

Chapter 10

Sierra

I ran for hours, until my legs couldn't carry me anymore. It was dark at this point, too dark to build a camp. I instead found a large tree and climbed it. I guess I was sleeping in a tree tonight.

-

Hurry up! I said from the lake.

A beautiful house with large glass windows sat on the edge of the water. I could see someone leave the house, running down the dock. He jumped off the dock and disappeared into the crisp lake water. When he emerged, his back was to me. I placed my hand on his shoulder, sparks erupted. I gasped in surprise.

"My Luna". He spoke softly, turning around and reaching for me. His face was a blur.

"Who are you?" He took my breath away.

-

My sleep was disrupted by the light of dawn and the cooing of morning doves. I had stayed wedged between two branches all night. I allowed myself a few minutes to wake up and slowly stretch my cold, aching muscles. My guilt eventually got the better of me, unable to let me relax. I hoped Gloria could find it in her heart to forgive me one day.

I climbed down the tree and pulled out my map, charting my course. I was determined to find this witch. After a few minutes of mapping, my course was set and I was on my way. I decided to stop into one of the nearby packs I had run by last night in the hopes of getting something quick to eat. Some packs were very welcoming, others not so much. None that I knew of would let a rogue into their territories. But I wasn't exactly a rogue. A rogue is one who is banished from their pack. I had just had mine taken away from me, but I was an Alpha by birth, so technically, I was the leader of the pack now, even though nothing remained. Alpha Carl never made me an official pack member, so when I left I wasn't made a rogue either.

An Alpha could decipher who was a rogue or not. Cyrus taught me what he knew about that. He said I had an alpha aura, but it was very weak. Probably because my wolf only came out twice. If I could ever get her to come and go whenever I pleased, it would be a different story. Because of that, it didn't take much to hide my aura. All the Alphas, Betas, and Gammas gave off a powerful aura. It was there to let others know their rank. It didn't matter how old or young, part of the pack or not, you were able to tell who the authority figures were. I didn't need any unnecessary attention drawn to me, so I was thankful for this silver lining.

"The town is just ahead" Sienna said.

"Great because I'm ready to eat an entire house."

We walked through what looked to be the main street of the pack, there were small shops and restaurants on either side of the road. I looked around and saw an outdoor restaurant with six tables.

Most of them had half-eaten meals. As I continued forward, I found a small toy doll on the ground. I picked it up. She looked beautiful. She had blond hair and blue eyes with a dainty blue dress. Her hair was braided to the side and she even had freckles across her cheeks and nose. Who would leave this treasure behind?

"Where are all the people?" I asked no one. I put the doll in my bag. It didn't deserve to be left on the ground. Maybe I will find the owner one day.

"It appears they left in a hurry..."

"I wonder why"

"Someone or something must have given them a good reason to leave so abruptly."

A cold shiver went down my spine at the thought.

"What should we do?"

"Let's get out of here quick, grab a meal if you have to, but let's not stick around."

"Sounds good to me."

I walked through the abandoned pack territory, careful to stay within the shadows as best as possible. I found a small market where I grabbed a prepackaged sandwich and a bottle of water and left some what little cash I had on the register counter. I was about to leave the town when I felt myself being watched.

I surveyed the area, though I didn't see anyone. "Who's there!" I yelled.

"You're not from around here. What brings you such a far way from home?" The chilling voice spoke. I snapped my head in the direction of her voice.

"Show yourself!!" I demanded.

"Sienna, what is it?"

"A witch, I think."

"You need not be afraid of me", she spoke.

"I'll be the judge of that, show you yourself!"

A beautiful woman emerged from the shadows. She had platinum blond hair and silver eyes and was dressed in an all-white dress that flowed with the wind. She looked flawless, almost like an angel.

"You're a witch?" I asked.

"Indeed I am. I take it you've never met a witch before." She noted. "Your name, child?"

"Sierra."

