

## Chapter 4

DANE

No. This was bullsh\*t.

Ann was a liar. Her family were thieves.

Let her cry. She would never actually leave. She'd stay around, begging me to f\*ck her again. But I had to resist, this time. Even though, now that I'd tasted her, it would be that much harder.

Her tears wouldn't bring back my family or my packmates. Or undo all the damage and trauma her pack had caused.

My wolf growled and paced beneath my skin. My wolf..liked my wife. He craved her.

But my wolf was all passion and instinct, and I had to rely on my human side to be objective. Which meant shaking off these feelings and walking away.

Time to find the woman I *actually* owed my life to: Evelyn Barclay.

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ANN

The pain in my heart was so terrible, I thought I was going to die.

I curled into the couch and sobbed in huge, heaving gasps for hours. Until I was spent and couldn't cry anymore.

I wished there was someone for me to call. A friend. My family.

But I had no friends, and my family was a pit of poisonous snakes. They hated me for refusing to spy on Dane for them. For choosing him, every single time.

In ways that he would never know.

I stood on shaking legs. I was sore from losing my virginity. Empty from the cut soul-bond.

But I had spent a lifetime putting pain aside. The Reeds made sure of that.

Instead of dwelling on it, I picked up the halves of the ribbon and his credit card.

He thought I was greedy. A gold digger. Wrong. I didn't want anything from him.

Quietly, I left the office above the club and got a cab back to the penthouse I had tried to call home.

That was another one of Dane's punishments. He made me live in the city, away from the land and the woods. Away from the wild places.

Even though I didn't have a wolf anymore, taking me away from the wild nearly gutted me.

Which was exactly what he wanted, because he thought I was one of the people who had gutted him and his pack three years ago.

I never even thought about the morning after pill I left on the couch at the club. I didn't think about pregnancy at all.

Not until it was far too late. By then, I was a hundred miles away, and there was no going back.

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DANE

That night after seeing Evelyn I went back to the Atlanta penthouse and crashed. I didn't see Ann. I didn't think about it.

The next day I worked, trying to make my time in the city as short as possible.

I sent a car for Ann later that day, since I refused to drive anywhere with her. My grandfather wanted us to visit him on Blue Ridge pack lands for dinner.

Work ran late. I took the roads out of Atlanta and north to the mountains at a breakneck pace so I wouldn't miss the meal. The ride was an hour and a half. I did it in an hour.

I might be a bastard, but I hated to disappoint the old man.

I arrived at the massive, sprawling mansion just as the sun was setting, checked in with my beta, Archer Fox, then drove farther up the mountain to my grandfather's home.

His "paradise" he called it. A big cottage with a view of the valley and its sparkling lake to the west. He was outside, pattering in his garden. Summer was at its peak, and the whole place was a riot of scents and colors.

People say I look like him, and I can see why. He's a big man with a serious face and dark eyes. But his hair is pewter gray, now, and mine is still black.

"Where's Ann?"

They were the first, grumpy words out of his mouth.

I looked around. I expected to find her here, with him. The old, former alpha hated most people, but he would take a bullet for Ann.

I tried to tell him a thousand times what a conniving liar she was, but he never listened.

"She's supposed to be here," I said. "I sent a car."

"Maybe this has something to do with it." He tossed me a cell phone. Or threw it at me. He still had an arm on him. Wolf strength doesn't fade like human strength does.

I caught the thing before it smashed into my face and looked at the screen. There was a picture of Evelyn from last night. She was with me. I had my arm around her waist, and we were so close we were almost kissing.

I scrolled up. It was a news article on one of those celebrity gossip sites. The headline read, "Award-winning Actress Gets

Cozy with Married Billionaire."

I thought of Ann's face last night when I'd finally f\*cked her then told her I never loved her. I'd relished twisting that knife.

But now...

I clenched my fist and had to stop myself from smashing the phone on the ground. Very carefully, I handed it back to my grandfather.

"I'll take care of it."

He snorted. "You'd better. The Council won't like it."

I thought of my cut bond. It didn't matter if we were bonded, as long as we were legally married. "The Council will likely turn a blind eye as long as the war doesn't start again."

My grandfather frowned at me. "You want people to think the wolves of Blue Ridge don't stand by their vows? Is that what I worked and bled for? What your parents died for? So you could trash our good name?"

Shame washed over me. Connall Montague might be prickly as hell, but I'd die before I failed him like I had the night Broken Forest attacked. "I said, I'll take care of it."

I called my beta. "Get those photos of Evelyn and I off social media sites," I snapped. "And find Ann. She never showed up today."

"Consider it done, Alpha," Archer Fox said in his stoic voice.

My beta would move heaven and earth to carry out one of my requests, but I was still off-balance. Last night, I'd given in to Ann and all the dark, possessive things I had been battling for years.

I'd let myself have her the way I craved.

Then, like an animal caught in a trap, I'd gnawed off my own leg to escape. Cut our bond.

I shouldn't have done it. Like my grandfather said, Blue Ridge wolves kept their word. I might not have technically broken my word to the Council, but close enough.

And I'd broken my promises to Ann. The ones all wolves made when they mated.

Lately, it was getting harder and harder to remember she deserved it.

I flipped through the contacts on my phone and called my wife. But she didn't pick up. I texted. Called again. And again.

Ann never missed a chance to come here. It was the only time she got to be in the woods, and I knew how much she loved it.

She never answered. Later, I left my grandfather's and went to the main pack house.

Archer Fox met me at the door to the huge, rustic foyer. I was so enraged by then, he probably felt me coming through the pack bond.

"Where's Ann?" I demanded.

Archer had a growl in his own voice when he answered, "The car she uses is at the Atlanta International Airport. According to the security footage, it's been there several hours."

"And?!"

"She bought a ticket to Europe. She's really leaving."



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