was a moron, and apparently I was, because I hadn’t the slightest idea what he was talking about.

A split second later, he was off, racing up the hill toward the stone circle.

Lachlan stared at his phone. “Apparently, Up Helly Aa is the Viking boat burning festival. Happens once a year. They spend the year building a Viking boat, then they burn it at a massive nighttime bonfire.”

“Then that’s tonight, I suppose,” I replied, “but the commotion at the circle has nothing to do with that. Far too early, isn’t it?”

“Looks like.” He started toward the circle, and I followed.

Cool wind whipped my hair back from my face as we climbed the shallow hill toward the stone circle. The air smelled of salt and grass, a fresh scent that cleared my lungs and my mind.

There were so many people around the circle that we couldn't get close, but I immediately heard whispers of what was going on.

*Theft.*

I leaned close to an old woman who gossiped with her friend, straining my ears.

“Dug it right out of the ground, they did,” she said. “Under the cover of night. Can you imagine?”

“What did they take?” I asked, unable to help myself.

She shot me a suspicious look. “Eavesdropping, dearie?”

“Sorry.” I gave her an apologetic smile. “Just curious.”

She huffed. “Well, you'd have to ask the Alpha. This is her turf and her business.” *And not for the likes of you, outsider.*

I could all but hear her say the last bit. She was definitely thinking it.

“How do I find the Alpha?” I asked.

“If you weren't so obviously a mainlander, that would have revealed it,” she replied.

“Please?”

She harrumphed. “It's a busy night, but you'll find her at her club, The Norn. Good luck getting in, though.”

“How—”

She turned away, and clearly, the conversation was over. I glanced at Lachlan, who was studying the crowd around us.

“We’re not going to get close right now,” he said. “Let’s head back and see what we can find there.”

“We need to go to this place called The Norn.”

He nodded. “We’ll find it,” he said, and headed away from the stone circle.

“Could this be related to the theft at the museum?” I asked, knowing it was a long shot.

“Maybe. But these circles were here long before the Vikings. The coincidence is too much, though.”

I agreed. This was related somehow. I just needed to find the connection.

The town was still quiet when we returned, and we set about looking for The Norn. Google Maps didn’t have any answers for us, though I shouldn’t have been surprised. Supernatural towns like this weren’t exactly inviting the Google vans to town to map the streets.

Over the afternoon, we covered every lane, read all the signs, and traipsed down the smallest alleys, and yet, we were still unable to find anything. Even the people we asked seemed to have no idea—or they didn’t want to tell us.

We ended up stopping in a pub for dinner—fish and chips, which was excellent—and managed to pry a bit of info out of the bartender. Or rather, he wasn’t able to run away from us.

The old man leaned over the bar, looking like he hadn’t left the dimly lit place in the last fifty years, and gave us a suspicious look. “You’ve got business with the Alpha, have ye?”

Lachlan nodded. "Paying our respects."

The man eyed Lachlan up and down. I couldn't tell what species he was, but I guessed some kind of shifter from the way he looked at Lachlan.

"You're an Alpha yourself, aren't ye?" the old man asked.

That confirmed it. Shifters could recognize an Alpha's power. Something in our animal nature made it as natural as breathing.

"I am. Guild City." Lachlan's voice lowered, vibrating with the power of the Alpha's command. "Now, tell me where we can find The Norn."

The man's jaw tightened as he tried to resist the command. Not all Alphas could command members of another pack, but not all Alphas were Lachlan, either.

Finally, he grimaced and said, "Ye'll find it through the green door at the corner of Fleetwick Street and Winding Lane."

"Thank you." Lachlan laid the money for our meal on the table, and the man scooped it up and hurried away.

"That was handy," I said.

Lachlan turned to me. "It doesn't work on you."

"I know." Which was weird as hell.

"You're different, Eve. We've always known it, but it's becoming all the more apparent now. And there's something about these places that's familiar to you, isn't there?"

I nodded. "I don't know what it is, but yes. Wyre, and now here." I rubbed my arms, wishing I could put my finger on what exactly it was. "It's no coincidence that these thefts are



happening and they're tied to a place that means something to me—I just have no idea what the larger meaning might be.”

“The Maker has planned this.”

I shivered. “I think so. And that’s the scariest part. He’s always one step ahead of us.”

“We’re stronger. *You’re* stronger. Whatever you are, it’s powerful.”

I nodded. Before I could stop myself, the words escaped my lips: “Back on Wyre, I wanted to shift. I could feel something inside me, and I was desperate to change.”

“Into a wolf?”

“I don’t know. I think so. Must be, since I might be related to the pack that once lived there.” I met his gaze. “Why have I felt empty for so long, and now I’m finally feeling something?”

“Maybe you’re home.”

“But Guild City—”

“Is your home, too. But this could be part of your past.” He reached for me, as if he wanted to brush his hand against my cheek. My heart leapt, and I longed to lean into his touch. But at the last moment, he drew his hand back, his forehead creasing.

My heart deflated the tiniest bit, and I kicked myself.

*Of course* he couldn’t touch me. We shouldn’t even be having this conversation. Spilling my guts to him was dangerous. The two of us were barely hanging on, both using potions to get through the day. And the only reason we were having so much trouble was because we were resisting what was between us.

We *had* to.

For his sake, and for mine.

I shoved the last bite of chips into my mouth—trying to be unladylike because repelling him would be a good thing right now—then stood. I brushed my hands off and said, “Let’s go find this place.”

He nodded and rose.

Together, we walked out into the darkening night. I could feel the moon just beginning to rise, and fear sliced through me. I couldn’t see the damned thing yet, but it was already pulling on me. The moon gave as much as it took, and if I didn’t figure out what was going on with me soon, I wasn’t going to survive it.

“Are you all right?” Lachlan’s gaze was searching.

He was too damned observant. “Fine.” I hurried off down the street. “This way. I remember seeing Winding Lane down here.”

The streets were bustling as we cut our way through town. Though they’d been empty before, they were now heaving with people, many of whom were dressed as Vikings, complete with fur cloaks and helmets. At least half of them held flaming torches high above the crowds, creating enough heat to warm the night.

Songs reverberated through the streets, and in the distance, I could see a massive wooden boat drifting toward us. It sat right above the head level of the crowd, and I had to assume that it was being carried on the shoulders of the townsfolk. Up Helly Aa was no small deal around these parts, and something about the ceremony tugged at my soul.

Was this place really part of my past? Were there more lies in my history than I'd realized? Was I even who I thought I was?

I shook away the crazy thoughts, knowing that I was at risk of spiraling. With the moon higher in the sky, I could feel myself weakening.

It didn't take us long to find The Norn, but the place wasn't marked. I remembered the green door from earlier in our search, but I'd had no reason to recognize it. A tiny window sat at eye level, covered by a sliding door set into the wood.

"It's a secret club," I said. "Like a speakeasy."

Lachlan tried to open the door, but it didn't budge. The tiny window whisked open, and a pair of green eyes appeared. They flickered with suspicion as the person asked, "Password?"

Shit.

It *was* like a speakeasy.



*Lachlan*

I stared at the man's eyes through the tiny window in the door. This bloody club was proving to be annoying. We didn't have time for this shit.

I imbued my voice with the Alpha's Command, feeling it vibrate with power. "Let us in."

Two lines appeared between the man's eyes as he inspected us. "Can't try that on me. Not a shifter."

"But this is the Alpha's place," Eve said.

"Don't mean it's run only by shifters."

That was unfortunate. "I'm Lachlan MacGregor, Alpha of the Guild City pack. Here to pay my respects to the Alpha of Shetland."

"A moment." The little window slammed shut.

"Do you know who the Alpha is?" I asked quietly.

"Not by sight, no," said Eve. "Heard of her, though. Fiona Fraser."

There were over two dozen packs in Europe alone, so it was no surprise I hadn't met her. Would have been convenient, though.

A few moments later, the door opened, revealing a bruiser of a man with a bald head and an impeccably tailored suit. "She'll see you."

Thank fates pulling rank had worked.

Together, we stepped into the quiet bottom level of the bar. It was an unassuming space, empty save for the metal staircase that wound its way upward. The bouncer gestured for us to take it, and we climbed quickly to the next level. I went in front of Eve, not wanting her to be the first to walk into an unknown place.

The next level was a quiet, dark bar, a classy place with crystal glasses and small, gleaming wooden tables.

"She has a private room," the bouncer said. "To your left."

We walked ahead of him, weaving our way through the tiny tables. Though a small jazz band played softly in the corner, I could still hear the revelry outside.

Strange that the Alpha would be in here if there was an important civic event happening.

The room the bouncer led us to was located at the back of the building. Wide glass windows revealed a view of the sea beyond, which glittered in the moonlight.

A woman sat in a massive, thronelike armchair across from the door, her legs crossed casually as she stared at us. There were about a dozen other shifters scattered around the room, lounging in booths and at tables as they drank amber-colored alcohol and murmured in low voices.

The Alpha was only about ten years older than me, with the calm self-assurance of the best alphas. Her dark hair was pulled up in an intricate series of braids, and she was dressed in an outfit of leather and fur that had to be a Viking costume.

She arched a brow as we approached. “Visitors on Up Helly Aa? Don’t you know it’s impossible to find accommodation?”

I inclined my head respectfully. “I am Lachlan, Alpha of the Guild City pack.”

“I know who you are.” Her gaze flicked to Eve. Cunning gleamed in the depths of her eyes, along with ruthlessness. “And who are you?”

“Eve,” she said.

“Just Eve?”

“Just Eve.”

“You’re a strange one, aren’t you?” She studied her, something shadowed in the depths of her eyes. Knowledge? Did she recognize Eve?

It almost felt like she did. But Eve didn’t seem to recognize her.

Fiona gestured to a man standing against the window. He hurried to bring two chairs, and Eve and I sat across from her.

“What brings you to our islands, if not our festival?” she asked.

“A theft,” I said.

Her eyes sharpened. “Not the one that just happened, I’m sure?”

“Perhaps.” I told her the story of what had happened down in London, and what we’d found on Wyre. Perhaps it wasn’t wise to show her our hand so soon, but I left out any mention of Eve’s role and the Maker. As long as she was kept safe, I was willing to take the risk. Anyway, it was important to give something when you wanted something.

As I spoke, the Alpha’s eyes grew more shadowed. “A Moon Stone, you say?”

“Aye. One that was taken centuries ago from its resting place on Wyre.”

Fiona’s lips twisted. “Bastards.”

“What was taken from the stone circle today?” I asked. “We heard about a theft, but we couldn’t get close enough to see.”

She frowned. “You’re a coincidence that I wasn’t expecting.”

“I don’t think any of this is coincidence,” Eve said.

Fiona nodded. “I think you’re right.” She leaned back in her chair. “Another Moon Stone was stolen from us.”

Shock lanced me. “What?”

“Weren’t expecting that, were you?”

“No. Though perhaps I should have been.” I frowned. “Did you know it was buried there?”

“We did. Never disturbed it, though, as it wasn’t ours to disturb.”

“The woman I spoke to said it was your turf,” Eve remarked.

Fiona nodded. “Aye. As Alpha, I’m steward of that circle. But it’s an ancient heritage site. More importantly, it’s not *our* ancient heritage site. We have no right to it or its contents, but we do have a responsibility to protect it.” She grimaced. “We failed, victim of a threat we didn’t see coming.”

Her words about rights and responsibilities spoke to me. For all her ruthlessness and cunning, she could be trusted.

“What do you mean, it’s not your heritage?” Eve said. “Because it belongs to people who came before your ancestors?”

The woman nodded. “The circle was built by people who lived here thousands upon thousands of years ago. They’re closer relations to me than the ancient wolves who buried the Moon Stone there a thousand years ago.”

“The Vikings?” she asked.

“Yes.” Fiona gestured to the people in the room, then toward the windows. “The people on these islands are

descendants of the Vikings and Scots who lived here over the last centuries. It's why we're burning that boat tonight—remembering our heritage. But the people who buried the Moon Stone at the circle were different.”

“Different how?”

“They were Vikings, yes. But they were a species of wolf unlike any that has been seen in these parts for nearly six hundred years.”

“Extinct?” I frowned. The old man on Wyre had said they were gone, but not extinct. “A breed of shifters who've been totally eradicated?”

She nodded. “That's what we believe, yes. They came over here with the rest of the Vikings in the eighth century. *My* ancestors. And for some reason, they took a liking to that ancient circle and buried their Moon Stone there. Carved their images on the stones as well.”

“But they've been gone for hundreds of years,” Eve said. “Why?”

Fiona shrugged. “That, I do not know. What we have are stories passed down through the years, along with what has been written on the stones—much of it in a language we can't read.”

Fates, this was getting twisty.

The faint sound of bells pealed outside, and Fiona stood. “That's my cue. It's time to light up the boat.”

I stood, frowning. There were still more questions.

Fiona could clearly see it in my face, as she raised her hand. “Not now. We've waited all year to light this damned



thing on fire. Tomorrow morning, I'll have something to show you. It's best to see it at dawn, anyway."

"Thank you." Eve stood. "Truly."

She nodded. "I meant it when I said accommodation is impossible to find. Do you have a place to stay tonight?"

"We do not," I replied.

"There's a garret at the top of this building. It's yours if you want it. There's a good view of the festival from the window, in fact."

"Thank you." I inclined my head to her. "We owe you."

"I'll be sure to collect. But in the meantime, plan to meet on the street out front, an hour before dawn. Don't be late." Without a backward glance, she swept from the room. Her pack followed her, leaving us alone.

I turned to Eve. "Shall we go watch this festival from the window?"

She nodded. "Let's. Dawn will come early."

*Eve*

Together, Lachlan and I made our way to the stairs that led to the top of the building. We passed a little toilet on the floor below. The tiny flat held only a bed and a counter with a sink.

I faltered when I entered and stared at the small bed. It was a double mattress, at best. How the hell were we both going to fit?

A glow from the single window caught my attention, and I walked toward it. In the distance, I could see the blazing Viking boat. It was magnificent—a bonfire in the middle of town, the surrounding crowd cheering as the inferno lit up the night.

“Impressive,” Lachlan said from behind me.

I nodded, riveted, but part of my mind was back on that bed.

“I can sleep on the floor,” he offered.

“We’ll be fine.” The words escaped me before I could consider them, but I meant it. I wouldn’t make him sleep on

the floor, and we *would* be fine. Sure, I wanted him, but I had some self-control. He definitely had self-control.

As the blaze died down, I turned from the window and toed off my boots, then climbed into the bed. I arranged myself in a narrow shape and stared up at the ceiling, leaving plenty of room for him. “You might as well sleep here,” I said, shoving a pillow between us.

He sighed, then turned off the light and climbed onto the other side of the bed, making sure to stay on top of the covers. His weight depressed the mattress, and I could imagine him lying there so close to me.

Immediately, the room shrank by half, and every inch of my skin lit up with awareness.

*Shit.*

This, perhaps, had been a bad idea.

Lachlan didn’t move a muscle, however. He might as well have been a statue. Seconds passed, then minutes. At one point, I heard a hitch in his breath that made my own breath catch.

Images flashed in my head—me, him, us. What if I just rolled over and kissed him? That wouldn’t be the craziest idea.

*Yes, it would.*

I squeezed my eyes tightly shut and tried to ignore the thoughts that popped into my head.

Impossible, of course.

By the time I finally fell asleep, I was so worked up that the next part felt like a dream.

Suddenly, I wasn't alone anymore. There was warmth pressed up along one side of my body. Like a heat-seeking missile, I turned toward it, then raised my hand and sunk it into Lachlan's hair.

He moaned low in his throat, still asleep.

I was still asleep, too—wasn't I?

Did it matter?

Through a haze of dreams, it was easy to do what I wanted. Especially when he wanted it, too.

I pulled at him, and he rolled on top of me, settling between my thighs with a groan. Despite the layers of clothing, the heat and hardness of him made me gasp. Pleasure shot through me, stealing away the rest of my resistance.

I was awake.

So was he, and his green gaze burned down at me, hot and fierce. "We shouldn't," he whispered.

"I know," I said, and kissed him.

He leaned into the press of my lips and slipped his tongue into my mouth. He kissed like a man determined to enjoy his final minutes on earth, and my head spun.

"Fates, it's been so long," he muttered, dragging his mouth down the side of my neck.

Heat trailed in his wake, making me shiver. "So long?"

"There's been no one since I saw you that first time." The words seemed torn from him, as if he didn't want to share them but couldn't help himself.

*No one?* Holy fates, I couldn't imagine.

Was that why he spent so much time in the fight ring?

I tilted my head, joining my lips with his as I kissed him like he was the last person I would ever kiss.

He might be.

Time slowed as he moved on top of me, heat and pressure making pleasure coil more tightly within me.

“More,” I gasped.

He shuddered, then slipped a hand to my stomach, resting it on my skin. His fingertips drifted lower, brushing the waistband of my jeans.

I shuddered, arching up toward him.

“May I?” His voice was rough as gravel.

“Yes. Please.” I couldn’t get the words out fast enough, wanting to do this before my rational self caught up with us.

Deftly, he flicked open the buttons and slipped his hand inside my pants. At the first touch of his fingertip to my flesh, he shuddered. “Heaven.”

Ecstasy like I’d never known raced through me as he found the center of my pleasure, focusing his efforts there. It didn’t take long for my body to explode into a kaleidoscope of sensation.

When it was over, I opened my eyes. Lachlan stared down at me like I was the most amazing thing he’d ever seen.

Then he launched himself off the bed.

Horror flashed through me, and I yanked a pillow over myself even though I was still mostly clothed. He clenched his fists, his eyes flickering black.

“We shouldn’t have done that,” he almost growled, then spun around and charged from the room.

Panting, I stared up at the ceiling.

Holy fates. Had that really just happened?

And his eyes...



*Lachlan*

I strode away, my mind racing and my heart barely able to keep up. At the base of the stairs, I leaned against the wall.

What had I just let myself do?

With shaking hands, I dug one of Mordaca's potions from my pocket and swigged it back. The foul taste was welcome, and I prayed it would suppress the curse that I could feel raging through my veins.

Frustrated, I pinched the bridge of my nose.

The fact that I had been desperate for her was no justification.

I'd known that we were impossible even when I was a teenager. That I'd avoided other women hadn't been to save myself for her, because she was never supposed to happen. It had just felt...right.

Lonely and frustrating, but right.

Ever since I'd seen her, there'd been no one else for me. I couldn't even imagine it.

So I'd spent all my free time in the fight ring. Fat lot of good it had done me now. At the first opportunity, while my defenses were lowered in sleep, I gave in.

And how glorious it had been.

But it could never happen again.

*Eve*

I woke alone.

Lachlan had never returned, and I was grateful. The last thing I needed was to roll over and look into his eyes.

Last night had been...amazing. Stupid, but amazing.

I rubbed my chest, wondering how much further my heart had inched toward him.

*Nope.* No time to think of that now. I needed to get my head in the game and solve the mystery of what the hell was going on here.

Of what the hell I *was*.

It didn't take long to pull on my boots and jacket. Sleeping in my clothes hadn't been fun, but it had been efficient, at least. Ralph was nowhere to be seen, for which I was also grateful. I couldn't imagine that he would have any comforting words for me.

The stairs creaked as I made my way down. The early morning was still dark, the air crisp and cool with a hint of



rain on the horizon.

Lachlan leaned against the wall next to the door, but he straightened when I stepped out onto the pavement. I could see people in the distance, still partying on the streets from the night before.