"I thought so. I'll ask again Sierra, what are you doing so far from home?"

"How do you know I'm far from home?"

"I'm a seer. I can see into your past and what your future could be. I will say, you have quite an interesting past."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Adaline." She answered, coming closer to me.

"What happened here?"

"Lycans."

"Goddess....they are far from the kingdom."

"They are the least of your worries." She shrugged.

"Excuse me?"

"You need training. You are like a time bomb waiting to go off."

"How do you-"

"I am a seer. I saw you through someone else's memories. So I came to warn you, you are in great danger. But now, having you in person, I can see everything. Tom was a smart man to point you in my direction."

"Warn me? Wait, are you the witch I'm looking for?"

A smirk played on her lips.

"I am."

"Thank Goddess! When can we begin?"

"We have a few minutes now. There is one thing that I would like to teach you before you need to leave."

"Um okay."

"Are all her marbles in a row?"

"Witches are known for being cryptic..." Sienna shrugged in my head.

"Sit, let's not waste any more time. Join hands with me. You have rare abilities, in fact. But you will need to practice. You won't learn anything unless you take the time. Now, I want you to clear your mind."

I obeyed her orders and cleared my mind.

"I want you to focus on every instance in your life when you wanted to disappear. When you killed the doctor, The time Brandon tried to touch you. The times you were given all those marks. When your pack was set up in flames, The time your brother blamed you for breaking your mom's china plate, and she believed him."

"How do you-"

"Focus", she said more firmly.

I put all of my energy into focusing on my memories. Slowly I felt a tingling sensation rush through my spine, working its way outward.

"That's it, very good."

"Did I do anything?"

"Look at your arms, child."

I looked down at my arms, but they were nowhere to be seen. I sprung to my feet in a panic and ran to the front of a small designer shop that had a mirror in the window. I was nowhere to be seen.

"Im invisible?!"

"I want you to practice this in your time, alone," Adaline said firmly.

"But how do I get it to stop?!"

"Focus on being seen."

I did as she said and I slowly shimmered back, my reflection back in the mirror. A rush of exhaustion came over me and I fell to the ground. Adaline just barely caught me before I hit the pavement.

"Woah..."

"Magic can take a lot out of you. The more you practice, the less energy it will take. So make sure to take time to practice. I must go now. We will meet again."

"When? How will I find you?"

"Fret not. I'll know where and when to find you. I have seen it already." She said before disappearing into what looked like a portal to another area.

I sat on the pavement for a moment trying to process what the actual f**k just happened. How did she know about me? She said she saw me in someone else's memories? That narrowed it down, but it did nothing to reassure me. How did she know I could make myself invisible? What did she want to warn me about? I felt uneasy about it all. I decided to grab my lunch and leave. I wasn't especially hungry, but I paid for the food and I wasn't about to let it go to waste. I got up and brushed myself off, grabbed my food and went on my way. I was about to pass the pack borders when I was stopped.

"You there! Halt!" A man's voice commanded.

I turned to see a massive Lycan standing before me. I never even heard him coming. I guess it's true what they said about Lycans, they were the better werewolves. Which meant I was about to be in big trouble.

"Name?" He commanded. His aura was strong, stronger than a normal Alpha, but something told me he was a Beta. The Kings Beta. He held a tablet in his hand, ready to type away.

This is the last thing I needed. I turned and began to run away. I wasn't going down without a fight.

I swear I heard the Beta ask himself "Why do they always run?" before I was tackled to the ground on my stomach.

"Lets go", he said with an annoyed tone. He picked me up from the ground and gave me a push in the direction he came from: north.

"You're not going to restrain me?" I asked in disbelief.

"Do I need to?" He shot back. "Last I checked, I was the Lycan and you were the werewolf. If you run again you wont get more than a few steps before you get put on your ass again."

"Fair point." I agreed.

"Are you going to tell me your name and make my job a bit easier?" He asked.

