

Chapter 0006

I wake up in the middle of the night and groan a little with pain from my stiff muscles and my aching face. I prod at my nose, pleased to find that it's already much better – the speed of wolf healing really is great, even though my nose is still too swollen to truly smell anything.

But as I sit up, I realize that the real problem here is that I am...grimy.

I'm completely covered in sweat and blood and my body feels...disgusting. I stick out my tongue as I survey myself, not even really able to believe that I was able to fall asleep like this. I mean, how much pain had I even been in?

A lot, my wolf reminds me, nudging me with her nose. Can we go find them now?

I scowl and mentally push her away, not able to think of it – or maybe just not wanting to, not right now. I mean, what the hell does it mean – what do I even feel about any of this?

Did I imagine it?

Or did...did two mating bonds actually snap into place

yesterday afternoon, the day after I left Prince Asshole at the altar?

But no. That's impossible. You get one fated mated – just one! And most people don't even get that!

I don't even know what one mating bond snapping into place feels like, let alone two. My wolf must be wrong – whatever happened must have just been...I don't know, some kind of hormonal reaction to being around so many boys all at once.

I'm not wrong! she growls, snapping her teeth at my denial. But I ignore her again.

I quickly move to the wide communal bathroom at the end of the room. I grab a set of supplies from the waiting shelf and dash towards the shower stall. But when I pull back the curtain I gasp – actually gasp – in horror at the site before me. The floor and walls are covered in muck, and boy hair, and – oh my god, is that even blood in the corner?

I scowl at myself, hating this side of me that's decidedly a Princess...

...but I have to get clean.

And quite suddenly I remember what Jesse said on the way in – that there are some hot springs over the far hill. I breathe out a little moan, instantly wanting

nothing more than a long, hot bath all by myself. To get clean, and to refresh myself – I just know it's the one thing that will set me right.

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After about five minutes of searching for the hot springs, I find them.

They're everything I hoped they would be. Clean, fresh water – smelling just slightly of sulfur – bubbles out through a set of rocks, creating a little steaming pool that's just deep enough to sink into. With a quick glance over my shoulder to check that I'm actually alone, I strip off my clothes and fling off my hat, running my fingers through my hair as I wade into the pool, moaning a little at the luxurious warmth of it enveloping my exhausted and battered body.

When that's finished, I tie my hair back in a knot at the base of my head and I take a deep breath, closing my eyes and turning my face up to again stare at the castle against the sky as I start on my body. As I run the bar of soap all over my skin, pampering myself a little as my muscles unwind, my mind turns to the question of battle magic, and just how the Academy might teach something like that.

Because Rafe and Jesse and I – we're all supposed to

have some kind of magic, a gift from our Grandmother, the Goddess. Mom and Aunt Cora told us each about it when we turned sixteen, but...none of us have manifested anything yet. Mom is an incredible healer, and Aunt Cora can control the weather, but the three of us?

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