I stopped a few feet from Lachlan and leaned against the same wall. He handed me a takeaway coffee cup and warm paper bag. The scent of a sausage roll wafted toward me, and my stomach grumbled.

“Thanks.”

He nodded and looked away, clearly not wanting to make eye contact.

That was fine. Better, in fact.

I turned and looked out at the street, listening to the sounds of the continuing party as I bit into the savory, salty roll. I finished my breakfast in record time, then started on the coffee. After my first bracing sip, a car rolled up.

The Land Rover was muddy and well used, but the woman at the wheel was as coiffed as she had been yesterday. Fiona rolled down the window and nodded toward the back. “Get in.”

Lachlan strode toward the car and opened the door, gesturing for me to enter. After I climbed in, he shut the door and walked around to the other side.

“Sleep all right?” Fiona asked, a smile in her voice.

I frowned at the back of her head. Had she read what there was between us and intentionally put us in such a tiny room?

I frowned.

“Fine, thanks.” Lachlan’s voice was short. “The boat burning was impressive. We saw it from the window.”

“Yes, the builders try to outdo themselves every year.” She turned onto a country road that led away from the town. “We’ll be there soon.”

The car climbed a hill and looped around. The moon hung low, illuminating the standing stones towering toward the sky. They were utterly massive, fifteen of them at least, flat and wide and tall.

Fiona stopped the car and stepped out. I followed her, watching her squint up at the sky. “Looks like a clear morning. Good news for us.”

“Why do we need clear skies?” I asked.

“We want to see the moon set.” She walked toward the stone circle, and I hurried to keep up, keenly aware of Lachlan at my back.

As we passed through the stone ring, magic shivered down my spine. Suddenly, my blood and bones felt alive with power. It sparked through me like I was made of carbonated soda, and I shivered.

Fiona looked back at me, a considering expression on her face.

The scrutiny made me uncomfortable, so I looked past her to peer into the center of the stone circle. A statue stood in the middle, and I frowned. “That’s unusual.”

“I know.” Fiona walked around to the front of the statue, and I followed. “Only one of its kind in all of the UK.”

I believed her. I’d been to quite a few stone circles and seen pictures of many more. There were never statues in the

middle.

From the back, this one appeared to be a woman in a long, simple dress. As I walked around to the front, Fiona pointed to the ground in front of me. “Watch your step.”

I hopped over a gash that had been carved into the ground, no doubt by the thieves searching for the Moon Stone. Lachlan went the other way around the statue, and he, too, had to step over a gouge in the ground.

“They knew that their target would be buried at her feet,” Fiona said.

“Who is she?” I asked, coming to stop beside Fiona.

“You don’t recognize her?” Fiona pointed to the face.

I looked up, then felt my heart drop to my stomach. The air whooshed from my lungs, and I nearly swayed.

It looked like my mother.

No...it looked like *me*.

Not a perfect resemblance, but the similarity was there in the brow and nose and chin.

I turned to Fiona, my heart racing so fast it made me lightheaded. “How long has this been here? Is this a prank?”

She laughed. “A prank? No, love, we’re not that bored up here in the middle of the sea.”

“Of course not.” I swallowed hard and looked back at the statue. My head swam as I stared into the face. “How long?”

“Long as any of us can remember. Long as our written history. We think it was put here by the wolves who came before us.”

“And the Moon Stone was found at her feet?” I looked down at the scar in the ground. The dirt was still torn up, a great hole where the stone had once been.

“Yes. At least, we think.” She shrugged. “We never saw it, of course, since we wouldn’t disturb this place. But it was written about,” she said, and pointed to the standing stones surrounding us.

It was still too dim to see clearly, but it looked like there were carvings on the stones, just like at the castle.

“Do you have someone who can read those?” Lachlan asked.

“Not all of them,” Fiona said. “But some of the carvings are pictures. Those are easy enough to read, along with the Old Norse.”

The moon was nearly to the horizon. The sun would follow shortly. A bit of me hoped that when the sun finally rose, the light would reveal that the statute was of a completely different person and looked nothing like me.

Sure, I wanted answers. Of course I did. But I didn’t want to be some kind of figure who was so important that there were statues of me.

“It’s got to be an ancestor of mine,” I said, suddenly feeling foolish. Not *me*. Of course it wasn’t me. This had been carved long before my birth. And even though there were seers who could prophecy such things, it was ridiculous to think I’d be important enough to merit a prophecy or a statue. “I just have a famous ancestor. Hell, loads of people do.”

“Perhaps.” Fiona nodded to the horizon, where the moon was just starting to dip toward the horizon. “Watch carefully, now.”

“What am I looking for?”

“Look at her hand,” she said, gesturing to the statue. The figure stood with her arms outstretched at her sides, palms up and facing forward. “You’ll see the effect as soon as the moon sets.”

“Effect?” As soon as the words left my mouth, I noticed that the figure’s hand began to glow. Bright light emitted from the palm, forming the shape of a crescent moon.

*Shit.*

I stared at it, dumbstruck, then looked down at my own palm. It too, was glowing. Brighter than ever, as if it were responding to the moon and the statue.

I felt Fiona’s gaze on me and closed my palm into a fist. “Why does it happen?”

Fiona shrugged. “We don’t know. But she’s definitely you—or an ancestor—and the Moon Stone was important to her.”

“I’m one of them, aren’t I?” The words escaped me, soft and low. “What were they, exactly?”

“Wolves, like us. But maybe not quite the same.” Fiona shrugged. “They’ve been gone for centuries. And though they wrote things down on these stones, they didn’t write everything.”

“What else did they write?” I asked.

Fiona strolled to one of the stones and pointed to the carvings that had been etched deep into the rock. There were pictures of a woman—likely the same woman as the statue—and several wolves. It was difficult to tell what the story was until Fiona spoke.

“We think that she was meant to shift like the rest, but she never could. Something stopped her. As a result, she was torn apart.” She pointed to a gruesome carving in which the woman lay on the ground.

I frowned. “How are you making that connection? She’s just lying there.”

“Touch the stone.”

I drew in a bracing breath and did as she said, resting my hand against the carving. Immediately, images flashed in my mind. Emotions.

Pain. Fear.

Suddenly, I *was* her, feeling everything she felt.

Just like me, she desperately wanted to shift. Her body screamed to transform, but she couldn’t. Whatever stopped her was impossible to determine, but it was totally immovable.

When it became too much, the pain exploded outward from her—from me—tearing us apart inside. It sucked the strength from my muscles and the breath from my lungs.

I collapsed, my legs giving way beneath me.

Lachlan caught me at the last minute, swooping me up against him so that I wouldn’t hit the ground.

I gasped as I tried to catch my breath. As I was no longer touching the stone, everything felt just a little better.

“Are you all right?” Lachlan’s hands burned against my skin where he held me.

“I’m okay.” Shakily, I tried to stand under my own power.

Fiona moved around to look at me, a strange expression on her face. “You freaked out, there.”

I rubbed my head. “That’s not normal?”

“Normally, we see what happened to her. We don’t feel it. What was it like?”

“I—” I swallowed hard. “I’m pretty sure she died, torn apart by the broken magic inside her.”

Fiona nodded. “That’s what we always surmised.”

I looked at the stone behind her, my gaze riveted by the carvings that were illuminated by the newly risen sun. If that really was me—and it sure felt like it—then how much longer did I have?

The need to shift had been growing stronger every day. Eventually, it would be too strong.

I didn’t have long.

I shivered, swallowing hard. “What happened to the rest of these wolves?”

“We think they went like her. Unable to shift, so they died out.”

“They can’t be entirely gone.” If they were, I wouldn’t be here.

Fiona shrugged. “Perhaps.”

I had to find them. They would have answers.

But even as I thought it, I knew how ridiculous it sounded. If there was another breed of wolves out there—a pack different from the rest—we would know about it. No question.

Right?

I looked at Lachlan, who had stopped photographing the stones to stare at me with eyes too dark with concern.

I shifted uncomfortably beneath his gaze, not liking the possible hint of pity. I'd kick his ass if there was pity there.

"Do you have any idea who stole the stone?" he asked Fiona. "Any clues?"

Fiona looked at him. "What's in it for me if I share?"

"We want the same thing: for the thieves not to have the stone. When we find them, we'll return the stone to you."

She crossed her arms and pursed her lips, considering. "Fine. We don't know much, but we do know that one of the figures wore the symbol of the Ascending Brotherhood."

"What's that?" I asked.

Lachlan frowned. "The gang that operates out of London's docks?"

"The very same." Fiona nudged the dirt with the toe of her boot. "It was found just about here. The symbol was etched into a money clip. Seems to have fallen out of his pocket, along with two hundred quid."

"That seems too convenient," I said. "Do you believe it was genuinely lost and not planted?"

Fiona shrugged. "The cash suggests a genuine loss. Who would leave that behind?"

"Or it's collateral damage."

"Were there any other clues?" Lachlan asked.

"Just footprints in the dirt, but nothing we can trace."

Damn. "Would you be willing to give us the money clip?" I asked her. "I have a friend who can read information about objects through touch. She might be able to find more information."



Fiona frowned, her gaze considering. She sighed. “All right. We’ve got as much as we can from it, anyway.”

“Will you be sending people after the thieves?” Lachlan pressed.

“We’re planning to, yes.”

“Let me go after them. They’re more dangerous than you realize, and there’s more at stake. We don’t want to alert them to the fact that someone is after them.”

“Of course someone will be after them.” Anger flashed on Fiona’s face. “We can’t allow them to do this and think they can get away with it. There must be consequences.”

“And there will be. But there are lives at stake in addition to artifacts and pride.” He gestured to me. “Her life, in fact.”

Fiona’s jaw tightened, and she stayed silent a moment. “Fine. But we’ll work together. A *team*. I will always be apprised of your progress and plans.”

“Of course.” Lachlan nodded. “And we’ll bring you the Moon Stone once we recover it.”

“Good. I can live with that.” She started back toward the car. “Now, let’s go. I’ll get you that money clip.”

“Thank you,” I called after her, hurrying to keep up. “We appreciate it.”

“Yeah, yeah. Just don’t let me down.”

Before climbing into the car, I turned back to look at the statue.

What the hell was I?

Nothing was as I thought. Had my mother known? Had anyone else? *I* certainly hadn’t. It felt like I’d been living a lie

without even knowing it.

*Lachlan*

After Fiona gave us the money clip, Eve and I returned to Guild City. I took her directly back to her tower this time, knowing she'd want her own space.

The sight of her collapsing at the stone circle had been enough to rip my heart from my chest. Whatever she'd experienced when she'd touched the stone had been horrific. Judging by the drawings and what Fiona had said, she was about to be in dire trouble.

We'd gone there because we desperately needed information. I hadn't expected to hate what we found.

Fear chilled my skin at the thought of what could happen to her. Deep within, my wolf growled, anxious to protect her. Whatever threatened her felt nearly out of my reach—something that I could neither see nor fight.

I gripped the comforting weight of the money clip. It was a clue that could lead me toward a villain I *could* fight.

I just prayed it wasn't my brother.

As we crossed the courtyard to the tower, Eve staggered. I swept her into my arms, and she glared.

“How are you?” I asked. “Is it worse?”

“I feel like I’ve been put through a blender.”

My heart twisted at the thought. “Will your pain potion help?”

“Yes, but I don’t know how much longer I can hold on.”

I hated this more than I had hated anything in my life. As we reached the steps to the door, it was flung open. Carrow frowned at us, worry in her eyes. “How much worse are you?”

“Same level.” Eve struggled out of my arms and moved slowly to a chair, then sank down by the fire. Quickly, she downed one of the potions. When she looked at me again, her eyes seemed slightly brighter and the lines in her forehead smoother. “Give Carrow the money clip.”

Carrow looked between us questioningly, and Eve quickly explained what we’d seen. I handed it over, and she took it, frowning. “Whoever owns this has spent time at the South London docks,” she said after a moment’s analysis. “He’s a man—a shifter, I think—but that’s all I see.”

A shifter.

Garreth?

He’d said to give him time. Was this what he meant? Could it be possible?

Wishful thinking on my part, most likely.

Carrow handed me the money clip.

“Thank you,” Eve said to her, then looked at me. “Are you going to get started on tracking that money clip?”

“I’ll get on it right away,” I replied. “But what about you?”

“I need to find out more about my past. Maybe Liora, my mother’s friend, can help me find my father. I don’t even know if he’s still alive.”

I couldn’t imagine that kind of uncertainty, and it made my heart twist for her. “I can ask our guild historian if we have any record of him.”

“I don’t know if he ever lived here.”

“If he did, we’ll know a bit about him. He may be on your birth certificate as well.”

“I don’t have that.”

“We likely have a record of it. We’ll find him, don’t worry.”

She nodded. “Good luck. Let me know if you find anything.”

I nodded, wanting to say something to make her feel better. But my tongue lay dead, my mind empty. There weren’t any words that could make her whole, and I hated that.

As I left, I felt Carrow’s gaze on my back. Eve’s protective friend would look out for her, but still, I’d reassign the guards to watch the Shadow Guild tower. And her, if she left it.

I made my way quickly across town and sought out Kenneth, who I found in the library once again. As I entered, he turned to look at me.

“Kenneth. Can you search for any information about Eve or her birth parents?”

My second nodded. “There’s no telling what we’ll have. At least names, I’d think, and that’ll give me a jumping-off point.

Her mother is dead, but what about her father?"

"We don't know. Hopefully alive, and with good reason for staying away."

"I'm not sure that exists."

"Neither am I." It was too tall an order, certainly.

"I'll get right on it."

"When you've found something, send it straight to the Shadow Guild."

He nodded, and I left him to it, heading back to my quarters. I needed a quick shower before heading to the docks. It was midmorning, a good time to do recon at a place that was probably quietest during the day.

I made quick work of cleaning up, then crossed town toward the Haunted Hound. Quinn manned the bar, and I gave him a short nod as I passed.

"How's Eve?" he called out.

"Fine." *Lie*. I turned to the other shifter. "Not quite fine, but she's hanging in there."

"She's tough."

I nodded and left. *Tough* was an understatement. Nothing kept her down, and I admired it.

It didn't take long to find a cab in Covent Garden, and within minutes, I was making my way toward the docks, where the freighters loaded and unloaded. It was a massive place, though, and I didn't know exactly where the gang kept their headquarters. Fortunately, I had a contact I could speak with who was familiar with London's supernatural criminal underworld.

I found Maurice where I usually did, holed up in his shoe shop in the shadier part of town. For all intents and purposes, it looked like an Old World cobbler's shop—shoes all along the walls and an area in the back where he repaired old pairs and made new. Shoes were hardly the only things he was selling out of the little place, however, though I'd never asked the details of what exactly he dealt in. I knew that it wasn't anything too morally questionably, so I didn't need to know more.

The little bell over the door rang as I entered, and Maurice came from the back room, wiping his hands on his apron. His gray beard and mustache were neatly trimmed, and his eyes twinkled behind small, frameless glasses. "Lachlan! My favorite Alpha wolf. What brings you to my door today?"

"Information."

He smiled. "Ah, I should have known. What is it you require?"

"There's a gang operating out of the freighter docks. The Ascending Brotherhood. I need to know where."

"Of course there's a gang. There are many. What does this one do?"

"So far, they help a supernatural of unknown species steal ancient artifacts."

Maurice frowned, clearly thinking.

I pulled the money clip from my pocket. "This was left at the scene of the crime."

He took it and frowned as he inspected it. "Convenient for you, no?"

“Maybe a little too convenient. But it’s our only lead, so I’m following it. Even if it’s false, it was planted by someone.” *Maybe even my brother.* “Perhaps they can lead me to answers.”

Maurice nodded. “I see your point.” He handed back the money clip. “You’re correct. That is the symbol of the Ascending Brotherhood. You’ll find them on the west side of the main docks, the ones with the freighters from overseas.”

“Thank you, Maurice.”

He nodded. “Be careful. They’re a nasty bunch. Fairly new to the area but aggressive. I heard they operate out of one of the old freighters, *Mary Lou* or *Mary Sue* or something like that. Thing hasn’t moved in years.”

“I owe you.” One day, Maurice would come calling for a favor, and I’d need to be ready to pay.

If I was still alive, of course.

He nodded, then waved me out the door.

I left his shop and made my way across London, moving quickly. The midday sun was hidden behind thick gray clouds, and the chill in the air bit into my skin.

By the time I reached the docks, it was early afternoon—likely a quiet time for the gang, which would be good for me.

As with all of the docks in this part of town, it was gated off and protected by guard shacks that admitted a slow trickle of cars and lorries. But there was no way that the gang handed over their ID every time they wanted to get into their headquarters.

There had to be another way.



I hurried around to the west end of the docks like Maurice had said. It was a massive area shoved up against some old warehouses, only half of which still had the glass in the windows. The chain link fence that separated me from the docks was tall and topped with barbed wire. Towers of shipping containers sat on the other side of the fence with no one in sight.

It was the perfect place to cross.

Perhaps there was a way through somewhere—a hole, or even a little door—but I wouldn't waste time looking for it. Instead, I climbed, moving swiftly up the fence to the barbed wire. It would have been difficult for a human to get past the spiked barrier, but I made quick work of it, using my shifter strength and agility to launch myself over without getting cut.

I landed silently on the other side, then darted into the shadows of one of the shipping containers. For the briefest moment, I listened, using all my senses to determine if anyone was near.

It was quiet.

I set off across the lot, sticking to the shadows of the containers as I patted my pocket to make sure there was still a transport charm within. I was here on recon, but I'd be vastly outnumbered if I were discovered. Speed was vital. I could have brought backup, but we weren't here for a fight. Just information.

When I reached the end of the row of containers, I spotted the docks themselves. Massive freighters were roped off to the pylons, one of them rusted and ancient.

That had to be the *Mary Sue* or whatever it was called. Dock space here had to be expensive, and one wouldn't leave

a worthless ship tied up in this port.

To my right, about fifty yards down, a group of men maneuvered a collection of large boxes toward one of the vessels. Other than that, the coast was clear.

I headed toward the men, who looked like deckhands rather than gang members. The downside of approaching during the day was the light. I needed a disguise.

I passed the men, who ignored me as expected, and found a small office built into a shipping container with one glass wall. I ducked inside and grabbed a white hard hat and clipboard. The disguise might not work, but it was worth a try. At the very least, they'd hopefully approach me before attacking.

I left the office and strode across the dock, moving back toward the ship that hopefully housed the gang. I passed two other men in hard hats, both of whom nodded at me, and then I turned onto the slip that housed the freighter. The vessel towered to my left, rising at least fifty feet in the air.

At the end of the dock, a ladder led up to the deck. A man stood at the base of it, arms folded across his chest. He turned and spotted me, a frown creasing his face.

“Oy, what’re you doing here?” he called.

“Inspections.” I raised the clipboard, not slowing my pace toward him.

“You know you don’t do that here. All you blokes know.” He strode toward me, fists clenched. “Now get out of here before I throw you out.”

I smiled. “I’m sure there’s a mistake. I’m new, you see, and—”

The man reached me and swung. I ducked, avoiding the punch, then lashed out and struck him in the gut. He heaved out a breath and doubled over. One more punch to the head, and he was unconscious.

Quickly, I dragged him into the shadows behind a shipping container that sat near the edge of the dock. He slumped like a ragdoll as I tore a strip off his shirt to gag him and bound his wrists with his belt and his ankles with his shoelaces.

