

Claire

After leaving Keegan, who let us know he'd be in touch within the next couple of days, Tereshan and I begin to walk back to the packhouse. As we do, I stop, looking around.

"What is it?" Tereshan asks me.

"Isn't this near that tunnel that Dane found in the last timeline? The one where we were able to sneak food into the pack?"

Tereshan looks around. "I never saw it. But I heard about it. I'll tell Dane and Jesiah to keep an eye out for it. We should make sure that Franco can't get in that way."

He turns, pulling me to him. "That was a great thought, my brilliant mate." I know I'm blushing, but I don't look away.

"It feels different this time, doesn't it? Not just this," I say, moving my hand between us to indicate the physical differences, "but you and I working together. It feels like we fill in the gaps that the other has, whether it's that our strengths are different, or we just really were meant to be the other half of each other."

"It feels good. It feels right," he says. "But, saying that, we need to talk about something that isn't going to feel

right.”

He strokes my cheek, watching me closely. “I want to go to the brothel tonight. Not only do I need to find out what’s going on, but now I want to get Selah’s sister out of there. Looking at it now, it’s a horrible place where women and some men are exploited. I don’t want to take you there, but I think we’ll get more information if you come with me.”

My hands instantly go sweaty. After hearing what Zoey and Amelia suffered and they weren’t even in the brothel, the idea of stepping foot in that place makes me feel sick to my stomach.

“So, let’s talk about it,” he says, leading me to a tree and sitting down before pulling me into his lap, so I’m straddling him, and we can talk face to face.

“If you truly don’t want to go, I’ll go without you. Know that first. It’s your decision. But if you decide to go, I have some rules. You never leave my side, you do exactly what I tell you to do, even if you don’t understand it, don’t argue, don’t fight me and when we’re walking through the crowd of people, never let go of my hand. If someone pulls on you, you tug on me, and I stop and get you out of the situation. Understood?”

I nod, feeling even more sick, but already knowing that I’m going to do it. I have to, if for no other reason than we were just discussing how much better things are going because we are working together. But also, those

women need my help too. They won't trust Tereshan, I wouldn't if I were them, but they will trust me. Selah even said that when we talked.

"I'll go," I tell him.

He tucks my hair behind my ear, running his fingers through it before refocusing on me. "It's very likely that Franco, Ivy and Eason will all be there tonight. All three of them will want to hurt me and the best way to do that is through you. So, you never leave my side."

I nod, running my thumb through the stubble on his jaw line and chin.

"Once we're in the room, I'll need you to talk to the women, help them to understand that we're here to help but that we need any information they can provide to us."

"Like what? What should I be asking them?"

"If they've heard any conversations with Franco, maybe with Eason talking about the brothel or what they are using it for. Obviously, they are taking advantage of women who need help, but there's more going on, something that we're missing. Let's see what they say, if they know anything at all and then we can go from there. But make sure they know that my help, our help, is not dependent on their information. I'd rather them not say anything than give us bad information because they want to try and get out of there."

He leans forward, kissing my nose. "I know this will be scary for you. It makes me sick to think of taking you there, but it's the only way we're going to get the information we need."

"It's one night," I say, holding on to that thought. For the women there, it's much more than that.

"How are we going to get them out of there?" I ask.

"We're bringing Jesiah and a couple other warriors. We'll drop them off before we get to the brothel. I'll pay to have the girls for the night. They will have to crawl out a window and run to them. But once they get there, Jesiah and the others will keep them safe. It's risky, but it's the only way I'm getting them out tonight if they choose to leave. If they don't, we're not fighting with them Claire. It's their choice and I'm still planning to buy the brothel. We'll get them out one way or another."

He holds me a bit longer as I think through what he's said.

"Any other questions before we head back?"

"Not now, but I may later."

"Ask before we get there. Once we're there, I want you to act nervous and skittish about being there."

I snort. "Well, that won't be hard."

"I won't let anyone touch you, Claire. You are mine."

He kisses my lips gently. "Okay, let's get back to the packhouse. I need to call 'my guy'," he says smiling.

That makes me laugh and he stops, watching me. "I love that sound. I hope to hear more of it in our future."

"I hope we have more of it between us, and in our pack," I say as he lifts me and puts me on my feet.

"Always thinking of the pack," he says, taking my hand and beginning to lead me to the packhouse.

When we get back Tereshan asks if I want to sit in on his call with Eric. I decline, wanting to check in with Feena since we've been gone all morning.

He leans down, kissing me again. "What if I want to change our plans and just spend the rest of the day kissing my mate?"

That makes me giggle and I shake my head at him, before turning to head to the kitchen.

"I wasn't joking," he calls out. I turn and blow him a kiss.

"I'll be collecting the real thing later," he calls, making me laugh again.

The smile is still on my face when I walk into the kitchen and see that Dane has Feena against the wall, his body pressed against hers, his hand in her hair. Her arms are wrapped around his neck and he is kissing her like Tereshan kisses me when we're alone. Like he means it

and wants to make sure I know it.

When I hear Feena whimper, her leg lifting to wrap around Dane's hip, I quietly back out of the kitchen. Instead, I head to the library. When I get there, I'm thrilled to see that all of the unnecessary furniture has been removed and what is left has been cleaned.

"Hey, Luna. What do you think?" Jacoby asks, coming to stand beside me.

"I love it. Now we just need to order some books and get those tutors scheduled to start coming in."

He looks at me.

"What?" I ask, looking at him.

"You're the reason all of this is happening, Luna. You're the reason that Alpha has become a different person, a better Alpha. You have made this pack a better place to live. A good place to live. Every day it's getting better, and we owe that to you."

"It's more than just me, Jacoby. The entire pack has to work together. That's what makes us stronger."

He smiles, looking away from me.

"What?" I ask again, turning to look at him.

"Spoken like the true Luna that you are."