"Not a chance." I answered immediately. "Sorry, it's not you." I apologized.

"Its me?" He said comically, finishing my sentence.

I laughed at his corny joke and shot him a smile.

"I just don't want to be found. The less people know where I am, the better for everyone."

"We can offer you aid and protection even if you need it. But I will need to know your name, your affiliated pack, and we do cross-reference with birth records and finger prints so lying won't help any. We will find out who you are one way or another, Jane."

"Jane?"

"Jane Doe. For now anyway." He smirked.

"Are you always this funny when you are taking people against their will?"

"Not my choice. Only following orders. Doesn't mean I can't make light of the situation." His smile faded.

"Sorry to hear."

"The pack is just up ahead, I'll have you walk with them once we catch up."

"Yes Sir." I sighed.

- - - - -

We walked for most of the day, taking a few short breaks for the elderly and the children. What the King hoped to accomplish from this I didn't know. What I did know was that he was making himself out to be a real jackass whether he meant to or not. There were nine guards in total, from what I counted. Four stood on one side of us, four on the other, one leading the way, and the Beta led the tail end. They each had their own backpacks which I noticed them grabbing water bottles out of.

Most of the guards were indifferent with us. The Beta, whose name I still didn't know, would have conversations with the pack members. There was one guard, however, the one leading us to the Kingdome, that was just plain evil. He spent most of the walk boasting about some woman he did unspeakable things to in the bedroom and when he wasn't talking about s*x, it was about what he would do to us if we stepped out of line. The Beta semi-discreetly reprimanded him for his vulgarity on several occasions. At least someone had some class.

"Mommy, I'm tired" a small voice called out.

"I know baby, come here." The mother picked up her young daughter and carried her as we walked.

It took a hot minute for me to put the pieces together, but then I figured it out. The little girl I was looking at had blue eyes, freckles, and a blond braid over her shoulder which rested on her dainty blue dress. I took my backpack off and dug through my bag. There! I grabbed the doll I had stored away earlier today and ran to catch up with the girl and her mother.

"Missing something?" I asked.

"The little girl's eyes looked at my hand before she snapped her head up off her mom's shoulder and reached for her doll.

"Mommy! Look!" She exclaimed.

"Oh how wonderful!" Her mom whispered, undoubtedly fearful to speak too loudly on account of how close we were to the scary guard. She turned back in my direction and mouthed 'thank you'. I gave a simple nod in return and we continued walking in silence.

Chapter 11

Sierra

We trudged along, listening to the guards talk amongst themselves, too afraid to do so ourselves. Two of the guards on my left were talking about what the kitchen would be serving for dinner tonight. A guard on the right was poorly humming a tune I didn't recognize, and the Beta and another guard were talking about their weekend plans. Apparently, the Beta and his mate were planning on going away for the weekend. It sounded nice. I wish I could live a life like that.

Henry, the evil looking guard, didn't speak to anyone. It seemed as though he was just as hated by his colleagues as he was by us. I almost felt sorry for him. Almost. His face seemed to be stuck in a contorted, angry looking face. I guess what they say is true. If you keep making that face, it'll get stuck that way.

"Isn't that the truth." Sierra snickered.

Werewolves and Lycans alike were supposed to be generally good looking people, but Henry was just plain ugly. His hazel eyes were cloudy, his brown hair stringy and greasy looking, his face set in a scowl, and a beer gut to match the ensemble.

I looked ahead, hoping for everyone's sake that we would be arriving soon. The sun will be setting soon. A few minutes passed but, to everyone's delight, we could see the outskirts of the Kingdom's pack come into view. It was massive. There was a cluster of tall buildings in the center of the Kingdom that looked like a proper city. It seemed to turn into suburbs and then country land. From what I can tell, the actual palace, or what I assumed to be the palace, was set off from everything else. It was a massive stone building with nothing around it but gardens and grass. It almost seemed lonely all by itself. My wolf and I felt something stir within us. I almost felt called to go there.