Finished, I brushed off my hands and headed toward the ladder, leaving the helmet and clipboard behind. My ruse had worked as long as it was going to.

The dock was still empty as I climbed the ladder to the top deck. I slipped over the railing, tension prickling along my skin.

Would I find Garreth here?

Part of me wanted to, part of me didn't. We knew he was in league with these bastards, but I didn't want to face down the idea of him willingly working for them.

The deck was quiet as I searched it, moving between the high stacks of shipping containers. No doubt anyone who was on board was down below. I found an entrance to one of the cabins and slipped inside the austere hallway.

There had to be an office somewhere, perhaps with information. Maybe even a person I could question.

A noise sounded from behind me, and I spun around. A skinny lad with a tattoo under his eye and a torn leather jacket stared at me for a split second, shocked, then shouted, "Intruder!"

Damn it.

I charged toward him, but he turned tail and ran. I followed, deciding that Plan B was my best bet now—grab one of the men and transport him out of there to be questioned later.

The lad disappeared down a hallway, but another figure appeared.

Shocked, I nearly stopped running.

Garreth.

My brother looked skinnier than he had before, with shadows under his black eyes and a pallor to his skin that made my heart ache.

“Garreth.”

“Lachlan.” He backed up, putting space between us. “You need to get the hell out of here. There are nearly two dozen guys on this ship.”

“Come with me.”

“Can’t, mate. Not yet.”

Footsteps pounded behind me. A lot of them.

Garreth nodded to an exit just behind him. “You can get out that way.”

“Come with me. Help me stop this.”

“Grab one of the others if you need answers, but I can’t come. Not yet. And I can’t be seen near you.” He sprinted down the hall, away from me.

I wanted to follow—to drag him back—but my pursuers had turned the corner. Nearly a dozen of them crowded into the hall, then rushed me.

How the hell was I going to take them all in such a small space?

As if in answer to my prayers, a man appeared through a doorway to my right. He wore glasses and the tired look of someone who spent a lot of time doing research.

I grabbed him, plunged my free hand into my pocket for my transport charm, then hurled the thing to the floor. It exploded upward in a poof of silver smoke, and I lunged inside, dragging the man with me.

The ether sucked us in and spun us around, spitting us out in the courtyard in front of my guild tower. I braced myself, waiting to see if anyone had followed us.

They hadn't.

The man struggled, trying to break away from my grip. "I don't know nothin'! Let me go!"

"Of course you do." I pulled him toward the castle. "Now, come on. I have some questions for you."

*Eve*

We visited Liora for the second time in almost as many days.

As she opened the door, confusion sparked in her blue eyes. She was the age my mother would have been if she were still alive, but a combination of sunscreen and magic kept her looking far younger.

“Eve, are you all right?” She ushered me in, and Mac followed.

“I’m fine.”

“Liar.” Concern echoed in her voice. “Come sit down, and let me get you some tea. It’s good to see you again, Mac.”

“That would be amazing, thank you.” Liora’s tea was famous for its restorative properties. She always added a bit of magic that I’d never mastered, but every time I drank it, it reminded me of my first weeks here with her. I’d been devastated by the loss of my mother and the revelation that I was meant to be Lachlan’s mate. Liora and her tea were my safe port in the storm, and in a sense, this place still was.

Within minutes, we were seated in her cozy living room with the tea spread out on the table before us. Mac and I shared the little loveseat, and Liora took the squashy chair across from us. My honorary aunt had the style of an old hippie, her place full of colorful cushions and braided rugs.

I took a sip of tea, sighing at the warmth that rushed through me.

“Tell me what brings you here again so soon,” she said. “I kept looking for a cure for you, but I didn’t find one.”

That was expected. She’d known she couldn’t help me, but she’d tried anyway. I nodded my thanks and told her everything we’d learned so far, finishing with, “You knew my mother. Does any of this sound familiar?”

Liora frowned and shook her head. “Unfortunately not. As far as I knew, she was a regular werewolf. She never mentioned any of this to me.”

“And my father?”

Shadows crossed her face, and she looked like she wanted to hex him. “That good for nothing was no one special.” Her mouth twisted, as if she were holding back more curses, and then she stood. “I’ll be right back.”

She left the room, and Mac and I shared a confused glance. “What was that about?” Mac asked.

“She hates him for leaving my mother before I was born. I hate him for that, too, actually.”

“Do you know why he did?”

“No, only that it wasn’t for a good reason. It’s not like he had to go off to war or take care of my sick nan or anything.

Mum always made it sound like he just up and left because he didn't want the responsibility."

"Bastard."

"Exactly," Liora said, charging back into the room. Her stride and voice were equally irritated, and she flopped into her chair. "Your mother gave me something to give to you in case you ever asked about your father."

"What?" Confusion raced through me. "Why didn't she give it to me herself?"

"Because she knew how you felt about him. You wouldn't have wanted anything."

"That's true. But why didn't she hold on to it herself? She died in a car crash. It's not like she knew what was going to happen to her."

"A seer once told her she would live a short life." Sadness creased Liora's features. "I'd wanted it not to be true, but in the end, it was."

My heart twisted at the memory of learning about the accident. Tears pricked my eyes, and I felt Mac grip my hand and give me a squeeze. I clung to her and met Liora's gaze. "What did she give you?"

She handed me a battered silver locket, and I took it. "From what I understand, he gave it to her. She made it plain that she wanted this given to you if you asked about him."

I nodded and took it, closing my fist around the cool metal. "Do you think he's still alive?"

"I don't know. But his last known location was a village on the east coast of Scotland called Avereen."

"Is it a big village?"



“Not terribly, but without his name, it might be tough to find him.”

“You never knew his name?” I hadn’t. My mother had never told me, and I hadn’t wanted to know.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t. I think she might have once said it was Tom, but I’m not certain of that.”

“Okay, we’ll look for a Tom to start.” I stood. “Thank you so much.”

“Good luck, dear.” She hugged me tightly. “Your mother would be proud of you.”

My vision grew watery, and I blinked the film away. “Thank you.”

“Anytime.” She pulled back. “Be careful, now. Let me know if I can do anything.”

“Will do.”

Mac gave her a goodbye nod. “Thanks for the tea.”

“Of course.”

We made our way out onto the quiet London street, then turned to each other.

“We need more than a town and a first name,” I said, looking down at the locket in my hand.

“Does that offer any clues?”

I tried popping it open, but it wouldn’t work. “It’s stuck.”

“Stuck or locked?”

“Hard to say.”

Mac held out her hand, and I passed it over to her. As she inspected it, my mobile vibrated. I pulled it from my pocket

and opened it to find a text from an unknown number. I scanned it quickly, my heart leaping. “Kenneth, Lachlan’s second, just sent me a message. He says my father was called Thomas Mackay.”

Mac stepped closer, trying to read my mobile over my shoulder. “Really? Does he say anything else?”

“Says he visited my mother once after she’d moved to Guild City and joined Lachlan’s pack. But he didn’t stay long. That’s how they got his name, though. They don’t have an address or anything for him.”

“But now we’ve got a full name and a town. That’s bound to be useful.”

“Thank fates.” I tucked the mobile away. “We’re getting somewhere now.”

Mac gripped my arm, her touch comforting. “Are you hanging in there?”

“Fine. A bit worn down, but fine. Once we get to the bottom of this, I’ll be right as rain.”

“But what about Lachlan?”

I frowned, bemused by the question. “How is he doing?”

“No, how are *you* doing with him?”

With a sigh, I muttered, “That’s not as fine.” I looked at the street, searching for the words. “I care for him. More and more every day. I know I shouldn’t. It’s downright dangerous. But he’s so...good inside. I don’t know how to describe it... but I like him. I trust him.”

Mac nodded. “Makes sense, given the fated mate thing and all.”

I laughed bitterly, dragging my hand through my hair. “Yeah, that. I wish it didn’t exist.”

“If wishes were horses.” She grabbed my hand and pulled me along. “Now, let’s go find your father and sort all this mess out.”

She pressed the locket back into my palm, still shut tight. I strung it around my neck, patting it down and vowing I’d figure out how to open it.

Mac and I took a transport charm to the tiny town of Avereen. It was a beautiful village of old buildings backed by rolling hills on one side and the sea on the other. As we stood in the middle of the town square, I turned in a circle, taking it all in.

“I’d expected it to be on one of the islands,” I said. “Not mainland.”

“It’s been a long time since the old wolves were around.”

I’d told her everything we’d learned, and she’d started calling my possible ancestors *the old wolves*. I liked that name, even though I wished I had something more accurate to call them.

“How the heck are we supposed to find one person in a whole town?” Mac asked. “Google him? Social media?”

“Doubt he has a Twitter account.” I spotted a church on the other side of the square. “Let’s ask in there. Churches often know all the people around.”

“Think your dad was religious?”

I shrugged. “We can only hope.”

The church itself was a quiet, serene space. Small and ancient, it was filled with little wooden benches that faced the

altar at the front. The stained glass was beautifully ornate, but the rest of the building was simple in its decoration.

An old priest came out from a back room, eyes brightening when he saw us. “Good morning. How can I help you?”

“We’re looking for someone,” I said. “Thomas Mackay. He used to live here.”

“Ah, that he did. Come to pay your respects, have you?”

The words hit me like a fist to the gut. Mac gripped my hand, and I managed to keep my face bland. Mostly.

The priest seemed to have noticed that I was a bit off and frowned. “I’m so sorry. You didn’t know?”

“Um, no. But that’s all right. Does he have family in the area?” Did *I* have family? Not that I could really consider them that. Perhaps they were related to me by blood, but having never met them, they were no more than strangers.

“I’m afraid not. But he’s buried in the old cemetery on the west side of town. Back left.”

“Thank you.” I turned to go, then looked at the priest again. “You never knew him, did you?”

“Alas, I did not. Knew his sister before she died, that’s how I knew of him.”

“A sister?” I’d had an aunt.

He nodded. “Died of the flu. Nasty thing.”

Damn. “Thank you.”

He nodded, watching us as we left.

“Well, that’s a bummer,” I said.

“To say the least.” Mac searched the square in front of us, then pointed. “I think the cemetery is that way. Want to go?”

I nodded. “Might as well.”

We set off across town, my nerves making me jittery the closer we got.

“How do you feel?” Mac asked.

“Relieved and disappointed at the same time.”

“Makes sense.”

“It’s not like I knew him. Or wanted to know him. Or like he wanted to know me.” My throat tightened a bit at the thought, and I blinked away tears.

“We make our own family,” Mac said. “That’s the most important bit.”

I smiled at her. “You’re right. And we’ve got a good one.”

She grinned and nodded.

The cemetery was an ancient place, full of crumbling headstones covered in lichen. We searched the rows at the back and found my father’s headstone quickly. It was a simple affair—just a name and a date.

“He died when I was ten,” I murmured. That was a lot of years during which he could have visited me.

Mac gripped my shoulder, and I leaned into her. I’d seemed to need a lot of hand holding in these last couple days, but I cut myself some slack.

I frowned, searching the headstone for clues...but what the hell was I going to find here? Nothing. Not on this gravestone, at least.

I pulled the necklace from around my neck and looked at it. The metal was tarnished and old, the locket dented at the back. It was a twisted knot design, pretty in a simple way.

My gaze landed on the headstone next to my father's, and I spotted the same design at the top of the slab. The name underneath was Dierdre Mackay, and it looked like she'd lived before my father. There was overlap, though, enough that she might be his mother or aunt.

I knelt in front of her headstone and ran my fingertips over the letters. I was more drawn to this grave than I was to my father's, though I had no idea why.

The twisted knot carving caught my attention again, and I realized that the center of the knot was a particularly deep indentation. It was the exact size as the locket in my hand, so I raised the little piece of metal and pushed it into the hole.

Magic sparked, and I gasped.

Mac knelt by my side, and we watched as light swirled in front of the headstone. A moment later, it coalesced to form the shadowy figure of an older woman—seventy, at least, with silver hair and finely lined skin.

I stared at her, caught by surprise.

“Well?” she asked. “Why have you awakened me? Who are you?”

“Um, I'm Eve. I mean, Verity...Mackay.” I used my given name and my father's last name, just in case it would help her recognize me.

Her eyes widened. “No!”

“I am.”

Her face softened. “Well, I’ll be. I’m your Great-Aunt Dierdre. I used to look after your father when he was a lad.”

“Really?” Even though I didn’t love my father—how could I, when I’d never met him?—I still liked hearing the stories of my family.

“Indeed. A troublesome lad he was. I knew he had a little daughter, just as I knew he didn’t visit.” She tutted. “A shame, that.”

“You knew about me?”

She nodded. “For a short while, I did. Died before I could visit, though.”

My heart clutched. “Definitely a shame.”

“Why are you here, lass?”

“I need to know what I am. Apparently, I’m a type of shifter that should be extinct. Or something. We don’t have all the info yet. But I was hoping my father might know. Maybe he was one of them.”

“Something special?” She shook her head. “No, not him. Average as they came. Wolf shifter, medium size and strength. It’s your *mother* you’ll be wanting to look into, lass.”

“No, she was a regular wolf shifter. I knew her all the way up until I was fifteen. I’d have noticed if she was something different.”

“Would you?”

I hesitated. No, maybe I wouldn’t have. I’d been fifteen. Absorbed in my own life until my mother was taken too soon. “Wouldn’t she have told me?”

Great-Aunt Dierdre looked at the locket that I'd pressed into her headstone. "I'd say that locket was her way of telling you."

"What do you mean?"

"Tom gave that to your mother, that much I know. It's a family heirloom, it is. And your mother knew I would allow you to contact me."

"You knew her?"

"A bit. She grew up here, too, you know. I'd liked her since she was a girl. Knew her well enough to know she was too good for the likes of your father."

"Really?" She'd only ever said she'd grown up in a small village, pushing me off when I'd asked for details. It wasn't to my credit that I'd never pressed for more information, but I'd thought I had all the time in the world.

The ghost nodded. "She lived at the edge of the village in a small house with her parents. Did so until she ran off with my nephew. Never came back. Clever girl."

"She joined the pack in Guild City."

"Good for her." She nodded approvingly. "If you want information about what you are—why you're special—then that's where you need to look."

"Do I have family still alive on her side?" I knew I didn't even as I asked. My mother had told me so. She wouldn't lie about that, at least.

Dierdre shook her head. "Poor thing didn't. She was an orphan, taken in by an old man and woman who died long ago. I think that's why she sent you to me when you wanted answers."



*She sent you to me.*

My mother really had. It had taken time and the right kind of questions, but I'd found my way here because of the locket she'd given Liora.

“Go to the little house near the forest on the east side of town, near the sea. You'll find what you're seeking there.”

“Thank you *so* much.”

“I'd give you a hug if I could, but alas....” She raised her ghostly arms.

“It's enough just to see you.” I looked down at the grave. “You're...happy here?”

She laughed. “Of course. I don't spend all my time in the dirt, you know.”

“Good.” I stood, and Mac joined me.

Great-Aunt Dierdre waved me off, then disappeared. I took the locket back and put it around my neck, then turned to Mac. Before I could ask if she wanted to head over to my mother's old home, my mobile vibrated again.

I pulled it out and read the text from Lachlan:

*Found one of their men. Planning to question him. Do you have any truth serum?*

I looked at the leather cuff around my wrist. The slender vial of potions sparkled in the late afternoon light. There was just one truth potion left.

“What is it?” Mac asked.

I showed her the message, then typed out a response saying that we’d be there soon. I looked up at Mac. “Slight change in plans?”

She nodded. “Definitely. I’ve got a transport charm.”

“Excellent.” As Mac pulled the charm from her pocket, I felt the heat of someone’s gaze upon me. It prickled the back of my neck, like a prey instinct going into overdrive.

Heart pounding, I looked toward the forest.

There, a shadowy figure stood.

*The Maker.*

He was watching me.

A chill raced down my spine.

“Mac,” I whispered. “In the forest.”

She looked up. “I don’t see anything.”

“It’s the Maker.”

“Fates, let’s get the hell out of here.” She chucked the transport charm to the ground. As we stepped into the silvery smoke, I felt the burn of the Maker’s gaze.

*He’s orchestrating this.*

*Lachlan*

“What is he planning?” I demanded.

The man blinked up at me. We’d stashed him in the dungeon, and Eve had brought a truth potion ten minutes ago. She’d looked shaken when she’d arrived, but she’d refused to answer my questions, stating that it was more important to interview the man I’d caught.

I disagreed, but there was no convincing her.

She stood to my right now, staring down at the man we’d tied to the chair.

“You might as well spit it out,” she said. “The truth potion will force you to speak eventually.”

His face twisted in a grimace, and he snapped, “You bitch \_\_\_”

“Watch yourself,” I barked.

Eve put a hand on my arm and smiled sweetly at the man. “It’s fine. I *am* a bitch. And bitches get shit done. Like making

you talk.” She leaned close and growled, “What is he planning?”

Finally, the man answered. “He’s seeking three Moon Stones for a ritual.”

“Three?” Eve straightened. “How many does he have?”

“Two.”

So we hadn’t missed one. Thank fates. “Why does he want them?” she pressed.

“A ritual.”

“What kind of ritual?” I asked.

“I don’t know.”

I looked at Eve for confirmation, and she said, “Truth. One more question, *maybe*.”

“Where has he hidden them?” I asked. “Specifically.”

“His headquarters,” said the man, “which I don’t know the location of.”

“I doubt that.”

“You nabbed a guy low on the totem pole, gov. I don’t know where he keeps them.”

Eve nodded, confirming the truth of his statement.

Damn it.

“Why is he so interested in me?” she asked the man.

“Not saying nothin’.” He gave her a mulish look, his jaw set.

“Truth potion has worn off.” Eve spun away from him and left the cell. I followed her, locking the door behind me before

turning to her. She looked up at me and said, “I have more truth potion brewing, but it will take time.”

“We’ve got some information, at least. He’s not there yet.” I watched her, noting how drawn she looked, her face pale and her eyes shadowed. “What’s wrong, Eve?”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re really not.” It wasn’t wise to care or to seek more information, but I couldn’t help it. Mate bond or no mate bond, I cared about her. Worried about her.

She drew in a slow breath and looked to the side. “My father is dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

“He died when I was ten.”

My heart ached for her, an unfamiliar feeling that made me want to rub my chest. I resisted. “You’re hurt because that means he could have visited you.”

“Wouldn’t it have been better if he’d been dead all along?” She grimaced. “For me, obviously, not for him.”

“Yes. From that perspective, yes.” I wanted to take her into my arms. Comfort her.

I shouldn’t.

But I also couldn’t help myself. The pain in her eyes made something break inside me.

I hugged her close, trying to absorb her pain with my body. It was a worthless attempt—impossible, of course—but it didn’t stop me.

Briefly, she stiffened, but only for a moment. Within seconds, she had melted against me, burying her face against

my chest.

Holding her felt as natural as breathing, as right as waking in the morning. How was I supposed to resist this thing between us?

I had to, and I knew it. The Dark Moon curse was proof enough of that.

“Eve.” Her voice was torn from my throat. “What am I going to do about you?”

She gave a ragged sigh and pulled back, stepping away so that we were no longer touching. The loss burned like fire streaking down to my soul.

“Nothing.” She dragged her palm across her cheeks, wiping away the dampness. “There’s nothing you can do except ignore me. As I need to ignore you.”

“But—”

“No buts. We both have our reasons. Compelling ones. You, the Dark Moon curse. And me—” She broke off, looking away.

