

Chapter 5

DANE

"Go get her!" I snarled. "Call the airport and stop that flight!"

As a wolf, money didn't do much for me. But in the human world, being a billionaire made me unstoppable.

Archer nodded and shouted to my pack warriors.

I went up to my room in the pack house. It was decorated to look as much like the outdoors as possible, with stone and wood and natural colors.

When Ann was here, she stayed in this room, too. I never slept in the bed when she was here.

As soon as I walked in, I heard someone in the closet.

Ann. It had to be. Archer must have been mistaken about her at the airport.

I strode toward the door, already growling, and kicked it open.

A woman in a white dress screamed.

Ann's dress...but this woman wasn't Ann. Too tall for the dress, which should have hit at mid-thigh but on this woman barely covered her ass.

I bared my teeth. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Evelyn Barclay stared at me.

Her face was softly rounded, with huge blue eyes, cupid's bow lips, and a pointed chin. That plus her wavy blond hair and curves were the reasons the media like to call her "the second coming of Marilyn Monroe."

Evelyn was also a wolf—connected by marriage to the Hundred Lakes Pack.

My grandfather had pulled Blue Ridge out of obscurity and into wealth with his own sweat and blood. We might be the richest pack in Atlanta, but we were far from the oldest. And in our world, old blood mattered.

The Hundred Lakes Alpha and Luna sat on the Council. I shouldn't offend Evelyn. But in that moment, I didn't care.

"Get out of her clothes," I snapped. "How did you even get in here? You need to leave."

My grandfather would never let me hear the end of it if he found out Evelyn was on Blue Ridge land.

Evelyn blushed "I...just wanted to see you. I came in to wait and had some wine and spilled it on my dress. I bet Ann won't mind." She smiled sweetly.

Ann would absolutely mind.

"Take it off," I snarled. "And leave. Something happened..."

Evelyn's eyes filled with tears, and she rubbed the inside of her

left elbow. My gaze fell on the crescent moon-shaped birthmark there.

I ran my hands through my hair, torn between this and knowing I needed to hurry to get to Ann.

But aside from Evelyn's powerful family, I didn't want to hurt her...she'd saved my life.

When we were kids, we'd both been kidnapped by some lackeys of the Reeds. I'd mostly blocked it out, But I remembered the little girl with a crescent birth mark on her arm who was a prisoner with me. She distracted the kidnappers while I escaped.

I'd promised to go back for her. But when I convinced my grandfather to take the pack warriors there, there was no sign of the Reeds' wolves or the little girl.

Then, two years ago, a singer wandered into one of my clubs out of the rain, desperate for work. She was decent, but I wasn't going to hire her.

Then I saw the birthmark, and everything changed.

I owed Evelyn *everything*. I made sure that semi-talented singer became one of the biggest stars in the country, because that's what she wanted. Thanks to her ties with the Council, they tolerated a wolf living such a public life.

Humans only saw what they wanted to see, anyway.

Pleasing Evelyn had always been easy. All she ever wanted was attention. After the death of my family, my forced marriage, I

wanted to do *something* to make *someone* feel good.

I picked up the wine-stained dress from the bed and put it gently in her hands. "Please," I said, "Ann is missing. If I don't find her, my grandfather will lose his mind."

Pure hatred hardened Evelyn's soft face, but just for a second. It was gone so fast; I might have imagined it.

She took the dress, then went on tiptoes to kiss my cheek. Like always, her scent was expensive and cloying. Just a little too much. Like most things about her.

She pulled back and pouted. "Let me know when you find her. I'd just...*hate* to think of her in danger."

Then she left, and I drove like a demon to the city. Before going to the airport, I swung by the penthouse to see if Ann was really gone.

All of Ann's clothes were still there. I went to her jewelry box. All of the expensive, glittering jewels were there.

I smirked, momentarily relieved. She didn't run. She'd never leave all this behind.

Then I looked at the bed. The maids had made it already. It was neat, all the dozen fluffy pillows in place.

But my heart froze.

Ann had two belongings from her childhood: an ancient journal and a delicate necklace with a pendant made from a fat pearl that shined silver and iridescent, like moon magic. She

kept them on her side table.

They were gone.

Instead, there was half a silver ribbon on the bed. Only half. And it was wrapped around a black credit card.

Out of instinct, I reached through our bond. I tried to sense her. She'd been there, in my mind, for three years. She was part of me.

But our bond was cut. She was gone, and I had no way of finding her.

No. I didn't accept that. I wasn't done with her yet.

I called Archer as I ran to the car. I had to get to the airport. "You're right. She's running. Bring her back!"

ANN

I bought a ticket to Europe. I went into the bathroom, changed, put on a hat and sunglasses. Then I sat at a gate nearby and watched.

Sure enough, that flight got mysteriously cancelled. Then Archer Fox appeared less than an hour later.

They forced all the passengers to stay on as they searched the plane.

It was a testament to just how rich Dane Montague was that

he could interfere with the TSA.

But he was that rich. No one would ever tell him no.

Except me, apparently. The person who most desperately wanted to tell him yes to everything he asked.

When Archer left, I went into another bathroom—the busiest one I could find—changed into a new outfit with a wig, doused myself with a different perfume this time—and left the airport.

I rolled my half of the silver ribbon into a tight ball and stuffed it in my pocket. It was plain, now, no longer sparkling with magic. But it was also a reminder.

Dane had always sworn he was going to kill me, and when he cut that ribbon, he won. Something in me died.

But so had our bond. Which meant he couldn't sense me. And that meant I could truly set us both free. No matter what the Council said, we were poison for each other.

So I buried the girl I'd been and everything she was deep down inside, and I walked away to save us both, even though it killed me.

Dane Montague would never see Ann Reed again.



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Gifts