"Henry, take this pack to the processing center. I will meet you there shortly. I need to make sure preparations are in order" The Beta said, now jogging past everyone in the direction of the palace.

"Do give my regards to the King, Beta Jackson", Henry said in a tone I wasn't too sure of. It wasn't a full-blown attitude, nor condescending, it was something strange. Was he trying to be a kiss ass? If so, he was failing miserably.

Beta Jackson gave him a curt nod and continued on his way. We were led towards the outskirts of the city, stopping outside of a big brick building. It actually looked similar to the orphanage I grew up in. Was this where we were staying?

"Single file maggots!" Henry snapped. "If one of you so much as breaths wrong it'll be you to death!" He reached into his travel pack and pulled out a whip with three strands on it. From what I could tell,

the strands were laced with silver shards. A sharp crack effectively had everyone scrambling to get into line, avoiding all eye contact. The sun had caught some of the silver in its light, giving it a sparkle, confirming my suspicion. This was not just meant for crowd control, it was meant for punishment. Silver was one of the very few things that could bring a werewolf to its knees in a millisecond. It ate away at the skin, leaving nasty burn marks, kinda like a chemical burn would. It would slow down our accelerated healing and even prevent a wolf from fully healing, leaving a scar in its place. Many packs used silver in their handcuffs and even laced their prisoner cells with it to keep them from escaping. The silver in prison cells would also prevent a wolf from linking with the outside world, or so Cyrus would tell me. I thankfully never learned first hand.

We all assembled into a single file line. Henry paced up and down the line with his silver whip. I noticed there had been a few Lycans milling about that suddenly disappeared. I guess they didn't want to stick around for this. Couldn't blame them. I wished I could join them. I looked to my left and right, taking in each of the pack members. None of them looked malicious or dangerous, everyone had been nothing but cooperative. Why would the King put everyone through all of this? For his dead mate? Was it really worth it?

"You never had a mate, you don't know." Sienna tried to sympathize with the King.

"Maybe not, but I know this isn't the way to get answers."

We had been standing in line for a while. One by one, the guards would bring pack members inside. Some of the children started to get restless, one in particular, a little boy, no more than 4. We had been standing there for at least half an hour. In 4-year-old time, that's like a century. His mother looked very pregnant, she had her back turned to him for a moment while she tended to her little girl, who was probably 5 or 6. The same little girl whose doll I had found. She certainly had her hands full. I never thought about children much, not anymore anyway. I always wanted a whole litter of pups but I don't think it's in my cards. I have never even gone through heat yet!

"James?" I heard the woman whisper yelling. I saw her looking back and forth frantically.

I looked towards where the guards were standing, and to my horror, the little boy, James, was standing right behind Henry, checking out his whip. Henry turned around, sensing his presence.

"What do we have here?" A wicked smile crossed his face. He drew his arm back, lining up to whip the boy.

I sprinted to him, dropping to my knees as if I was sliding into home plate.

"James!!" The mother yelled in horror.

I grabbed him in my arms and turned us away from Henry, shielding him with my body, when I felt the first excruciating bite of the whip.

"Aaaaaahhh!" I let out a sharp, pained scream as I felt my flesh being ripped off my back.

"What is this?!" Henry spat.

"He is just a boy! He doesn't know any better!" I managed to get out through clenched teeth.

"Well, I'll teach him then!" He said as he tried to move me. I could hear James's mother sobbing in the background.

"No! Leave him, take me instead!" I let out a pained sob.

"Damn it." Sienna sighed, already knowing our fate.

He hesitated a moment then grabbed a very hysterical James from my arms and shoved him in the direction of his mom, who ran to collect him. "Take note people, this is what happens when you step out of line. Guards, secure her!" He barked. Two men came and lifted me off the ground, they dragged me over to the metal fence that surrounded the orphanage. "Remove her top, I was a full canvass." He sneered.