“You what?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all.” She smiled at me, but it was hollow. “Suffice it to say this is dangerous for us. Mates or not, there are reasons we can’t be together. Reasons we can’t afford to ignore.”

I searched her face, not liking her answer. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Nothing.” She turned and started up the stairs. “I need to visit my mother’s childhood home.”

I followed her. “Why? What did you find out?”

She spoke without looking back. “Whatever I am—it didn’t come from my father, like I thought. My mother had more secrets than I realized. And she had a very roundabout way of sharing them.”

“Why not be direct?”

She reached the top of the stairs and turned to face me. “I don’t know. Maybe she thought I was too young to handle it. Maybe there was a scenario where I never needed to know.”

I wasn’t sure I agreed with those reasons, but it wasn’t my place to say. “I’ll come with you.”

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea.”

“I don’t care. I’m coming with you.”

She huffed and turned around. “Whatever. I’m not going to waste time trying to dissuade you.”

It was good enough for me. “I’ll tell Kenneth what we’ve learned so that he can add it to his research. I have him trying to decipher the carvings on the Shetland standing stones.”

“Excellent. Will you ask him to share that information with Seraphia? I think they could help each other.”

Guild City’s librarian would be the perfect partner for Kenneth’s research. Not only was she intelligent, but she also had ready access to the largest library in Guild City. “I will.”

“I’m going to swing by your kitchens to pick up some food, then I’ll meet you in the courtyard.”

I nodded, watching her turn the corner and stride away. I couldn’t help but marvel at her as she walked off. No matter what life threw at her, Eve kept her chin up and kept moving forward.

Whatever she was—whatever we would find at her mother’s old house—it was going to be something the likes of which the world had never seen.

I was sure of it.



*Eve*

I tried to keep my breathing steady as I walked toward the kitchens.

What the hell was I going to do about Lachlan? That embrace had nearly broken me.

It was one thing to want to jump his bones all the time—who wouldn’t want that? But it was an entirely different thing to have such tender moments. *Those* were the kinds of thing that made one fall in love. How could he be so... understanding? Kind? Insightful?

It wasn’t fair.

It certainly wasn’t something my defenses could resist.

I rubbed my chest absently, vowing to maintain my distance, no matter what. He had the Dark Moon curse to contend with, and I had the damned seer’s prophecy about my death to consider. She hadn’t been clear about how I would die if I pursued the bond with him, but she’d been clear it would happen.

It was one of the few things that could actually frighten me, and I wasn’t going to ignore it.



As I approached the kitchens, my stomach grumbled. Fortunately, they were empty when I entered.

Excellent. I'd be able to raid the larder and be on my way without any conversation.

A rustling noise from the pantry caught my attention, and I stiffened. Someone was here? No. I would sense another person, feel their magic. Quietly, I crept toward the pantry. I had a feeling I knew who was in there, and I knew I wasn't going to like it.

When I peered around the edge, I spotted chaos. Packages of food were scattered everywhere, and a fluffy raccoon tail was sticking out of a massive crate full of snack bars wrapped in colorful packaging.

"Ralph." My tone was that of an annoyed parent, and when Ralph's little head popped up out of the crate, the guilt in his eyes told me he recognized it. "What are you doing?"

*Did you know there's not a single chocolate bar in this whole place?*

"I think your previous thefts have led the cook to hide them."

A cunning look glinted in his eyes. *I see.*

"You will not go on a hunt for them, I swear to fate, or I will string you up by your ankles and let the birds laugh at you."

He looked at me, a scandalized expression on his face. *You wouldn't.*

"Try me." I crossed my arms. "It's one thing to raid the larders at our tower. It's entirely another to do it at the Shifters Guild."

*It's kind of your guild, too.*

“Not in a way that means you can do this.”

He harrumphed.

“Put it all back. It's not like you want any of this, anyway.”

*I don't. It's all healthy and gross.*

“Exactly.” Thank fates he was magical and I didn't have to worry about a proper diet for him. If he were a normal raccoon, we'd be in the veterinary ER with cardiac arrest every other day.

As he began to put the snacks back, I grabbed a few energy bars, then snagged a couple of apples from the kitchen counter. It wasn't exciting, but it would have to do. I didn't want to spare even a minute if we were almost there.

The sound of tiny, padded footsteps made me turn. Ralph stopped in front of me and held up a single chocolate bar in offering. *You look like you've had a hard day.*

“I have.” I stared at the chocolate. “But where did you find it?”

*Cook isn't as clever as she thinks.*

“Nothing stops you.” I sighed, then took the chocolate bar. I could use it. “Thank you.”

He nodded. *Shout if you need me.*

“Always.” I ruffled his little head, then left the kitchen. He was a menace, but I was lucky to have him.

A few minutes later, I found Lachlan in the courtyard. Full dark had fallen, but the streetlamps had turned on and picked up the slack. I tossed Lachlan an apple and an energy bar, but no way was I sharing my chocolate.

I wasn't in love with him yet.

He caught the items deftly. "Thank you."

I nodded. "Have you got a transport charm we can use?"

This was one of the other reasons I hadn't fought him about coming with me. I knew it was pointless, but I also needed a ride.

"I do."

"Great." I shoved my energy bar in my pocket and held out my hand for the stone. He gave it to me, and I raised it, about to throw. "Ready?"

He nodded.

I chucked the stone to the ground. When the silver cloud poofed up, I reached for his hand. He gripped my palm, and warm shivers raced through my body.

*Ignore them, idiot.*

With a deep breath, I imagined my destination and stepped into the cloud, bringing him with me. The ether sucked us in and spun us through space, then spat us out at the edge of my mother's village.

The moon gleamed high in the sky, stars twinkling despite its light. The night was bright enough that it was easy to see, and I felt something surge deep inside me at the feeling of moonlight on my skin. I swayed, lightheaded.

Lachlan gently gripped my arm to steady me. "Are you all right?"

I nodded, trying to clear my head. Whatever was inside me wanted out. It wanted to shift, to run, to hunt. There was a beast inside me, after all. I just had no idea how to let it out.

Even now, I knew it was impossible. I could try and try, just like I had, and nothing would happen.

Damn it, these weren't the thoughts I needed to be having right now. I drew in a deep breath, trying to focus on my surroundings and drag myself back to the present. I could smell the salty scent of the sea in the distance, and I breathed deeply. It felt like home, somehow, as if my soul recognized that my ancestors had once lived here.

"If she's related to the wolves from the islands, I'm surprised she's not from there," Lachlan said.

"Me, too. But if there really is Viking ancestry, this place makes sense. They did make it to the east coast of Scotland."

Lachlan nodded. "Where to?"

I bit into the apple and pointed to the small cottage in front of the woods. It looked like it was part of the shadows of the forest behind it and was separated from the main town by a couple hundred yards. "It's that one."

"Far from town."

I nodded. "She told me a lot of stories about it when I was a kid. Never the exact location, but her tales had such detail and life that I never thought to ask. I felt like I was getting the full story."

"I don't think you were."

"That's what I'm starting to realize." I set off toward the cottage, nerves prickling my skin.

From here, it looked abandoned. I'd expected it, but all the same, it was strange to see the place that had featured so heavily in my mother's tales looking so decrepit.

The feeling only intensified as we got closer. There was no protection charm that I could sense, but it was such an off-putting place that I doubted even the local teenagers came here to deface things and break other minor rules.

“No one has been here in decades,” Lachlan said.

“Agreed. My mother said she left when she was eighteen to be with my father. Her adopted parents had died by then. She left the village after she had me.”

I stopped in front of the old building, inspecting the tiny structure. It was a three-room cottage, from how she’d described it, and it looked to be about that size. Some of the glass in the windows had been broken, and the door looked as if it were cracked open. The night was dark enough that I couldn’t see inside, but it felt empty.

“Do you want me to go first?” Lachlan asked.

I appreciated that he didn’t just barge in. Normally, he’d be the first into any unknown place, wanting to scout it for danger before I entered. But this was too important, and I could sense that there was no one inside. Surely he could, too.

“No, I’ve got it.” I drew in a deep breath and pushed open the door. It creaked ominously, letting out a dusty scent.

I drew my mobile from my pocket and turned on the torch. The bright white beam illuminated the decrepit interior. There was still furniture in the combination living room–kitchen, but it was so dusty and old that it should be in a landfill.

I stepped inside, feeling the echo of my mother in the walls. She’d been a child here, however, someone I had never known.

Lachlan joined me, and I appreciated his presence. It helped banish the ghosts that weren’t helpful to my cause. In

all of my mother's stories, she hadn't spoken much about the people who'd adopted her. Instead, she'd stuck to the exploits of her youth—the adventures she'd had in the surrounding countryside and the friends she'd made.

“I think this was her bedroom,” Lachlan said from the back of the house.

I joined him and found a little room with a narrow bed. There wasn't much left besides a few pieces of furniture, but we searched it thoroughly, going so far as to pull up any loose floorboards. I even used the potion that was meant to reveal hidden places, but to no avail.

After an hour, I stepped back and sighed. “There's nothing here.”

“I think you're right.”

I turned in a circle, inspecting the nearly empty space. “Why was I sent here, then?”

“Perhaps the one who sent you didn't realize there was nothing here.”

Dierdre might not have known, that was true. She was just the intermediary. But why the hell had my mother made it so damned hard? Why hadn't she told me what I needed to know?

Maybe she had.

I frowned, searching my memories. She'd told me a lot of stories, some more often than others—to the point that it'd begun to annoy me when I was a teenager. Teenagers were easily annoyed, but she'd really gone overboard with the stories about the cave at the base of the sea cliffs. I still dreamed of them sometimes, convinced that my mother's stories would never leave me.

“I’ve got an idea.” I left the cottage, glad to breathe fresh air that wasn’t haunted by memories. “We need to find this sea cave she spoke of all the time.”

“She told you about it often?”

“You’ve no idea.” There were other places that she’d talked about as well, but this one had been the most common.

As the moonlight gleamed brightly on my skin, I followed the sound of the sea toward the cliffs. Lachlan stayed close at my side, his attention alert.

When we reached the cliffs and I could finally see the ocean, it took my breath away. The moonlight gleamed on the waves, sparkling like diamonds against a shimmery backdrop.

“There are supposed to be narrow stairs that lead down to the beach.” I searched for them, moving left along the cliff. “But we don’t want to be caught by high tide. Unless you have another transport charm.”

“I do.”

“Good.” After a moment, I found the steps. “Here they are.”

The narrow stairs were carved right out of the stone, and the descent to the beach was not for the faint of heart.

Oh, how I wished I still had my wings.

But no point wishing for that. Didn’t matter how much I missed them, I needed to move forward. Keep my head in the game.

Carefully, I took the stairs one at a time. To my right, the waves crashed against the beach. I ran my hand along the wall to my left, steadying myself as I tried not to think of plummeting to the shore below.

Finally, I reached the bottom, stepping gratefully onto the rough sand and pebbles.

Lachlan joined me a few seconds later. “Do you know which way to go?”

“No. Shall we split up?”

He shook his head. “It can’t be far if your mother went there as a child.”

“Don’t underestimate my mother.”

“All the same, we’ll stay together.”

“Fine.” I wasn’t going to waste time fighting with him. I started to the left of the stairs, hurrying along the beach as I inspected the wall for any sign of hidden caves or passages.

It only took fifteen minutes before I found a narrow fissure in the rock, almost too narrow for me to enter. I stopped in front of it, inspecting the entrance.

Lachlan joined me, and I could feel his skepticism. “I’m not sure I’ll make it through there,” he said.

“Don’t risk it. I’ll go.”

“You’re sure this is it?”

“My mother mentioned it being narrow. Like a slice in the earth where it had cracked open to reveal a secret realm.”

“This fits.”

I nodded and stepped forward. My heart raced as I turned to the side and squeezed into the fissure. The stone walls brushed against my front and back.

“Thank fates I’m not claustrophobic,” I muttered. “You’re not going to wiggle through here, Lachlan. It gets tighter.”



“Be careful. If you aren’t out in thirty minutes, I’ll blast my way in, if I have to.”

“Don’t do that.” If he responded, I couldn’t hear him. I was too far in.

The passage wasn’t long, fortunately, just about fifty feet. I felt when it broadened, but it was too dark to see. Images of spiders and other creepy crawlers flashed in my mind, and my hand shook slightly as I withdrew my mobile to turn on the torch.

When the white light cut through the darkness, I gasped.

It was huge.

Like the beach outside, the ground was made of sand and pebbles. The ceiling towered overhead, and dozens of nooks and crannies marked the walls.

It was the perfect hiding place. I just needed to find the spot where my mother’s secrets were tucked away.

I searched quickly, climbing up the walls where I could and sticking my arm into dark holes that gave me the jitters. With every minute that passed, I was reminded more and more of my mother’s stories. It was like she was here with me.

It was such a lovely feeling that I didn’t notice the water beginning to rise in the cavern. I stuck to the edges, climbing the walls and not even seeing the tide pour in through the entrance.

It wasn’t until Lachlan shouted my name that I realized something was wrong. Still clinging to the wall, I turned around and spotted him. Patches of his shirt were bloody where he’d clearly had to tear his way through the narrow fissure in the rock.

“Lachlan!”

His dark eyes were wild with worry. “Tide is coming up, and you don’t have a transport charm to get out of here.”

He was right. And I must have been in the cave longer than I’d realized. Shit.

“Help me search this wall.” I pointed to my right. “I’ve done all the rest.”

He nodded and loped over, splashing through the water to reach the wall. He climbed swiftly and began to search the many little spots where something could be hidden.

My own efforts became frantic as I glanced every few minutes at the water rising behind me. It was fast, moving up the cavern every minute.

The ceiling was high here, but could it reach the top? Could it drown us?

Probably not, but I didn’t want to be around to find out.

I kept looking, my heart racing as I shoved my hand into the tiny crevasses. When I finally touched something that wasn’t rock, I was so surprised that I nearly lost my grip on the wall. The item didn’t bite me, and so I grinned and pulled it out of the hole.

A book, ancient and weathered.

And locked.

A tiny metal lock sparked with magic.

The fact that the book was dry and not beaten up by seawater answered my question of whether we would drown in here, but I was glad to be leaving.

“Found it!” I raised it high to show him, then put it in my pocket.

“Good. Let’s get the hell out.”

Still clinging to the wall, I turned to look at Lachlan. He was about halfway up the wall to my right, standing on a narrow ledge, and gestured me over. “We can leave from here.”

It was the perfect spot—just enough room to slam the transport charm against the ground.

I climbed my way over to him, moving quickly as the water began lapping at my feet. The sea was cold and fiercely biting, and I wasn’t keen to take a dip. Finally, I reached Lachlan and climbed onto the ledge to join him.

“Ready?” he asked.

I nodded, and he threw the charm to the ground. I gripped his hand, and we stepped into the silver smoke.

*Lachlan*

I took us directly back to Eve's tower, knowing she'd want to be in her own space to look at the book her mother had left her.

We appeared in the courtyard, and she pulled the little leather volume from her pocket to inspect it. The tiny metal lock glinted under the light of the streetlamp behind us.

"It's enchanted," she said. "I bet the contents will be destroyed if I don't open it properly."

"Do you have a key?"

"No. But—" Her hand flashed to her neck, and she gripped the silver necklace that hung there. "This is from my mother."

"Ah. And you think there's a key in there."

"I do. I tried to open it, but I couldn't. I didn't try everything, though." She turned and raced toward the tower.

I followed her, trailing her up to her workshop to find her frantically sorting through ingredients.

“I only tried to open it manually. I didn’t try anything from here.” She flipped open a book and began to read. “Yes, this should do it.”

She moved deftly in her natural element as she worked with her ingredients and tools. Within minutes, she had a potion bubbling in a cauldron.

“It won’t take long to brew.” She removed her necklace and set it on the table.

“How are you so good at this?” I asked.

“I was determined.” She shrugged. “Anyway, after I left the pack, I needed a way to survive. This was it.”

“I’m sorry you felt you had to leave.”

“You wanted me to.” She looked up. “You *needed* me to.”

I nodded. “I thought so, at the time.”

“You can’t go back on it now. More than ever, it’s obvious we can’t be together. You saw that when you were young, and it hasn’t changed.”

I hated the words but knew she was right. There was no question.

“It’s done.” She picked up the locket and dipped it in the potion, counting to ten under her breath. When she removed it, the silver glowed with light. “I think it worked.”

I watched as she laid the locket on the table and popped it open easily, a smile on her face. “There’s a tiny key,” she murmured.

“Your mother had this all thought out.”

“In a roundabout way, yes.” She pulled the book from her pocket and used the key to open the lock.

I joined her, standing close enough that I could see the writing within but not so close that I touched her. I couldn't afford to so much as brush up against her.

She flipped through the pages quickly, and it became obvious what the book was.

"It's a key," she said. "It will help us translate the writing on the stones."

"I think you're right. This is enormous. A new language."

"A new language that might tell me exactly what I am." She looked up at me. "Can Kenneth use this to finish his work? He already knows the Old Norse."

I nodded. "I'm sure he can. I'll take it to him immediately."

"I'll come with you."

As much as I wanted her to, the shadows under her eyes made it clear that wasn't a great idea. She was exhausted, weakened from her condition, and it was late.

"You should sleep," I said.

She opened her mouth to protest, then shut it. "You're right. I'm exhausted and no good to anybody if I don't fix that. But I'll come over first thing in the morning."

I nodded. "Good."

It was time to leave. Of course it was.

Yet I wanted to stay. The only thing that got me moving was the book. Kenneth needed it.

I turned and left the room, not looking behind me as I made my way out of the tower and across the courtyard. Every

step that I took away from her felt unnatural, and that was the most dangerous thing of all.



*Eve*

I slept like hell, memories of my mother's stories turning into dreams that wouldn't stop. Normally, they'd be welcome, but I kept waking in a cold sweat, feeling like I was too slow to discover whatever I was supposed to learn.

When the sun finally rose and I felt mostly rested, I got up. My insides ached like they were being torn apart, and I reached for one of the vials of pain medicine on the bedside table. With a shaking hand, I closed my eyes and drank the liquid, then leaned back against the pillows, feeling it flow through me, taking away the pain. It was dark behind my eyelids, but it was soothing.

How much longer was I going to last? The potions were becoming less effective with time, and I was going to need to shift. Soon.

I heaved a sigh and opened my eyes.

Ralph sat in the chair across from the bed, staring at me while eating a bag of popcorn. *You talk in your sleep.*

“Did I say anything interesting?”

*Nonsense, mostly.*

“That's what I figured.” I made quick work of my shower and dressed in fresh jeans and a shirt. Boots and a leather

jacket finished the outfit, and I longed for when my life was boring enough that I could afford to wear a dress again.

Not anytime soon, I was afraid.

*Going to your boyfriend's?*

“How's Cordelia?”

He glared at me, the reminder of the lady raccoon clearly putting him in a foul mood. They'd been thick as thieves recently, but I hadn't seen them together in the last few days.

*Fine.*

“Uh-huh. You don't ask me about my relationships, and I won't ask about yours.”

*You play dirty.*

“I play fair.” I pointed at him. “And maybe eat an apple or something.”

*I'm allergic.*

“To apples?”

*To all fruit and veg.*

“Sure.” I left him in the chair and headed to Lachlan's tower. I stopped for coffee and breakfast, debating whether I should get Lachlan something. I shouldn't do anything that would grow the bond between us, but he always fed me.

