

## Chapter 1

DANE

Everything about that night—everything about *her*—is burned into my memory.

Maybe our love is toxic.

But I can't turn away.

No matter what I say, or how cruel either of us get, I'm hers.

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The moon was no more than a sliver that night, like the Goddess closed her eyes so she didn't have to see what was about to happen: the destruction of one of her strongest packs.

All because I was too f\*cking young and dumb.

Too soft.

Because of *her*.

I was twenty-one. As the Alpha's heir, I was the leader of the warriors who patrolled Blue Ridge pack land—the deep woods and mountains of Georgia—just south of the Tennessee state line.

I paced the top of an overgrown wall near the edge of Blue Ridge land in my wolf form.

I was big—bigger than most wolves in my pack. But I knew how to walk softly, and my solid charcoal-gray fur made me hard to see in the dark.

The raggedy backwoods pack run by the Reed family had been trying to bite chunks out of our land for as long as I'd been alive.

They thought because my grandfather had gone to Atlanta, made something of himself, then come back with billions and made the Blue Ridge Pack the most powerful in the Southeast, we were too big for our britches. We didn't deserve these woods, this green expanse of forest and streams, because we'd gone soft. Gotten rich.

F\*ck Broken Forest, and the Reeds especially.

The sound from the woods came again. Like someone stumbling, lost and sick.

I scented blood and silver.

Then I heard *her*.

A female weeping.

“Help...please...” She sounded weak and sad, like she didn’t expect anyone would ever save her.

Her hopelessness was a fist in my gut. No one should ever sound like that.

I trotted through the forest, searching for her, pulled like a magnet. There was a new scent along with the metallic tang of silver and copper—lilacs.

I came around a tree and found her. Though the moon was dim, she’d fallen in a puddle of light. Her long, silvery hair was matted and tangled. Her white gown was shredded so that most of her body was visible. Streaks of blood covered her body.

She was like a dream that had fallen into the real world and barely survived.

From her scent, she was a wolf. One who’d been poisoned with silver and then beaten to within an inch of her life.

I shifted into a man and knelt by her side. I smoothed her hair back from her face. She flinched and whimpered, but bit the sound back, trying to be strong.

That was the moment I knew: I would protect her for the rest of my life.

My wolf howled. There was something between me and this girl. A connection. I thought I heard her wolf...

But then it was gone. A wisp of smoke blown away on the wind.

I must have imagined it.

I put my hand in hers. "Shh. Tell me your name."

She shivered and wept, but gripped my hand with a hard, desperate strength. "I-it's...Ann... My wolf. I don't feel her!"

I lifted her in my arms and stood. "Our pack has healers. I'll take you to them."

She looked up at me with big, bright eyes. "N-no! They're going to...t-they..."

She passed out. There was so much silver in her, I could see it turning the delicate veins in her pale hands black.

If I didn't act, she would die.

So, I turned my back on my post.

I walked away and left a hole in Blue Ridge's defenses.

We were so strong; I didn't think anyone would dare come against us.

I hadn't counted on our enemy, the Reeds.

I didn't realize that this girl was their daughter, Ann.

I didn't know she was part of it.

Not until Blue Ridge was burning. Not until my parents and a quarter of my pack were dead.

Not until her father, Waylon Reed, forced us to kneel across from each other beneath the closed eye of the moon and tied a silver ribbon around our wrists like the mating ceremony demanded.

With claws to the throat of my grandfather, who was the Alpha of our pack, and my little sister—my last remaining family—the Reeds forced me to marry their daughter. The fallen dream.

Complicit, conniving, manipulative Ann Reed. The reason my family was dead.

Staring into her strange eyes—a pale shade of lilac—I took her as my wife. My mate.

And I swore to destroy them all. Especially her.

No one was going to kill Ann Reed except me.



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Gifts