"Yes Sir." One of the guards answered. I felt my already torn shirt being ripped open the rest of the way and my bra unclasped, fully exposing my back.

"Looks like you are already troublesome." The other guard said more to himself. I could feel his eyes glued to my already scarred back. The guards stepped aside while I waited. I could feel myself shaking with adrenaline or fear. I wasn't sure which was more prominent at the moment.

Crack!

His first whip came down hard. I let out a shaky breath, my skin felt as though it was on fire. This was a hundred times worse than I had imagined. The whip he meant to give to the boy was weak compared to what I had just experienced. He wanted me to suffer.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three fast strikes came plummeting down onto my back. I flinched away in vain. The unforgiving tongues mercilessly ripped flesh from bone. I could hear my blood splattering on the pavement and gasps of terror from the onlookers.

Crack! Crack!

"You stupid b***h!" Henry yelled before stomping on my thigh, effectively breaking my leg with his impressive Lycan strength.

Whatever adrenaline I had in me didn't stand a chance. I soon felt dizziness take over and my vision became blurry and spotty. There was some commotion in the background, but I was too weak to care. The last thing I remember was two guards dragging me away.

- - - - -

Jackson

"Brother, the Golden Leaf pack has arrived. There were no issues. I had Henry take them for processing. You can vet them in the morning." I said, standing in the palace throne room. It was rare that I ever found Edward here, except for diplomatic matters, or in recent years, for discreet investigations. If I found Edward here it was usually because he was missing our late father. He would often bring us in here as young children to teach us, or even to rough house despite our mothers objections.

"Thank you, give my regards to Ella". He sounded somber. His gaze fixated above his throne to a family portrait someone painted of our family years ago.

"I miss him too."

We exchanged a knowing glance before I left to make sure Henry wrapped everything up with no issues. Goddess I pray he didn't cause any more issues. He was on his last leg, as it were, but given how many guards resigned over the past few years, well, beggars can't be choosers. This journey had been especially long, there were many more children and elderly in this pack and it was the furthest we've collected thus far. I would need to talk to Edward about getting transportation for any further packs. It was a discussion I brought up several years ago but Edward dismissed it at the time. He truly did care about his kingdom and all the people in it, but his care of his mate topped everything. When Hope died, part of Edward did too. I made sure to check on him often. He was hard to reason with at times, although he has been easier to work with as the years went on. I could only hope that one day I would have my fun-loving, easy-going brother back.

As I approached the holding center, which was once an orphanage but, thanks to a multitude of good people, was vacant for many years now, I could feel something was off. The mood was especially tense, not a single pack member would look me in the eye. I could smell blood in the air. What the hell did Henry do now? I heard an awful cracking sound and my attention was immediately drawn to it.

I rounded the corner to find Henry standing before a she-wolf, bloody whip in hand. Before I even had a chance to stop it, he stomped down on the woman's thigh, a sickening cracking sound disrupting the peace, followed by the shewolf's bloody screams.

"HENRY" My booming voice shook through the air. Everyone froze, feeling my commanding aura.

"Beta, I was just-"

"Save it." I shut him down. "You two, untie her." two of our warriors made haste to untie the poor she-wolf.

"She was being uncooperative, and you know the king's orders", Henry started to cover for himself. "I was only doing my duty."

"I highly doubt that one she-wolf would have given you that much trouble that the only POSSIBLE way for you to subdue her was to beat her nearly to death in front of innocent women and CHILDREN" I spat back, getting in his face. I stared him down. He had no choice but to look away and bar his neck to me as a sign of submission. "Get out of my face. I don't want to see you right now."

He quickly left, the coward was always quick to leave. I would need to find out what really happened to see how far-fetched Henry's story was. I went over to the She-Wolf. She was barely conscious, but I recognized her immediately. She was the same girl who refused to give me her name earlier today. Maybe she did make a scene, though Henry would still have consequences to pay for his actions.