I was overthinking it.

I got a second cup of coffee and another bacon bap, then thought of Kenneth. Surely I'd see him, too, though I knew that Seraphia had already left for the night after helping him. I added a third to my order, and they packaged the drinks up in a takeaway tray.



Loaded down, I continued on my way. As I neared the tower, I realized that this was one of the first times that I'd come here on my own since leaving so many years ago. Normally, Lachlan was with me. Now, I was going to have to walk into the main room alone. Face my old pack. Alone.

I drew in a deep breath and straightened my shoulders.

I'd faced down way worse. This was mildly awkward. It was the last thing I should be worried about.

Anyway, this had been my mother's pack, too. For a while, at least.

I climbed the stairs to the main door and let myself in. As usual, the main room was full of shifters having breakfast and chatting. I nodded at the few who looked at me, then made my way across the room toward the hallway at the back.

When I ran into the cook who'd made me a sandwich a couple weeks ago, I smiled at her. "Have you seen Lachlan?"

She eyed the takeaway bag and coffees in my hands and frowned. Suddenly, I felt like a kid trying to sneak snacks into the movie theater and had an urge to hide the damned things behind my back.

She nodded toward the hallway behind me. "He's in the library with his second."

"Thank you." I doubted it would improve her goodwill if I offered her a pastry, so I turned and headed back toward the library.

I found Kenneth and Lachlan just where the cook said they would be and offered them the snacks.

"Thank you," Lachlan said.

Kenneth nodded appreciatively and sipped the coffee. He looked exhausted, and I made a mental note to thank him with more than just coffee.

“Any luck?” I asked, looking at the scattered papers in front of them.

Kenneth nodded. “The book you found was the key. I’ve got most of it translated.”

“Really? Anything interesting?” Kenneth and Lachlan shared a look, and suddenly, I was desperate to know. “What do you know that I don’t?”

“You’re something special, all right,” Kenneth said.

“Don’t draw it out.” I sat in the chair across from them and glared. “Tell me.”

“You’re a dire wolf,” Lachlan said.

*Holy fates.* “A dire wolf? I thought they were a myth.”

“They were, until you showed up.”

“I can’t even shift.”

“You haven’t transitioned yet.” Lachlan pressed a piece of paper closer to me. It was covered in symbols and translations, and I assumed it was proof of what he was saying. I didn’t want to take the time to decipher it, though. Not if he already knew.

“It’s different than what happens to regular wolves?”

Lachlan nodded. “It didn’t used to be. Dire wolves were like regular wolves, just larger and more powerful. More magic in their veins, which meant more strength. But they began to die out nearly a thousand years ago.”

“Right after those stones were carved.”

“It was one reason they left Norway,” Lachlan said. “They weren’t sure if it was something in the environment there. So they came to Scotland, hoping for a new start.”

“It didn’t work.”

“Not for long. More and more of their children couldn’t shift, until finally, there were no more of them.”

“No more?”

“They couldn’t survive being unable to shift.”

“They were torn apart.” Just like I’d been told would happen to me. “How did the magic get passed down, then, if no one survived?”

“I have a very tentative theory that it was carried on by distant relatives as a recessive trait,” Kenneth said. “Something may have happened to most of the wolves to make them lose their ability, but the magic wouldn’t have wanted to disappear forever. It would have found a way to survive.”

“That kind of works.” I frowned. “But it also kind of doesn’t.”

“I know.” Kenneth nodded. “It’s just a theory. Honestly, I’ve got no idea why they suddenly died out and why you’re the one.”

“So it’s safe to say we don’t know why,” Lachlan said. “But we do know what you are.”

“And that’s why the Maker is interested in me. I bet this ceremony he has planned is meant to make me shift.” I frowned. “Could it be such a bad thing, then?”

“He’s not acting in your best interest,” Lachlan said. “It’s safe to assume that.”

I nodded. “You’re right. But I need to be able to shift, or I’m going to die.”

Lachlan nodded. “He needs the Moon Stones for whatever he’s planning. If we can steal them back from him, we’ll be able to do the ceremony ourselves. You can shift, but in the safety of Guild City.”

I nodded, liking this plan. It took the power away from the Maker and would save me. “We don’t know where the third stone is, though.”

“I think we do.” Kenneth pushed a paper toward me. “It was inscribed on one of the stones.”

“So we could beat him there.” Excitement thrummed through me as I picked up the paper. It was a map. Familiar, but with an element I didn’t recognize. “A hill?”

“Not just any hill. A burial mound,” Kenneth said.

“Near my mother’s house? Really?”

“That’s what it says.”

I frowned. “She never mentioned it in all of her stories. She would have found it.”

“Perhaps she did, but didn’t make much of it because it’s just a mound of earth.”

“That’s possible. There were a lot of amazing places around there. The sea caves, dolmens, cairns. Maybe she just didn’t register it. But no one has ever excavated it? Humans love to dig up things like that.”

“I imagine it’s protected so they couldn’t find it. Easier to hide than the contents of a stone circle.”

“Good point.” I checked my mobile for the time. Midmorning. “Shall we go now?”

Lachlan nodded and stood. I picked up the map that Kenneth had copied from the book, recognizing a few of the landmarks.

“I’ll keep working on this.” Kenneth patted the book.

“How about you take a nap?” I said. “You could use one. The bags under your eyes could serve as luggage on a transcontinental trip.”

A smile quirked the side of his mouth.

“I second that,” Lachlan said. “You’re no good to me if you’re unconscious from exhaustion.”

“All right, all right. Good luck out there, and call me if you need anything.”

“Will do.” Lachlan led the way out of the library, and I followed.

“What did you do with the guy you caught?” I asked as we walked down the hall.

“Going to leave him here for now. Eventually, I’ll turn him over to the authorities.”

“Good plan.”

“Did you sleep well?” The concern in his gaze burned into me.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. How are you doing with the curse?”

“Turning the conversation to my issues now, are you?”

“It usually works.”

“Noted.” He shrugged. “I’m fine. Mordaca’s potion is holding me over.”

“And when it doesn’t?”

We’d reached the main hall and were still far enough away from the others that he stopped and turned to me. “You know what happens when it doesn’t.”

I swallowed hard, my gaze going to his. There was no fear in his eyes, nor sadness. He’d accepted his fate, perhaps because he’d had to visit the same upon his father.

Regret, though. I could see that.

“What?” he asked.

“What do you regret?”

His brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“I can see it in your eyes. The thought of what could happen makes you feel regret.”

A short breath escaped him, and he looked away, as if he didn’t want to say.

“Tell me,” I insisted.

“You think that’s a good idea?”

Getting to know him better? Probably not, but I didn’t care. “Tell me.”

“I’ll regret making my pack put me down. I’ll regret not knowing you better.”

I drew in a shallow gasp, not knowing what to say to that. I would regret that, too. But should I admit it?

“I—”

“Don’t say it,” he said. “Whatever it is, don’t say it. This is hard enough without knowing how you feel. Unless you’re planning to tell me you despise me?”

“No. I wasn’t going to say that.”

“Then let’s go.” He turned and strode through the room, heading for the doors.

I followed, feeling like I was chasing after a destiny I could never have.

*Eve*

We used a transport stone to travel to my mother's village, appearing at the edge of town as we had the first time.

“Are we running out of those?” I asked.

“I bought more from Mordaca.”

At a pretty penny, I was sure.

The morning was cloudy and dim with the scent of rain on the air. Damp green grass suggested that the rain had already come, but I imagined it could be back without troubling itself too much.

I pulled the map from my pocket and looked at it. “It says the burial mound is supposed to be in the forest behind my mother's house.”

“Hopefully, trees haven't grown through it.”

I nodded, thinking of the destructive power of the roots. Whatever was in the mound would be ancient, and with any luck, undisturbed.



We set off across the grass, the sound of the crashing sea growing louder as we neared the woods on the cliff. It was a strange forest, seeming almost out of place with its location, and perhaps this burial mound was the cause.

I intentionally gave my mother's old house a wide berth. For some reason, the place made me sad, and I wanted to avoid it if at all possible.

When we reached the forest, dark shadows stretched in front of us. The trees were ancient and gnarled, relatively stunted things for their age. No doubt they'd been bent and battered by the sea winds.

"Do you feel that?" Lachlan asked.

I nodded. Magic seemed to float in the air, growing stronger as we walked into the woods. Noise rustled in the undergrowth—small animals, I hoped. There were no longer any large predators in the Scottish wilderness, at least as far as humans were concerned. There were plenty of magical beasts, but they'd been hidden from human eyes by a spell crafted long ago.

They wouldn't be shy about showing themselves to us, however.

As we made our way deeper into the forest, something began to tug at my soul—a familiarity. It drew me toward the right, and I followed it.

Lachlan joined me. "Do you feel something?"

"Not sure what, but I think we need to go this way."

"You may sense the Moon Stone."

"I think you're right."

When we reached the edge of a clearing, I stopped. A grassy mound of earth sat in the middle of it, about seventy feet across and almost as wide.

“We found it.” Surprised flashed through me. That had been easy.

As I stepped forward, the trees in front of me sprang to life, gnarled roots rising out of the earth to form humanoid figures. Magic sparked around us, fierce and threatening. Soon, dozens of the guardians barricaded the way, blocking the mound. I was filled by a nearly uncontrollable desire to run and forget this place ever existed.

Perhaps this was what had happened to my mother.

Lachlan drew a long dagger from the ether, clearly intending to cut away the roots.

A deep sense of wrong filled me, and I laid a hand on his arm. “No. We can’t.”

“Then what do we do?”

I frowned at the root figures. They weren’t attacking, but I had a feeling they would if we threatened them or their charge.

“If this is the Moon Stone, then maybe I’m meant to have it,” I said. “Or at least, I wouldn’t be the one to threaten it, right?”

“That makes sense.”

“So I just need to convince them of that.”

“How? I doubt they speak English.”

“I imagine not.” I walked toward them. “But maybe they can read my intentions. I feel like I can read theirs.”

“Be careful.”

From the wariness in Lachlan's voice, I knew without looking that he hadn't stashed the dagger. At least the dagger was less threatening than if he'd turned into a wolf.

I reached the wall of figures and pressed my hand to the chest of the nearest. Roots twisted and turned under my palm. The creature stayed stock still, and I couldn't decide if it was alive or not. There were no facial features that I could see, even though it sported a vaguely head-shaped mass of roots.

I closed my eyes and tried to clear my mind, envisioning only my intentions concerning the burial mound. I vowed not to harm it and to take only what I needed.

At first, I had no idea if it worked, but then the magic in the air changed. The roots under my hand disappeared, and I opened my eyes.

The guardians in front of me had returned to the soil. The other figures stayed where they were, but a passage had been created.

I looked back at Lachlan. "Come on."

Together, we entered the clearing and approached the burial mound. The strongest sense of awareness overcame me, as if I were standing at the grave of an ancestor.

No doubt I was. Somehow, my mother had come into possession of that book and hidden it for me. Perhaps whoever was in this mound had played a role.

Slowly, I climbed to the top of the mound.

"What next?" Lachlan asked. "I don't suppose we just start digging."

"Absolutely not." Horror flashed through me. "For one, it's illegal. We don't have a permit. And for another, it just feels

wrong. It's a grave."

Lachlan nodded, his eyes flashing, and I recalled that we'd dug up his brother's grave just recently.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I know—"

"This is different, you're right. We don't need to disturb this body, most likely, so we shouldn't."

I nodded.

"Can you use that potion of yours to reveal what's underground?" he asked.

"Yes. I have one more." I drew my bag from the ether and prepared a spray bottle of the potion. I likely wouldn't have enough to cover the entire mound, so I'd have to be smart.

I started with the middle, dousing the grass until it glowed. As I worked, the outline of a massive ship revealed itself.

They'd buried an entire boat in here.

Phenomenal.

At one point, I revealed the outline of a buried body and stopped to pay my respects. It was just a few moments of silence, but it made me feel better about this whole strange business.

When I finally revealed the location of the stone, I gasped. It rested at the feet of the body, glowing brightly about ten feet underground. "I found it."

Lachlan joined me in inspecting the earth. "How do you want to get it?"

Could I? I looked toward the root figures who guarded the mound. Would they allow me to take something from the

mound? Or would they attack? If they attacked, could we defeat them? Did I even want to try?

All of this felt very questionable.

“We need that stone,” Lachlan said. “If we don’t take it, the Maker will. And he’s not going to do good with it.”

I nodded, knowing he was right.

“It’s meant for you,” he pressed. “You’re the one for whom these stones were hidden.”

“Do you think so?” The idea definitely made me feel a bit less shit about this whole thing.

“I do.”

I nodded again. “We’ll return it when we’re done.”

“We will.”

“And I’ll try not to disturb the grave...much.” But the idea of digging into it and removing the dirt turned my stomach. It felt like a step too far.

I knelt and pressed my hand to the soft, wet grass. I could feel the thrum of magic and history beneath my palm. Definitely familiar. Like it was part of me.

“Who were you?” I murmured.

There was no response, of course, but the crescent moon on my palm sparked with magic.

My power.

Could I? *Should I?*

It felt possible here in a way it hadn’t before. I needed to try.

I could feel the moon pulling at me even though it had long since set. It was always there, after all. The power flowed through me, making me feel like I was made of pure light.

I called upon the stone, trying to draw it to me. I started with the tiniest amount of power I could muster, trying to keep tight control of it. This was by far the most dangerous operation I'd ever tried. One wrong move, and I'd yank my ancestor right out of her grave and have a dancing skeleton call forth an army of root monsters.

*Not good.*

Power thrummed through me, and when it finally began to work, I could feel it. The stone felt like part of me, and as it rose through the earth, it seemed like a piece of my soul was returning to my body.

When it pierced the grass and touched my palm, a sense of peace surged through me. A wide smile stretched my face, and I clutched the stone, rising.

"It worked." I turned to Lachlan and held out the rock to show him.

"Well done."

"Now, let's get out of here."

He nodded, and we left the burial mound. I said a quick goodbye in my mind as we crossed through the barrier created by the guardians. As we walked away, I looked back to see them disappear into the ground.

"That wasn't so hard," I said.

Before Lachlan could answer, the air popped with magic. Figures appeared all around us, at least a dozen of them. More followed, one after the other.

My heart leapt into my throat, my skin chilling.

The Maker. This had to be his doing.

“We’ve got to go.” Lachlan reached for his pocket, no doubt to retrieve a transport charm, but a bolt of magic hit him straight in the stomach, driving him backward.

I felt the percussive blast—a sonic boom, sent by the mage who stood directly in front of us. My power surged through me, and I called upon my newest magic, dragging a tree from the ground to throw it at the mage.

It slammed into him, but not before his power burst through me, throwing me back against another trunk. The air was knocked from my lungs, and the Moon Stone tumbled from my hand.

Panic flared as I scrambled upright, every inch of me in pain. My insides felt like they’d been scrambled, and I could barely see.

My vision was good enough to spot a figure swoop in to steal the Moon Stone, however. He was a small man, but fast. He darted in and grabbed it, then raced away, disappearing behind the cover of his friends.

Rage filled me, and I called upon my power. But there were too many of them. They converged upon me, and in the distance, I saw the Maker. He watched with avarice, his plan no doubt going just as he wanted.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Lachlan as he was hit by another sonic boom. It slammed him into a tree, and ice filled my veins.

How many of those could he survive? Two would be deadly for a less powerful supernatural.

Four attackers converged on me, each dressed in plain, dark clothes. Their faces were concealed by hoods, but I could feel the determination in their gazes.

Terror made my power surge within me, and I used my new gift to pick up the tree that I'd thrown at the mage. It shot through the air, slamming into three of the figures before continuing to fly through the forest. I lost control of it and watched as it sailed into the distance, right into another tree.

More of the attackers converged on me, taking the place of their fallen comrades. I backed up, drawing my potion bag from the ether.

I heard the blast of another sonic boom and prayed that Lachlan wasn't hit. He could shift into wolf form, but then he wouldn't be able to use the transport charm.

Quickly, I hurled bomb after bomb at them, not stopping to check what the bottles contained. They exploded in colorful blasts, knocking some attackers unconscious, while others dodged the projectiles.

There were just too damned many of them, and the Moon Stone was long gone, along with the Maker. They'd got what they'd come for.

They'd probably grab me as well, if they had a chance. I couldn't let them.

"Eve!" Lachlan shouted.

I looked toward him. He raced to me, his hand clutched in a fist.

*He has the transport charm.*

Escape was our only option.



One of the figures grabbed my arm, and I kicked him off me, then sprinted toward Lachlan.

He hurled the transport charm to the ground in front of us, and we both dove into the silver cloud. The ether sucked me in and spun me around, then spat me out on the lawn in front of his tower.

I tumbled to the grass, gasping. Winded, I stared up at the sky.

“Damn it.” I clenched a fist and pounded it against the ground. “Almost had it.”

“He’d have taken you. There were too many.” Lachlan sat, turning to lean over me. “Are you all right?”

“Fine.” I pushed myself upright, feeling a bruise beginning to bloom where the attacker had grabbed my arm. Lachlan was right—we could fight a lot of people, but not two dozen. “He planned this all along.”

Lachlan nodded. “He’s been following you, hasn’t he?”

“Somehow, yes.” I thought of the two times he’d appeared to me. “He’s orchestrating all of this. No doubt he knows some of my story, and he was waiting for me to find the Moon Stone.”

“He wants you to transition.”

“But why? I’ll just be more powerful when I’m a dire wolf.”

“I think he wants you to be a dire wolf.” Lachlan frowned. “But why?”

“That’s what we need to figure out.” I shuddered hard, pain tearing through my insides. I gripped my middle and drew in shallow breaths. “Because I need to transition. No

matter what the Maker intends, I have to shift, or I'm not going to survive."

Concern creased his brow. "Do you have another of your pain potions?"

I nodded, digging into my pocket with a shaking hand. The potion was bitter going down, but I appreciated the relief that flowed through me.

"We'll fix this, Eve." Lachlan stood and helped me to my feet, pulling me upright. "You'll transition, but we'll stop him before he accomplishes whatever it is he's after."

I nodded, hoping he was right. "We need to find him and steal those stones back. Do you think your captive might know how?"

"Perhaps, but I'm not hopeful."

"Let's try anyway. It's our only hope."

*Lachlan*

Before we could question my captive, we needed to get cleaned up. I escorted Eve to her tower, but every step was agony. The third sonic boom had done a number on me, and it would be a while before my natural healing fully repaired the damage.

She didn't look much better with her wild hair and a slight lag to her step.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Fine. Using my magic just makes me feel like hell, is all."

"That will get better after you transition."

"I hope you're right." She looked up at me. "How are you? Did that third blast get you?"

"I'm fine."

"Did it get you?"

I gave a sharp nod.

"Damn. It'll take your healing a while, won't it?"

“It’ll get there.” We’d reached her courtyard and started across.

“Let me give you something for that,” she said. “You need to be one hundred percent for what’s coming.”

She was right about that, so I nodded. “All right. Thank you.”

She nodded and led me upstairs to her workroom. Carrow called out from one of the other rooms, and I heard another feminine voice, though I couldn’t place it.

“Seraphia,” Eve clarified as she started searching for something. “I know I’ve got a strong healing potion around here somewhere.”

“Have the truth potions finished brewing?” I leaned over one of the boiling cauldrons and watched the teal bubbles burst and smoke.

“Soon.” She pulled a vial out and handed it over.

