

## Chapter 2

ANN

THREE YEARS LATER

"Please, Dane...slower..." I begged.

Even though we'd been married for three years, my husband, Alpha Dane Montague of the insanely powerful Blue Ridge Pack, had never touched me.

Now, finally, he was buried deep inside me. I didn't mind the pain as he took my virginity.

I didn't even mind where we were, in a small office above a dirty club that served the dark supernatural underworld of Atlanta.

We weren't even in a bed. Just on a couch. It was dark and stuffy and smelled like old cigarettes.

I just wanted to *feel* this moment.

Maybe, *finally*, after so many years of throwing my heart at him, of trying to tell him I was a victim that night, too, he would love me...

He bent to growl in my ear, "You went to a witch for a love spell just so I could bear to touch you, didn't you? So f\*cking desperate. Why now, Ann? Because Broken Forest is finally mine? Because I finally took everything from them?"

His words pierced my heart and shocked me, even as he still moved inside me. Even as he stole my breath with his accusation. "What are you—ahh!"

I couldn't stop my moan. Despite his anger, his accusation, he was giving me pleasure like I had never experienced.

He smirked, but I knew him like no one else did. There was something unsteady in him.

After three years of resisting me, of hating me, he wanted this, too.

But then he bent and whispered, "Now, you're going to come, and you're going to scream my name. Because you will always belong to me, but I will never love you."

I didn't want to, but he changed his angle, thrust harder, deeper, and I couldn't help it. "Dane!"

My orgasm tore through me even as my heart tore in half.

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I sat on the couch after, cold and alone as he cleaned up in the bathroom.

I was so stupid.

From the night he'd rescued me in those woods and carried me the miles to his home to save me, my heart had been lost to him.

I told him they drugged me with silver that night, but he never believed me. He thought I was in on it. Willing to sell my body to keep him under Broken Forest Pack's control.

But really, my parents knew I would never agree to it. That was why they drugged me with so much silver and beat me so badly I had almost died.

They'd left me on his lands, knowing his good nature wouldn't allow him to leave me.

That single act of kindness had led to so many terrible things.

Dane had lost his family that night, and I had lost *myself*.

I lost my wolf.

I closed my eyes, a tear sliding down my cheek. Three years had passed, and I couldn't stop mourning her.

Sometimes being around Dane changed that. Made me feel whole again.

Then I remembered...he hated me. And he was in love with someone else.

Dane emerged from the bathroom and threw a box toward me. It bounced off my knee and landed on the floor.

"Plan B?"

"Just because I f\*cked you doesn't mean I want you pregnant. I told you; I'll drink molten silver before I ever let my blood mingle with the Reeds'."

His eyes fell on something on the couch, and he froze. I followed his gaze. It was a smear of blood. My cheeks heated.

"You were a virgin?" His voice was rough. "That... what I did... was your first time?"

I nodded, then bent and lifted the box and set it beside me on the couch.

"Does it matter?" I searched his face for a hint that it did. That he would've been gentler or caring if he'd known. But his jaw hardened, and his eyes turned cold.

It hurt so much. I had poured myself into this marriage. I loved him.

But he never *saw* me.

Besides, he'd been right about what he said earlier.

Once he was forced to marry me, Dane had made it his life's work to take down the Reeds. His grandfather made him Alpha. He rallied his pack. My family may have staged the ambush, but they couldn't hold on to the territory.

Out of the ashes of my family's actions, Dane had built himself up.

Through battles in the mountains and hostile takeovers in the business world, Dane had succeeded. He was now the most powerful Alpha in the South.

Even if I was his wife, the Reeds couldn't control him through

me. They couldn't control anything, anymore.

If it wasn't for the Council stepping in, Dane would've killed every Broken Forest wolf, including me. But the Council forbade any more bloodshed.

The Council—a group of the oldest, most powerful Alphas and Lunas that ruled wolves all over the world—had declared our marriage necessary to keep the peace in the region.

Dane never accepted the decree.

He'd made no secret of how much he detested me. I could feel his disgust through our bond all the time, and he could feel my pain. We were trapped. Two wounded animals tied to each other.

It was time to be free. Or as free as we could be.

For months I told myself he'd come around. He would see my love for what it was—real.

But he'd ripped that hope away even as he'd finally claimed my body. I should have felt loved. Instead, I felt dirty and used.

As he dressed, not even bothering to look at me, I pulled the folded silver ribbon out of my purse. The one they'd used to bind us together during our forced mating ceremony.

Since I didn't have a wolf, the magic in the ribbon was what tied Dane and I together on a deeper level—it held the magic of our mating bond. In the dimness, it glittered with woven threads of iridescent lunar magic.

*Dane, I have something to say.*

I touched his mind softly. It might be one of the last times. I loved how it felt to be tied to him. When he was kind, it was like having a warm safe place to rest.

But he was almost never kind.

He sneered and pulled his mind away from mine. "I don't much care."

Every time I thought he couldn't hurt me more, that his abuse would end, he cut me with his words again.

I laid the ribbon across my knees and hugged myself, squeezing my elbows like that could stop my heart from aching so badly. "I think we should cut the ribbon and sever our soul-bond."



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