I accepted it but frowned. “If you only have one, you should take it.”

“I’ve taken enough potions, and it’s not healing that I need to do.”

I nodded, hating that she was in such pain and danger. The beast inside me growled and raged, wanting to protect her. But there was nothing it could do. Not now, at least.

I drank the potion and sighed, feeling the effects immediately. “Thank you.”

“Of course.”

As my pain faded, her proximity struck me even harder. We stood only a couple feet apart, so close that her scent

wrapped around me and made my head spin. This close, I could see many shades of green in her eyes. Hundreds, it seemed.

It should be impossible. No one's eyes could have that many colors in them.

But Eve...

I reached up to cup the side of her face, unable to help myself. Her skin was silk against my palm, and my wolf relaxed at the feel of her.

She leaned into my palm, her gaze on mine. "This is a bad idea."

"I know." And yet, somehow I couldn't help myself. It was as if my body and my heart had run away from my mind. "I just—"

"A note arrived for you!" Carrow's voice filled the room, and I jerked back, startled. A second later, the blond woman appeared in the doorway, waving a slip of paper.

Eve looked away from me, the moment broken. "From whom?"

"Don't know. But it says both your name and Lachlan's."

"Mine?" I approached, my heart racing. Only one person was likely to write to us, but it couldn't be...

"Here." Carrow handed the note to me, and the sight of the once familiar handwriting struck me like a blow to the face.

"Garreth." I opened it and scanned the short contents. "He wants to meet us at the back of a pub called The Hanged Man."

“Does this mean he’s in control of his own mind?” Eve asked.

“Or that it’s a trap,” Carrow said.

I hated to agree with her, but it was possible. “It could be either.”

“How do we know which?”

“We don’t.” I turned the note over, looking for more writing, even though I knew I wouldn’t find it. “He didn’t tell us to come alone, though.”

“That’s hopeful,” Eve said.

I nodded. “The money clip we found was too easy. I think he might have planted it.”

“Do you think he’s been leaving clues for us?”

“I think it’s possible. A while ago, I got a note saying he needed more time. I didn’t know what to believe.”

“Wow.” She leaned against a table behind her, surprise on her face. “That would be...”

“Great. If he’s holding off the Dark Moon curse—even occasionally—then maybe he can be saved.”

She nodded, but the skepticism in her eyes didn’t surprise me. No one had ever found a cure.

I shook the thought away. I would focus only on what was possible.

“Does he say when he wants to meet us?” she asked.

“He doesn’t, so I assume that means now.”

She straightened. “Let’s go.”

“I’ll come,” Carrow offered. “We’ll bring the others, too, just in case.”

“Let me get a few of my guards as well,” I replied. “As much as I want to trust my brother, we can take no risks.”

“We’ll reconvene at the Haunted Hound in twenty minutes, then?” Eve asked.

“That will work.” I gave her one last look, then headed toward the door. I’d have to find my strongest men. Hope flared in my chest. With any luck, we’d be returning with Garreth this afternoon.

Slightly more than twenty minutes later, we joined Eve and her friends at the Haunted Hound. Between my forces and hers, we had a dozen people. Hopefully, we wouldn’t need them.

“The Hanged Man is located just a half mile away,” she said. “Let’s walk.”

I nodded, and we set off through Covent Garden. Anticipation made my heart race, and I tried to calm it. I shouldn’t get my hopes up. More importantly, I had to be cold and calculating. It was Eve’s life at stake, and I couldn’t risk that for a chance at saving my brother.

The Hanged Man was a quiet, dingy pub located down a narrow street that probably didn’t see much foot traffic. When we entered, we nearly filled the small front room. The old man who tended the bar raised his eyebrows, clearly surprised at the size of the group. I nodded at Kenneth to buy a round of drinks I knew we wouldn’t bother with, but we owed it to the bartender.

As our forces spread out in the tiny pub, Eve and I headed to the back. There were two small snugs, each filled with an

empty booth, but no Garreth.

Disappointment pierced me.

She frowned. “The alley behind, maybe?”

“Let’s try.” I found a back exit near the toilets, and we walked out into the dim alley.

Immediately, a shadow stepped away from the wall. I braced myself and noticed that Eve had a potion bomb clutched in her hand.

But there was just one person, and it was the one we sought.

“Garreth.” Hope flashed within me, bright and fierce.

“Brother.” He stepped forward, his face revealed in a faint slash of sunlight. He looked tired, his skin pale and his clothes rumpled. His eyes were a strange gray, far different than normal.

He saw me looking and nodded. “I can hold the curse off for a while, though I go through dark patches.”

“What are you doing?” I asked. “We can help you.”

“I know. But it’s my turn to help you now.”

“You left the money clip that led us to the docks,” I said.

He nodded. “The Maker trusts me. Barely. I’ve been using that to get intel and leave you clues, and that was the most I could do. This was the first time it was safe for me to approach.”

“He’s planning to make Eve transition to her dire wolf form, but why?”

“I don’t know that yet, but whatever it is, we’re not going to like it. I do know where he’s hiding the stones, though, and



where he plans for the final ceremony to take place. I can help you get in to steal the stones. That's what you want, right?"

It was the most logical step. I nodded. It was exactly what we needed. "Where?"

"He has a base at the Battersea Power Station. It was abandoned in the eighties. If you come in the early hours of the morning, I can get you in."

"Why did I see you at the museum?" Eve asked.

I couldn't blame her for her skepticism. Though I didn't hear it in her voice, the question made it clear she wondered.

"When I learned what the Maker was up to, I tried to get the stone before he did. I was too late. I'm lucky the thief he sent didn't see my face."

She nodded. "The museum proprietor said he heard two people."

Garreth nodded. "He did. I was seconds behind the original thief. I didn't have a chance to stop them at the stone circle, but I left the money clip. Dropped it like an accident. Can't be blamed."

"You need to be careful," Eve said. "If he figures out what's going on..."

"I'm a dead man walking already," Garreth said. "Whatever I can do here is a bonus."

He had a point. And by that logic, I was a dead man walking right by his side.

"There's only one safe way to approach the power station," Garreth said. "By train. Catch the five a.m. Just you two—I can't sneak any more in." He gave us directions for which

station and when to jump off the train to avoid detection, as well as what we needed to bring to be prepared.

“Thank you, Garreth,” I said. “We’d never have figured this out without you.”

“No guarantees. Even with these instructions, it’ll be deadly to try to break in. I’ll meet you at the jump point.”

I nodded, wanting to hug him, the urge so strong my arms itched. But he disappeared before I could move, which was for the best.

Eve sighed and leaned against the wall. “He’s been one step ahead of us all the time.”

“Thank fates.”

She nodded. “This is going to be dangerous, though.”

“Very.” I started toward the tower. “Come on. Let’s get prepared.”

*Lachlan*

The morning train station was quiet, with only a few commuters clutching coffee cups as they waited.

Eve and I stood with the rest of them. She anxiously watched the clock, glancing up every minute to make sure the train was going to be on time.

We'd spent the night preparing for what was to come, Eve making potions and me informing my pack of what to do if something went wrong. We'd spent the night apart, of course, but she'd haunted my dreams.

When the train arrived, we climbed on board with everyone else but stayed in the entry vestibule. We'd need to be ready to jump off soon. No point in finding a seat.

As the train rumbled from the station, Eve slipped a potion from the cuff at her wrist and splashed it on several areas around the door frame. It would disable any human technology, including the alarm that would sound when I pried it open. Finished, she stared out the window. I watched her watching London and prayed this would work.

“We’re almost there,” she murmured a few minutes later. “Just crossed the river.”

Battersea Power Station was located on the south side of the Thames and had been there since the 1930s. The art deco masterpiece was an utterly massive structure made of pale stone with four huge white chimneys soaring toward the sky. The chimneys sat at each corner of the long rectangular building, visible from all over London. It was an iconic landmark, a testament to the power of coal in London’s past.

“This is it.” Eve stepped back.

I took her place in front of the door and forced it open. The alarm didn’t sound, thank fates, and we’d just reached our destination—the side of the power plant.

“Go,” I said.

Eve slipped in front of me and jumped off, rolling to protect herself. I followed, letting the doors slide shut behind me.

I hit the ground and tumbled, protecting my head as I flew across the gravel at the side of the tracks. When I finally stopped moving, I looked up to see the train disappearing into the distance. Behind us, the power station sat like a massive beast, the four pale chimneys soaring toward the dark sky.

“I don’t think anyone noticed,” Eve whispered.

We climbed to our feet and hurried toward a small, abandoned outbuilding near the tracks. In the shadows, Garreth waited.

Thank fates.

I’d known he’d do everything he could to be there, but that didn’t account for the Maker discovering his deception and

stopping him. The fact that my brother was still safe was an enormous relief. Every minute he still lived seemed like a gift.

“Good work,” he murmured. “Let’s go. There are guards that patrol the perimeter, but we can avoid them if we go over them by climbing on the coal conveyor belts.”

He led us around the building toward the huge iron structures, which looked like spindly bridges leading from a long-abandoned pile of coal toward the building that housed the turbines. Garreth began to climb, and we followed. The conveyor belt had been derelict for decades, and parts of it appeared to have rusted away entirely. I placed my hands carefully, not wanting to tear the damned thing down by accident.

When we reached the top of the structure, Garreth led the way toward the main building. We moved quickly and quietly, not breathing a word as we passed over the guard patrolling below. The man never looked up, and we avoided him easily.

Finally, we reached the shadows of the building. The conveyor belt broke off, damaged at some point in the building’s past, and Garreth hung over the side to inspect the ground for passing guards. After a moment, he looked up at us. “All clear. We can go.”

Garreth led the way. We climbed down the iron supports and landed lightly on the ground, then ran for the small door tucked halfway behind some wild bushes. When we reached it, we slipped between the prickly bushes and the wall, finding a bit of cover in the deep shadows there.

Garreth spoke quietly. “There are nearly two dozen demons here, all working for the Maker. But the place is so big that we might not see any until we reach the Moon Stones, which he keeps guarded.”

“Perfect,” I said. “Which way?”

“They’re stored at the far end, in the old control room. We need to make our way through the main part of the building and up to the northwest corner. That’s where we’ll find the safe.”

I looked at Eve, who nodded. Garreth had told us about the safe, and Eve had packed every potion she could think of to deal with it.

“Good. Let’s go.” Garreth turned and pressed his hand to the door. Magic flared, and the door unlocked. He pulled it open and slipped inside.

We followed, entering the cavernous interior of the main part of the building. It was an enormous rectangular room, the broken glass ceiling soaring over one hundred feet high. Massive square pillars marched along the sides of the huge room, supporting the roof, and three enormous steel turbines sat in the middle of the space, long since gone silent and still.

The dark air echoed with the shadows of the past. This place had once been responsible for providing most of the electricity to London. Now, it lay quiet and disused by everyone...except for the miserable bastard who had made it his headquarters.

Garreth jerked his head to the side, indicating the direction we should go. We set off single file, Garreth in the lead and me at the rear. Eve had a potion bomb clutched in her hand, ready to throw.

We stuck to the shadows at the side of the wall as we ran, our footsteps silent. We were nearly to the end when a guard appeared in front of us. He was a tall, slender man with magic

that smelled like old, wet towels. Shock slackened his jaw as he stared at us, and then he charged.

Garreth and I worked in concert, as if we'd been doing this together for years. My brother stuck his leg out to trip the man, and I grabbed him by the collar, landing a blow to his cheek that knocked him unconscious immediately. I dragged the body to a nook in the wall where we could hide him, and the others followed.

"I've got his shoes," Garreth murmured.

"Keep guard," I whispered to Eve, and she nodded.

While Garreth tied the shoelaces together, I pulled the man's belt off and bound his wrists, then tore a strip off his shirt to gag him. Within thirty seconds, he was trussed up and left behind. There was every possibility we'd have to kill some of the demons, and that didn't bother me, but I'd prefer not to kill the humans unless I had to.

We set off again, eventually reaching a passage with an arched roof that led to a stairwell. At the base of the stairs, Eve stopped and stiffened. "The Maker just arrived."

"You feel him?" I asked.

She nodded. "I didn't before, but I do now."

"Is he above us?" Garreth asked. "The control room is three stories up."

She shook her head. "No, I don't think he's inside yet. He feels far away." She frowned, her face pale. "Why do I feel him?"

"Add it to the list of questions," I said.

She gave a low laugh. "That's the truth. There's far more that I don't know." She looked up the stairwell. "Shall we?"

Garreth nodded, and we took off, climbing the stairs swiftly and silently. We were halfway up when three guards appeared from a doorway on the landing. Demons. Their short, sawed-off horns marked them as a common species of mercenary. Surprise flashed on their faces, and one of them raised his wrist, where I could see a comms charm glinting.

There was no time—we had to stop him from contacting reinforcements.

The beast inside me growled, and I gave it free rein, shifting as I lunged toward the men. Magic swept through my veins, and I hit the ground on four feet and charged toward them. Garreth joined me, his wolf racing up the stairs.

A potion bomb arced overhead and landed on the chest of the demon in the middle. It exploded in a burst of blue liquid, and he collapsed backward, unconscious.

I reached my target and leapt on him, tearing at his throat before he could speak into his comms charm. At my side, Garreth did the same, blood spraying. Within seconds, it was over.

“I’d stay that way, if I were you,” Eve murmured. “I think we’re going to face more.”

She had a point. Neither Garreth nor I bothered to shift back as we climbed the stairs. The world was different from this perspective, but part of me preferred it. Everything was narrowed down to exactly what mattered—the hunt.

We reached the third floor, and Eve opened the door. Garreth slipped through and approached a heavy metal door at the far end.

He shifted back to human just long enough to press his hand to the door. Magic sparked, and it unlocked.



“Let us go first,” he told Eve.

She nodded, and he shifted back, joining me. Eve stepped to the side and pushed open the door, allowing us to enter.

We charged through, side by side. Delight shot through me, my beast enjoying his freedom. It wasn't often he was allowed to rampage like this.

Upon entering, it took half a second to catalogue the scene. A large, rectangular room, two of the walls covered by hundreds of dials and gages that hadn't worked for years. Several bulky desks marched down the room, facing the control panels.

Half a dozen guards lounged in the room. Demons again, the same species as before. For the briefest second, no one moved. Then they leapt up, drawing their weapons.

I charged toward the closest one, a growl reverberating in my throat. He slashed out with his blade, but I dodged it before sinking my teeth into his arm and shaking him until he dropped it. He howled, thrashing, and I dragged him to the ground before tearing out his throat.

On the other side of the room, Garreth did the same. Eve had her potion bombs ready, and she took out two guards in quick succession. Her aim was perfect, her speed deadly.

I left the guard where he lay and charged toward another. He, too, held a knife, and he got lucky, delivering a shallow cut to my shoulder. It should have burned, but my wolf was too consumed by the fight to notice. I leapt on his chest and tore out his throat, then left him in a heap.

When the guards were all down, Eve raced to the door. She dug through her potion bag and drew out a pot of liquid along with a brush. Quickly, she painted the substance on the edges

of the door. As she worked, the metal glowed briefly before fusing with the wall.

There was no longer any door at all—just a solid wall that our enemies would have to break through.

Garreth and I shifted back to human form, and he went to the massive safe that had been built into the wall behind the control panels. “I don’t have access to this, of course,” he said. “Did Eve come prepared?”

“I did.” She hurried over, digging through her bag. “Brought a few things I hope will work.”

This was the most difficult part of our plan. Garreth hadn’t known what spells the Maker used to seal his safe, so we’d had to guess.

Fortunately, Eve was the best at what she did.

She stepped up to the silver dial and splashed it with a bit of the potion contained in a little silver vial. The metal sizzled and sparked, and she nodded at me. “Try it.”

I gripped the handle and pulled.

Nothing happened.

Shit.

“It’s okay,” she said. “I’ll try something else.” She pulled out another vial and tried again. It, too, didn’t work.

“Hurry,” Garreth said. “He’ll be coming.”

She nodded, hands shaking slightly as she dug through her bag for another option. The seconds passed as she tried to unlock the door for the third time.

Still no success.

“I’ve got one more,” she said, her voice worried. “But the Maker has such powerful magic.”

“Try it,” I said.

A noise sounded from outside in the hall, and I strode toward the door that she had barricaded.

“I’ll be quick.” She splashed her potion on the dial, her face tight.

I listened at the door as she worked, trying to get a feel for how many were lurking on the other side. More than a dozen now. Too many. We were going to have to abandon this soon.

Without warning, the door exploded inward, propelled by such a powerful blast of magic that the noise deafened me and made me temporarily blind. Something heavy slammed into me and knocked me to the ground—the door. Head spinning, I tried to climb to my feet. My vision was still blurry, and my head rang.

When strong hands gripped my arms, I thrashed, but there were too many of them. Three demons had me in their grip. I didn’t stop fighting, but there was no breaking free.

The Maker stood in the rubble of the doorway, staring at us, as his guards charged inside.

Panic flared.

*Eve.*

I looked at Garreth. “Get her out of here!”

“Not without you!” Eve shouted.

But the guards were almost upon her, so many that they’d overpower her in seconds. And the Maker was here.

A tortured look of despair flashed on Garreth's face as he looked at me, but he knew I was a lost cause, just as I did. The most I could do was distract them while he got Eve to safety.

With a last surge of strength, I broke free of my captors and threw myself between Eve and the guards who charged toward her, blocking their way. Out of the corner of my vision, I spotted Garreth drag Eve into a transport charm and disappear.

Safe.

She was safe.

I pulled back from the fight, then turned to glare at the Maker. "It looks like it's just you and me."

*Eve*

The ether sucked me through space as panic clawed inside my chest.

Lachlan.

*We left him behind.*

Horror froze my blood. Garreth had dragged me out of there without fighting for Lachlan. We'd just *left* him.

The ether spit me out in the courtyard in front of the Shadow Guild tower, and I stumbled, nearly going to my knees. When I gained control, I spun toward Garreth.

“Why the hell did you do that?” I demanded. “We just left him!”

“We had to.” His eyes were shadowed with worry, but it didn't make me feel much better. “There were too many of them. He wanted you safe, and it was his choice.”

“Damn it, what about *my* choice?”

“He's my brother.”

Shit. I couldn't fight that kind of loyalty. "We need to go back and get him."

"We will."

"Now."

"Not until we have a plan. Backup."

As much as I hated it, he was right. "What will the Maker do to him?"

Garreth dragged a frustrated hand through his hair and spun around, beginning to pace. "I don't know. He's not part of the Maker's plan, as far as I know, so he'll probably use him as bait."

That made sense. "Why does the Maker want me?"

"I don't know what his final plan is, but he wants you to transition."

"As I thought."

"What's going on?" Carrow called. I turned to see her step out of the main door, a frown on her face. "Where's Lachlan?"

"We had to leave him." Suddenly, I hated Garreth's previous plan for stealth. He'd said we should go in a small group to avoid alerting the guards before we made it to the control room.

It had failed in spectacular fashion.

"Come on in." Carrow gestured us forward. "We'll make a plan to get him back."

Heart pounding, I followed her inside. Garreth came with us, and Carrow watched him warily. I turned to him, taking in his strange gray eyes. The curse had him—kind of. He seemed to be fighting it off, but how long would he be successful for?

“You didn’t betray us, did you?” I asked. “This wasn’t part of the Maker’s plan to get Lachlan?”

Anger flashed on Garreth’s face, followed by understanding. “No. I have my bad moments with the curse where I seem to lose time, but I’m managing. In this state, I would never betray my brother.”

“How can I trust you?”

“Give me one of your damned truth potions, and I’ll tell you. My goal is the same as yours, Eve—take down the Maker and get Lachlan back.”

There was such truth and passion vibrating in his voice that I believed him. I could see it in him—how worried he was for Lachlan, how regretful he was that his brother had been taken.

“We just need to figure out how to get him back, then,” I said. “That will be our first goal.”

“How do you plan to do that?” Carrow asked. “Do you think he’s being kept at the same place? Can we go back for him in a bigger group?”

Garreth shook his head. “The Maker has many places he could put him. He won’t leave him where we can find him, I’m certain of it.”

“Where else could he be?” I asked.

He frowned, clearly thinking. “There are several options, but I don’t know all of them.”

As he listed out the places that the Maker used as hideaways, I listened intently, but something else caught my mind like a strange fog.

A presence.

A command.

I blinked, looking around the room. It was just Carrow, Garreth, and me...but something was trying to draw me outside, like a ghost pulling on my mind. I turned toward the door and started to walk, unable to help myself.

I was riveted by the idea of the courtyard outside. Something waited for me.

“Where are you going?” Carrow asked.

“Outside.” My voice sounded distant even to my own ears.

“Why?”

I opened the door and stepped out, then spotted the Maker immediately. He stood in the middle of the courtyard—there, but not really.

“Where is he?” I demanded.

“Who are you talking to?” Carrow asked from behind me.  
“I see no one.”

The Maker smiled, a cold and cruel slash of lips on his strange, shadowy face.

“Tell me!” I demanded. “I want him back.”

“You will come for the ceremony tomorrow at dawn, or you will never see him again.”

Oh, fates. “Where?”

“The betrayer knows. Our northernmost outpost. Be within the cairn at dawn, or the man’s life is forfeit.” Without another word, he disappeared.

*Damn it.*



I wanted to reach out and yank him back, shake him until he gave up Lachlan. Instead, I whirled to face Garreth, who'd come to stand behind me. "Where is the ceremony?"

"In Maeshowe, the chambered cairn on Mainland, Orkney."

"What cairn? Is it special to my people?"

"I don't know, just that he plans to do the ceremony there. At dawn, on a day when the moon sets at the same time the sun rises."

"That doesn't always happen, does it?" I asked.

"No, which is why this day is important to him."

"Was this always part of his plan? Take Lachlan to draw me to him?"

Garreth shook his head. "I doubt it. I know only that he planned to get you somehow."

I searched Garreth's face, wanting to trust him. "Did he know you were going to betray him?"

Surprise flashed, and then he frowned. "Perhaps he did. There's no telling what he's capable of."

"Either way, this is where we are." Carrow turned to Garreth. "How do we get to this chambered cairn? We're going to need to be prepared with enough forces to stop this bastard."

"I'll tell you everything I know." Garreth winced and reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose. Pain flashed across his face, and when he opened his eyes, they were black.

Shit. He wasn't controlling it as well as he'd said.

"Just give me a moment," he ground out.

I waited, heart thundering. A few minutes later, he heaved a sigh, and his eyes returned to the strange gray color.

“It happens more and more, doesn’t it?” I asked.

He nodded.

“How long do you have left? You’re in control now, but you won’t always be, will you?”

“No, I won’t. But I should be good until dawn. Past that. Once we have Lachlan back and the Maker is finished, you can put me down.”

*Put me down.*

I didn’t even want to think about that, so I turned and went into the tower. They followed, and we took a seat in front of the cold hearth.

I leaned my elbows on my knees and looked at them. “We need a plan.”



After several hours of grilling Garreth on everything he knew about the Maker’s plan and coming up with our own course of action, we were finally done.

We still didn’t know why the Maker wanted to make me transition, but it had to be bad. However, there was no denying the fact that I was going to need to transition, and soon. Our best-case scenario for the plan was to steal the stones, save Lachlan, and do the ceremony ourselves later.

I prayed it would work.

When we were finished planning, our group split up to rest and recover. Garreth took a spare room in the tower, but

Carrow locked the door in case he lost the fight with the Dark Moon curse sometime in the night. It was unlikely, but she wasn't taking any chances.

There were still a dozen hours between then and dawn, and it seemed impossible that I could rest while Lachlan was chained up somewhere, held by the Maker.

I went to my workshop and stared at the books and ingredients, my mind racing.

I just wanted to see him. To know that he was okay.

There had to be a way. Determined, I went to the bookshelf and pulled down several volumes. My desperation dredged old memories to the surface of my mind. I'd heard Liora once speak about spirit travel. Perhaps I could find a recipe for that.

With every page that I flipped, every potion recipe that I skimmed, my desperation grew. There had to be a way. Lachlan and I were mates. We were bound through fate. I could feel his presence when he was near, like we were connected on a plane beyond the regular world. That had to count for something.

Finally, I found it.

I'd been right—spirit travel could only be accomplished between mates, but it was possible. Anxiously, I skimmed the list of ingredients and saw that I had them all. I was running a bit short on some, but I was determined to make it work.

Hope fluttered in my chest as I worked, gathering up ingredients and mixing them together. Time dragged as I watched the potion bubble and boil, until at last, the blue smoke turned green, and I smiled.

It was done.

At best, it would give me an hour, but I would take it. Maybe I could even find out where he was. I doubted that bit—the Maker was too smart to hold Lachlan in a place he could identify in case he could get a message to us—but I still hoped for it.

With my heart pounding, I tossed the potion back. It tasted like bright, fresh fruit of an unidentified variety. Magic raced through my veins, making my skin prickle and my heart race.

As my vision blacked out at the edges, I sat on the floor. My butt had just hit the ground when my head began to spin wildly. Within seconds, I collapsed backward, my soul seeming to shoot out of my body.

For the briefest moment, it was like traveling through the ether, wild and chaotic and dark, and then I appeared in a small stone room that smelled damp. Gasping, I spun in a circle.

Lachlan surged upright off a small bed pressed against the wall, a single torch illuminating his face in golden shadows. “Eve?” He blinked, shock flashing on his face. “Tell me you’re not really here.”

“Just my spirit. For a little while.”

His shoulders relaxed. “Thank fates.”

“Where are you?”

“They took me somewhere while I was unconscious, but I have no idea. He’s too clever to give me any insight.”

As I’d expected. Still, at least I was there.

More than anything, I wanted to walk up to him and kiss him. Seeing him in danger—experiencing the threat of losing

him—had shaken something loose inside me. I wanted him more than anything. I certainly didn't want to lose him.

But first things first, I had to see if I could get him out of there. I knew it was unlikely even as I walked to the cell door, but I had to try.

When I reached it, I tried to grip the handle, but my hand passed right through. It was expected, given the limitations of the potion, but disappointing. Still, I pulled a tiny vial of potion from my wrist and dripped it onto the handle, hoping it would eat away at the metal. It dripped right through.

Double damn.

Lachlan appeared at my side. "How are you here?"

I turned to him, taking in his stern, handsome face. "A potion that connects two mates together. It's why I can't influence the environment here. My body is back in my workshop."

"You look so real." He reached up to cup my cheek, and his hand made contact, warm and solid. I gasped, and his eyes widened. "I can touch you."

"I think you're the only thing I can touch in this whole place."

"Because we're mates."

I nodded. We'd been fighting it for so long—I needed to fight it, for my very life. So did he. But now that we were here, with his life on the line and mine not far behind, it was hard to remember that.

"One of us could die tomorrow," I murmured, the reality of it sinking in. "What are the odds we both make it out?"

Shadows flashed across his face. He'd run the numbers on this as well and hadn't come up with a good answer.

"We'll be fine," he said.

"You don't necessarily believe that."

"I want to believe it, and I think we've got a very good shot."

My future, my whole life, was being boiled down to *a very good shot*. Those were the kind of odds that were only good when you were hoping to get a table at your favorite restaurant on a Friday night, not the odds required for survival.

I swallowed hard and stared up at him, drawn by his sheer nearness. He was so damned handsome that it was hard to look away. His normally icy eyes had turned warm, the green filled with heat, and his full lips parted as he stared down at me.

"I've never seen anything like you," he said. "You're so beautiful, it's like a sunrise."

My breath caught. I wasn't one to be swayed by pretty words and compliments, but when they came from Lachlan, apparently, that flew out the window.

As his forest scent wrapped around me, I drew it deeply into my lungs, unable to stop myself. I couldn't get enough of him. I didn't *want* to get enough of him.

This was crazy—dangerous—but it felt like we might not survive tomorrow. And if we didn't...

I couldn't die without having kissed him one last time. The fact that a miraculous potion allowed me to visit him had to be a sign from fate.

In my soul, my wolf awakened. A deep, animalistic desire overcame me, sweeping me up in its grip, impossible to resist.

“Eve.” He made a low, tortured noise in his throat. “When you look at me like that...”

“Like what? Tell me.”

“I can’t help but want to kiss you. I won’t be able to stop myself.”

“Then don’t.” I leaned up on my toes, hovering my lips an inch from his.

Tension sparked between us, heat and desire arcing across the scant space between our mouths. My body was only an inch from his, and that same electricity lit up the tiny chasm. My head spun from the ferocity of my desire, and when Lachlan finally crushed his lips to mine, joy exploded inside of me.

He gripped my waist and pulled me to him, pressing the full length of my body up against his. Every inch of him was hot and hard, a perfect match to my curves.

It felt so right that everything inside me lit up with pleasure. I wrapped my arms around his neck and leaned into the kiss, parting my lips to give him access.

He made a low, animal noise in his throat and cupped the back of my head, holding me still so that he could plunder my mouth. He kissed like it was going to be his last, and pleasure made my head spin. A fierce desperation filled my body, and I slipped my hands under his shirt, running them over smooth skin and hard muscles. He shuddered hard, a groan tearing from his throat.

“Stop that if you don’t want this to continue,” he growled.

I moved my hands higher, sweeping them around to the broad planes of his back. He shuddered again, seemingly unable to help himself, then tore his shirt over his head.

Golden light gleamed across the flat stretches of muscle that called for my touch. I ran my hands over his chest, and he dropped his head back, a low growl escaping his throat.

When he raised his head and met my eyes, his flashed brighter green with his wolf. “Your shirt.”

I yanked it over my head, and his gaze dropped to my breasts. A simple cotton bra concealed them, but he looked at me as if I were wearing lace and satin.

With slightly trembling hands, he reached for the bra and unhooked the front clasp. It popped open, and cool air rushed over my breasts.

“Eve,” he groaned, reaching for my waist and pulling me toward him. “You’re so beautiful.”

Before I could say anything, he lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist as he bent his head to my breasts and drew his tongue over the sensitive skin there. I shuddered, clutching his head as pleasure rushed through me.

“Tell me you want this,” he said. “I have to hear it.”

“I want this. I want you.”

He growled and bit gently on my nipple. I cried out, clenching my thighs around him.

With purposeful strides, he carried me to the small bed and laid me down. His movements were rougher, harsher, as if his control were fraying.

I loved it.

With a couple of yanks, he had me naked from the waist down. He knelt between my spread thighs like a god. Any nerves I might have had were banished by the desire on his face.



With strong hands, he gripped my hips and pulled me toward him, lowering his head. I looked down to see his burning eyes staring up at me over my stomach. Chills raced over me, hot and cold at once. Every inch of me felt so sensitized that I couldn't bear it.

"I'm going to kiss you now." His voice was a low growl, and I nodded, my eyes wide.

He lowered his head and pressed his mouth to the sensitive flesh between my thighs.

I cried out and arced off the bed, but he held me still, kissing me like he would die if he didn't. Pleasure raced through me as he focused his attention on the most sensitive part of me, making my head spin and my breath grow short.

He growled his pleasure against me, making my muscles clench and my fingers grip the mattress. He drove me wild with his mouth, seeming to enjoy it as much as I did.

When the orgasm rushed over me, it nearly broke me. I gasped and cried out, sinking my hands into his hair as he kept up his passionate assault. As it finally faded, I opened my eyes and looked down at him. He stared up at me, his eyes so hot that they might as well have been made of fire.

"Lachlan, that was—" A tugging sensation pulled at me, yanking hard at my middle. Panicked, I grabbed him. "I can't stop it!"

He held onto my hips, worried, but it wasn't enough. The magic that had brought me there sucked me back through space, spinning me through the ether until I opened my eyes on the cold, hard floor of my workshop.

I stared up at the ceiling, my body still vibrating with pleasure.

Holy fates, had that just happened?

*Eve*

Of course, I slept like shit. My recovery nap was full of dreams of Lachlan, of desperate plans to free him and bring him back to me.

It was crazy. I knew that what we'd just done was the most we could hope for. It had been stupid of me to even try for it, but I hadn't been able to help myself. The stress and fear of losing him had pushed me forward, and I found it difficult to regret.

With aching muscles, I climbed out of bed. There were still a couple hours left before we needed to be at the Maker's ceremony, but it was time to rise.

I found Ralph sleeping on the sofa in the living room and another furry tail sticking out from beneath a pile of blankets on the chair across the room.

Cordelia.

I had no idea what mischief the two had been up to, but clearly, it had worn them out.

I left them to it and made my way downstairs to the main room. Most of my friends were already there, waking up with coffee and savory pastries.

Carrow met my gaze. “Garreth went to collect the shifters. Kenneth agreed to meet him in their courtyard.”

I nodded, taking coffee and a pastry for myself. Though I tried not to think of it, the previous night flashed through my mind.

“What’s that look on your face?” Carrow asked.

“Nothing.”

“Hmm.”

The door opened, and the Devil of Darkvale walked in, dressed entirely in black tactical wear. Carrow smiled at her mate, the most powerful vampire in Guild City.

I nodded my thanks to him, grateful that he was here. Normally, he kept busy with his own affairs as Guild City’s busiest mob boss. Today, though, the stakes were high enough that he’d come to help.

My other friends rose from their seats: Mac, Beatrix, Seraphia, and Quinn.

“Hades will meet us there,” Seraphia said.

How could we fail with this lot on our side?

*We can do this.*

I repeated it to myself over and over as we went to the Haunted Hound, where we would meet the shifters. Our forces were big enough. We would be okay.

Even as I said it to myself, I thought of the Maker.

I'd never seen anyone with his power. We might have gods on our side, but we had no idea what he was capable of. He also had an unknown number of soldiers on his side.

I shivered and pushed the thoughts away. This was the time for positive thinking.

A crowd of two dozen shifters waited for us in the Haunted Hound, piled between the tables as Kate, the third bartender, stared at them suspiciously.

Garreth stepped forward as I entered. "We have enough transport charms for our lot. Do you have enough for yours?"

I nodded. We'd managed to scavenge up enough.

"Then we'll go." He turned to the group, raising his voice. "I don't know what to expect when we arrive. A great number of enemy forces, certainly. They'll be spread out around the chambered cairn, I suspect. The Maker will hold Lachlan wherever he wants Eve to be, so we have to help her get there, all without being captured."

It made the most sense. The Maker would draw me there and try to catch me. I just needed to be quick.

He'd been smart enough to know he shouldn't bother telling me to come alone. It wouldn't have happened. The downside of that was that he was likely prepared with his own army.

"There will be three glowing Moon Stones," I said. "Likely near Lachlan, very likely within the cairn. We need to recover those."

Everyone nodded.

"And thank you," I said.

The shifters looked at me like I was a little crazy. Of course they would go to save their Alpha. But my friends nodded at me.

“It’s time.” Garreth pulled a collection of transport charms from his pocket and handed them out.

I did the same, and our groups gathered around. One by one, poofs of silver smoke exploded upward. We’d used a map to agree on a destination, and when I stepped into the ether, I imagined it.

Moments later, the magic spit me out in the cold, dark wind of Orkney’s main island. I drew in a bracing breath as my adrenaline hyped up, racing through my veins.

This was it.

I spun in a circle, taking in the thick, ancient forest around us. Trees were rare on these windswept islands, but I could imagine the Maker had chosen this one for the cover it provided.

My friends arrived at my side, wary and ready. Silently, our group appeared, growing larger and larger among the trees. There were nearly thirty of us, and the sight of them made hope flare in my chest.

We were going to succeed.

I took stock of the Shadow Guild, making sure everyone had arrived. As promised, Hades had joined us. He stood at the back, his black cloak billowing and his dark eyes trained on the forest ahead. Seraphia stood next to him, dressed in a deep green catsuit that suited her as the goddess of life.

Quinn shifted into his panther form, large and golden, while Mac drew her sword and gripped a potion bomb. I’d given her and Beatrix bags of bombs to fight with, and they

wore them at their sides. Carrow stood with the Devil, her golden hair blowing on the wind as she stared ahead, her gaze hard.

My team was accounted for.

I sought out Garreth and nodded at him. He nodded back, the signal that he was ready to start. In a swirl of magic, he transformed into the huge auburn wolf that was his other form. All around him, his pack shifted into animals of all sizes and colors: wolves, panthers, an enormous stag, and a bear. The bigger, predatory shifters had come, and they stared intently forward.

We set off through the forest, moving silently among the trees. According to the map Garreth had created from memory, we were about two hundred yards from the chambered cairn.

The moonlight filtered through the trees, sparkling upon my skin and making power surge through me. I gripped my potion bomb, unsure if I should unleash my newest, most volatile magic. It was powerful, yes, but I'd been growing weaker every hour. If I used it, the odds were good that I would collapse and be unable to rise, the pain too much.

Safer to stick to the potion bombs.

When the first attack came, we were ready.

A line of demons charged, their faces twisted with menace and their weapons raised. There were fifty of them, easily. I hurled a potion bomb at one of the closest ones, taking him out in an explosion of fire.

The shifters charged, leaping upon their foes and taking them to the ground. Quinn joined them, his golden form sailing through the air to attack.

A flash of dark clothing shot by me—the Devil, his vampire speed making him almost faster than human sight. I caught a glimpse of Carrow’s golden head out of the corner of my eye as she took out a demon, and potion bombs flew through the air as my friends hurled them.

From behind me, I could feel Seraphia’s magic surge. It filled the air, and in front of me, the roots of the trees burst from the ground and wrapped around five of the demons, raising them into the air and shaking them like dolls.

Dark smoke rolled around my ankles. Hades.

I glanced back to see him slam his bident into the ground. The two-pronged staff shot lightning into the sky as a small army of the dead rose from the dirt. In the underworld, he could call upon hundreds of them. Here on earth, he could only call on those buried nearby. There were apparently ten of them, and they charged into battle.

My heart thundered as I ran alongside them, looking for an opening in the attack to sneak through. If I still had my wings, this would have been an entirely different matter.

Screams and growls sounded as the battle raged. Magic exploded in the air as demons fired blasts of fire and ice. Potion bombs arced high between the trees before crashing against the chests of the enemy.

We defeated the first line of foes, but more came after them, so many that I couldn’t imagine where the Maker had found them all.

He wasn’t even there. I could feel him somewhere in the distance, likely still in the chambered cairn.

With every second that passed, more and more foes appeared. Were they regenerating? I’d never seen so many



appear so fast. We were kicking their asses, but we weren't gaining much ground because there were just so damned many of them.

A demon charged me, yellow eyes wild as he raised his blade. I hurled my potion bomb at him and nailed him right in the forehead. Satisfaction surged through me as he collapsed backward, unconscious.

The whole point of this plan was to get me into the cairn on my terms, not as a captured victim, which was what the Maker surely wanted. And yet, with every second that passed, it appeared that wouldn't happen.

I could feel the moon setting and the sun rising. The Maker had said we had until dawn. If I was late...

Lachlan's life was forfeit.

I glanced toward the sky, which was turning a lighter gray.

We were running out of time. There was no other choice. It didn't matter how many of the enemy we took out if we didn't gain any ground.

I'd have to let them take me. I needed to get into that cairn in time. From there, I'd figure out what I had to do.

So I stopped fighting and caught Carrow's eye, then nodded.

She grimaced but nodded back. We'd known this was a possibility and had a backup plan. Problem was, the backup plan was a bit crap. It was the only one we had, though, and I was desperate.

My heart raced as I waited for a demon to notice me. It took only half a second. Confusion lit his face, then triumph.

"Giving up?" he snarled.

“Hardly.” I hit him with an acid bomb in the arm, just to prove I wasn’t going down on his terms. “But I’m ready to meet your master.”

He growled and clutched his arm. The flesh sizzled sickeningly, and I started forward. “Take me to him.”

He nodded and pressed a comms charm at his neck. “I have her. Come and get her.”

A moment later, a figure appeared at my side. Human. One of the gang members, no doubt. He gripped my arm and chucked a transport charm to the ground, then dragged me into the smoke.

I braced myself and appeared a moment later in the middle of the chambered cairn. The entire thing was one massive stone dome. Flickering torches lit the single large room in glowing light, shining on carvings on the walls.

A sense of home flowed through me, as if this place were important to me. To my people.

The three Moon Stones were set into the ground at equally spaced intervals along the edge of the room. Guards had taken up positions between them, a dozen lining the room.

Lachlan stood by the wall, bound in massive chains. The Maker waited on the other side of the empty chamber, standing so still that he could be dead.

Fear flashed through me, cold and sharp.

I stared at the Maker, praying that the double-sided portal charm would work.

He grinned at me, evil cunning flashing in his eyes. “Hoping your friends will show up?”

“Yes, actually.”

A cruel laugh escaped him. “A double-sided portal charm again? Hoping to draw them to you now that you’re in?”

I shrugged. True, our backup plan was the same thing we’d tried when we’d snuck into the Clerkenwell tunnels to confront the Maker, but it was our only option.

“I’ve blocked it,” he said. “I was prepared for your tricks.”

Damn. I’d known it was a likely possibility, but hopefully, they’d be able to fight their way in. They were strong.

Until then, I just had to be clever.

I looked behind me at Lachlan, who stared at me with worry in his eyes.

“Is this place sacred to the dire wolves?” I asked. “It’s a lot older than they were.”

The Maker frowned. “Why do you care?”

“They’re my people.”

I could feel his confusion. He still couldn’t understand.

He wasn’t human, I realized.

I’d thought that maybe his strange, ephemeral appearance was a spell or a curse of some kind. But no, he just wasn’t human. He didn’t have the same feelings we did.

“It was,” he finally said. “Your transition could only occur here. Conveniently for me, you also can’t use your power here.”

He was right. There was nothing in the interior that I could throw at him. And if I tried anything at all and my magic went haywire, thousands of pounds of stone would rain down upon us and kill Lachlan and me.

“What the hell do you want?” I demanded. “What are you after?”

“You, the chosen one. There is only one dire wolf now, and the power of all of them lives in you.”

“All of them?”

“All of your ancestors. Didn’t you wonder why you had such a magnificent connection with the moon?”

Of course I’d wondered. I frowned at him. “How do you know all this?”

“I was there in the beginning.” He strolled toward me.

“Stop with the riddles and be clear.”

“I am being clear. It’s not my fault that you’re too slow to understand.”

“Bullshit. You’re acting like an old seer, giving information in riddles.”

Anger radiated from him, and he made a slashing movement with his hand. An invisible force picked me up and hurled me against the stone wall. Pain exploded through me, and I slumped to the ground.

Distantly, I heard Lachlan roar. I could imagine him fighting the bonds, but the chains were far too thick for him to break through.

Aching, my vision still blurry, I staggered upright and faced the Maker. “What do you want with me?” I demanded, stalling for time. He was too powerful, and I needed backup. My potion bombs weren’t going to do it.

“You will be my creature, helping me create the world I envision.”

“What world is that?”

“One under my command. One that fulfills the fate put into motion hundreds of years ago.”

“More riddles.” Frustration surged through me.

He raised a hand and smacked me backward again. The same invisible force slammed me into the wall, and my head cracked against the stone.

Once more, I heard Lachlan roar, his rage vibrating through me.

I staggered away from the wall, blinking to clear my vision.

The Maker pointed to the center of the round chamber, where an unfamiliar symbol had been etched into the dirt floor. “You will stand there to begin the transition.”

“No, I won’t.”

“You will.” The command in his voice shook the room, anger reverberating at the edges. “Do it. Now.”

Why didn’t he just make me?

An Alpha might command a sign of submission, but this monster wasn’t a shifter. He didn’t care about that. He’d had no trouble slamming me into the wall, so he could certainly force me into the middle.

“I have to go willingly, don’t I?”

He growled, rage lighting his eyes as he raised his hand once more and made a sweeping gesture toward Lachlan.

My mate slammed against the wall behind him, his head knocking into the stone. The wolf within me howled, anguish shooting through my soul.

The Maker did it again, slamming Lachlan even harder.

“Stop!” I screamed.

“You know how to stop it.”

Despair tore through me. My backup wasn't here. I wasn't strong enough to fight the Maker on my own, and Lachlan's life was at risk. One more hit against the wall, and he could suffer permanent brain damage, if he hadn't already.

I couldn't let that happen.

Anger surged through me, powerless rage, and the Maker stared at me with triumph in his eyes. “Bastard,” I hissed.

“No,” Lachlan said, his voice tortured. “Don't do it, Eve.”

“I have to.” Not just to save Lachlan, but because I needed to be powerful enough to fight the Maker. I needed to fix my broken magic.

We'd wanted to do it on our terms, away from the Maker and whatever he planned to do to me once the ceremony was over. But that plan was impossible now.

The only way for me to get the strength to defeat the Maker was to transition. I had to embrace what I was to stand up to him.

I walked toward the center of the circle, my heart pounding. This had to happen. It was the only way.

Relief battled with fear inside me.

The Maker smiled and watched me stop in the middle of the room. I could feel Lachlan's tortured gaze on my back, but I focused on the feeling of the Moon Stones. I could feel them more strongly as their magic flowed through me.

“Why now?” I asked.

“It is time.”

*Oh, that bastard, that wasn't an answer.*

His damned riddles would drive me mad. Before I could ask again, he began to chant. The air filled with light and sound, a low roar like the ocean. A sense of inevitability filled me.

Whatever he was chanting, I didn't recognize it. Something told me that only he could perform this ceremony, and it made me desperate to understand his role in this.

He was more than a minor villain, that was for sure.

We were connected somehow, and the feeling of it tainted my soul.

The Moon Stones glowed more brightly. The runes on the wall glowed along with them, filling me with power as they began to sing. It was an ancient melody, something I'd never heard before, but familiar all the same.

As the noise reached a crescendo, pain ripped through me, nearly blinding me, and magic exploded throughout the room.

*Eve*

While the Maker chanted and the Moon Stones and runes sang, my body was torn apart and put back together again. I couldn't see it happen, but I could feel it, bones and sinews rending as my vision stayed black.

The power and pain threatened to consume me as I lay on the ground. Part of me just wanted to die. I could never survive this. No one could.

*No.*

There was too much relying on me.

Lachlan.

The Maker.

He wouldn't let me die. And if I gave up, he'd just use me for his purposes. I had to fight. I had to be stronger than him, more determined.

I struggled past the pain, forcing myself upright, but instead of two feet, I rose on four. Furry white wolf feet filled



my vision, which was different than it had been. Sharper. More focused.

A growl reverberated in my chest. My whole body felt different. More alive. More primal. Fiercer.

“Down,” the Maker commanded, his tone that of an Alpha. I felt it in my soul, trying to force me back down into a position of submission.

Rage lit inside my chest.

*Never.*

I threw off the shackles of pain and let the power of the Moon Stones flow through me. They were part of me now, their magic lighting up my veins like rocket fuel.

Anger lit the Maker’s face as he stalked toward me. I growled, feeling my lips pull back from my fangs as my hackles went up.

“Watch out for the guards!” Lachlan shouted.

Of course.

The guards that stood around the perimeter were prowling closer to me, their blades raised as they watched me.

I was obsessed with the Maker, but there were other things to take care of first. I could feel the power of the moon more strongly than ever. Even though it was likely past dawn and the moon had set, the moon’s influence flowed through me like a battery.

Envisioning Lachlan’s chains breaking apart, I used the pull of gravity to tear them away from his body. When I looked behind me, the chains lay at Lachlan’s side.

It had worked—and no pain crippled me.

Immediately, Lachlan shifted.

*Get the guards.* Instinct made me speak to him with my mind.

*Done,* his voice came back.

That had worked, too. The pleasure of the hunt raced through me. The pleasure of *all* of this raced through me. Finally, I was a wolf.

It felt so right. So amazing.

Out of the corner of my vision, I saw Lachlan rampaging through the guards, taking them out one at a time. He gave me space to work on my own goal.

The Maker.

I was stronger than he'd expected.

I prowled in his direction, blood lust rising in me. He stalked toward me, determined to make me submit to him as the Alpha.

I would take him down.

We collided in a crash. I snapped at his neck, but my teeth went right through him. The bastard was corporeal enough to hold on to me, but he managed to make part of himself disappear before I could land my blow.

Asshole.

I tried again, managing to bite part of his shoulder before it disappeared. His blood tasted tainted and dark, and I nearly gagged.

“You’re coming with me,” he growled. As the words left his lips, I felt the ether pulling at me.

*No!*

How was he doing this? He hadn't used a transport charm.

He must have the power himself, I realized. I fought him, trying to push away. I couldn't let him take me. Frantic, I snapped at him, trying to get ahold of him and deliver a killing blow, but he was too fast and too powerful.

The ether kept pulling, and I fought it, yanking away from him, trying to stay grounded.

*Eve!* I heard Lachlan's voice in my head.

*He's trying to take me!*

Desperate, I snapped and struggled, using all my power to stay where I was and resist the pull of his teleportation.

When I felt strong arms around my middle, I knew it was Lachlan, trying to yank me away from the Maker.

Frustration flared in the eyes of my enemy, and defeat followed. He knew he couldn't fight us both.

And then, to my surprise, I felt the slice of pain at my shoulder.

He'd cut me.

Out of the corner of my vision, I saw him press a glass vial to the wound, collecting a sample of blood. It all happened so quickly.

"I've got what I need," he hissed. With a great yank, he pulled away and released me, then disappeared.

Lachlan and I tumbled backward, landing in a pile on the ground. I scrambled upright, still in wolf form, and looked around.

The Maker was gone. The guards were all dead, their bodies scattered in puddles of blood. I turned back to Lachlan,

who stared at me with awe on his face. “You’re magnificent.”

I looked down at myself, able to catch glimpses of white fur.

I was big.

*Really* big.

He knelt at my side, inspecting the wound at my shoulder. “You’re hurt.”

Why the hell had the Maker wanted my blood? Same reason he’d wanted me, probably. And we had no idea what that was.

I needed to be able to speak.

Shifting back to human form was as natural as breathing. One moment I was a wolf, the next, I was human. The flash of magic that accompanied the change was like quicksilver.

Panting, I knelt in front of Lachlan. He gripped me by the waist, helping me stay upright, and inspected my shoulder. “You’ve healed.”

He was right—I could no longer feel the pain—and I met his gaze. “Are you all right?”

He nodded. “More importantly, are you?”

“I think so.” I staggered to my feet. “Let’s go check on the others.”

He rose, wrapping an arm around my waist and helping me walk. All of my wounds had healed in the transition, but I was so exhausted that I could barely stand. As quickly as I could, I gathered up the Moon Stones and stored them in the bag I kept in the ether.

We exited the chambered tomb, which looked like a massive, grassy hill from the outside. In front of us, my friends walked through the woods. There were no more enemies, and I was able to account for everyone, thank fates.



### *Lachlan*

A day later, after everyone had healed, I visited the Shadow Guild tower. Everyone in my pack had survived, though there had been some gruesome injuries. Even Garreth had made it back, thank fates.

Unfortunately, his eyes had gone entirely black after the battle, his mind escaping him. However he'd managed to hold off the curse, he was no longer able to. It was almost as if he'd found the strength to help us, and then given up.

In a brief moment of clarity, he'd tried to get me to put him down.

I'd refused. No way in hell could I do that. It would break me.

Fortunately, my pack had agreed. They'd seen how Garreth had fought on our side to save me. Seen how he'd fought the curse.

Though we knew it was impossible, we'd agreed to try to find a cure. Until then, Garreth was locked in a tower room with a constant guard.

I hadn't seen Eve since we'd parted ways after the battle. We hadn't spoken about the night in the cell, and I didn't know

if we ever would. It'd been the most miraculous hour of my life, but it was over.

It had to be over. The Dark Moon curse still dogged my heels, and Mordaca's potion was quickly losing efficacy. The moment I fell in love with Eve, it was over for me. Hell, I was almost there already.

I probably shouldn't even see her, but I had to know she was okay.

When I reached the door to her tower, it swung open. Carrow stared at me, then stepped aside.

I entered and immediately spotted Eve by the fire. Her gaze flashed to me, and her lips parted. "Lachlan. What are you doing here?"

"Checking on you."

"I'm fine." She rubbed her chest. "My magic doesn't tear me apart anymore. I still don't fully understand it, but it's not hurting me."

"You'll learn what you're capable of." She'd been the most magnificent wolf I'd ever seen. Larger than any other, with bright blue eyes and a beautiful white coat. Her power would become legendary, I was sure. There were no others like her. "I need to know what you think the Maker is after."

"We don't know." She frowned, wrapping her arms around her legs. "But he wanted my blood for some reason. He's going to do something awful with it, I'm sure."

"Hey, now," Carrow said. "We'll take care of that. You're more powerful than ever."

Carrow was right. We might not have succeeded in stopping the Maker, but Eve's transition was an arrow in our

quiver.

“I just still don’t understand *how* it happened to me,” she said. “Why am I the dire wolf?”

“We’ll figure that out,” I said. “We’ll have answers, Eve, and we’ll stop him.”

“I hope so. Because nothing was as it seemed.”

I nodded, feeling the same. More than anything, I wanted to sweep her up in my arms and carry her away from this. Lock her away in some tower to be safe for the rest of her life.

But that wasn’t an option.

She had to face her fate, and I couldn’t be near her.

I stepped back toward the door. I’d seen what I needed to see—she was safe.

“I’ll have Kenneth start looking for more answers,” I said. “We won’t stop until we know what’s going on.”

She nodded, saying nothing as I turned and left. Walking away from her was the hardest thing I’d ever had to do, but it was necessary.

There could be nothing between us, no matter what fate decreed.

~~~

I hope you enjoyed *Pack of Lies!* The adventure isn’t over yet. The next one is coming in early May. [Click here to get it.](#)

## **THANK YOU FOR READING!**

I hope you enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. Reviews are *so* helpful to authors. I really appreciate all reviews, both positive and negative. If you want to leave one, you can do so at Amazon or GoodReads.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Ben, for everything. There would be no books without you.

Thank you to Jena O'Connor and Ash Fitzsimmons for your excellent editing. The book is immensely better because of you! Thank you to Susie Johnson and Jenna Ossip-Klein for the excellent typo hunting.

Thank you to my amazing narrator Laurel Schroeder for bringing the character's voices to life.

Thank you to [Orina Kafe](#) for the beautiful cover art and Chris Sim for the guild crests.

*For Saun.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hey there! I hope you enjoyed *Pack of Lies*. There's quite a lot of archeology and history in this one. Much of it revolves around the Viking period in Scotland.

Scotland, particularly the northern islands, was heavily influenced by the Viking diaspora. In the late 8th century, Vikings (primely from Norway) began to colonize parts of Scotland. They set up towns and Earldoms, taking over entire islands. Orkney and Shetland were two places where Vikings concentrated, but they also built settlements on the mainland and in the Hebrides.

In the present day, Viking ancestry is strong in Scotland, most notably in Shetland. Up Helly Aa, the Viking boat burning festival that I described, is an annual festival that is held on the last Tuesday in January in Lerwick. I put it at a slightly different time of year, but it is roughly as I described it. In real life, there isn't a standing stone circle near Lerwick. Instead, I based this circle on the Stones of Stenness found on Mainland Orkney. They do not have Viking carvings on them, however.

On the Isle of Wyre in Orkney, there really is a small ruined castle and a chapel called St. Mary's. Both were built during the Viking period in the 12th century AD. The castle

ruins are smaller than I described them in the book and the walls do not contain carvings.

However, there are ancient neolithic sites in Scotland that have been modified by the Vikings. Maeshowe, the site of the final battle in the story, is one of these sites.

Maeshowe is a Neolithic chambered cairn built around 2800 BC on Mainland Orkney. Similar structures were built as passage graves to house the bodies of important people. However, no burials were found in Maeshowe (that we know of), and experts are unsure of exactly what the cairn was used for. The entrance to the tomb is aligned with the winter solstice sunrise so that the back wall of the interior is lit up when the sun rises on that day.

From the outside, it looks like a massive round hill covered in grass. The interior is a small square chamber accessed via an entrance passage that is 36 feet long. I modified the chamber in the book to be round because it suited the story better. I also added a forest around the cairn, which is not there in real life.

Around the 12th century, the tomb was looted by Vikings who had made their home on Orkney. Earl Harald Maddadarsen and Ragnvald, Earl of More, were responsible, and they left behind more than thirty inscriptions on the walls, all of them written in runes.

Maeshowe was later looted by an antiquarian by the name of James Farrer in 1861. The characters in *Pack of Lies* don't speak favorably of antiquarians, and for good reason. Antiquarians were the predecessors to modern day archaeologists, but they were not the same. Many antiquarians were more concerned with obtaining treasure than they were with the past. As a result, they often destroyed archaeological

sites and the information that they contained (something an archaeologist would not do). James Farrer was no different. He broke through the top of the mount, as well as the side, and removed everything from the interior.

That is pretty much it for the history mentioned in Pack of Lies. I hope you stick with Eve and Lachlan for the rest of their adventure!

## **ABOUT LINSEY**

Before becoming a writer, Linsey Hall was a nautical archaeologist who studied shipwrecks from Hawaii and the Yukon to the UK and the Mediterranean. She credits fantasy and historical romances with her love of history and her career as an archaeologist. After a decade of tromping around the globe in search of old bits of stuff that people left lying about, she settled down and started penning her own romance novels. Her Dragon's Gift series draws upon her love of history and the paranormal elements that she can't help but include.

## COPYRIGHT

This is a work of fiction. All reference to events, persons, and locale are used fictitiously, except where documented in historical record. Names, characters, and places are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright 2021 by Linsey Hall

Published by Bonnie Doon Press LLC

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form, except in instances of quotation used in critical articles or book review. Where such permission is sufficient, the author grants the right to strip any DRM which may be applied to this work.

ISBN 978-1-64882-010-6

[Linsey@LinseyHall.com](mailto:Linsey@LinseyHall.com)

[www.LinseyHall.com](http://www.LinseyHall.com)

<https://www.facebook.com/LinseyHallAuthor>