Edward would be pissed when he found out what happened. Against my better judgment, I had the guards send the girl to the prison and would have a physician attend to her there. I would tell Edward tomorrow if she lived through the night. Her condition looked bad, her femur was clearly broken, her back destroyed, and there was a pool of blood on the ground where she laid. I'm not sure any amount of medical treatment could help her. How the hell was I going to explain this one?

- - - -

"Goddess! What happened?!" My mate, Ella, exclaimed as she and Dr White rushed into the she-wolfs cell.

"Henry, thats what. Can you do anything to help her? Just until Edward can come speak to her tomorrow?"

"I don't know if she'll be that lucky." Dr White mumbled to himself.

"Why would he do this?" Ella sounded broken for the girl.

"He said she was being uncooperative. I get the feeling it's half true, since she had also refused to give me her name."

"Morphine and blood are her best bet right now. I'll stitch her up as best I can here, but she will need to be seen in a sterile environment pronto."

"Thank you Dr White."

"Ella, watch yourself, there are some silver shards imbedded in her back", Dr White warned.

"I'm going to check on the Golden Leaf pack, make sure everyone else is okay, you'll call me if you need me?" I asked.

Both my mate and Dr. White grunted in acknowledgment.

It didn't take me long to get back to the orphanage. I took my time to make sure everyone was settled in properly. Directing the pack towards the bathrooms, kitchen, and bunk beds we had prepared for them. There was an unspoken unease amongst the group but no other immediate complaints. We had a full kitchen staff that had hot meals waiting for the pack which they gratefully dug into. I told them we would be back in the morning to escort them to see the king before retiring myself for the night. It was sometime after midnight when my mate got home, her teal scrubs now blood stained, bags underneath her eyes from stress and exhaustion.

"She is stable" Ella stated, clearly over today. "I don't know what havoc she caused but no one deserves to go through what she just did." She added, flopping down onto a kitchen chair.

"Lets get you cleaned up." I kissed her forehead and picked her up to go to the shower.

I stripped both of us down and washed off the left behind grime before getting Ella into bed where I spent the rest of the night worshipping her perfect body. Who needed sleep anyway?

Chapter 12

Edward

"Ah! Yes! Give it to me!" The loud Lycan woman yelled as I pounded into her.

Hailey? Hillary? s**t, what was her name? She was so loud. It annoyed me. Maybe if she was on top she would be quieter. I quickly flipped onto my back, taking her with me.

"Thats it! Oh yes!!" She screamed in ecstasy.

Fuck. That only made it worse.

She rode on my d**k like her life depended on it. I needed this to stop. I sat up and picked her up by the back of her thighs. Leaving the bed, I put her back against a wall before I mercilessly pumped into her, finishing our dirty deeds. She screamed as her orgasm ripped through her, and by some miracle, I came shortly after.

Harley! That was it!

"That was...an experience." Not a lie. "I should be getting back to my Alpha King duties, you know the way out?" I said as I took off the nasty condom that trapped my manhood.

Although werewolves of all sorts, Lycans included, didn't get pregnant unless they were in heat, I didn't take any chances and always used protection. I was the King after all, I didn't need a dozen Lycan females claiming that I was the father of their pup.

"Yes. I know the way out." Her face dropped and her lips formed into a thin line of disapproval. Oh well. She dressed and grabbed her purse, thank Goddess she was going easily.

"Thank you Harley." I said as she was walking out the door.

"My name is Heidi, not Harley." I could hear her voice echoing from the hallway and I swore I saw her flip me the bird. I earned it.

"I forgot another name."

"They are not our mate. What do we care?" Edmund said.

He did make a good point.

"Its still rude."

"I miss mate"

"So do I, Edmund, so do I."

Hope had left a crater in my soul. She was everything I ever wanted in a mate. She was a wonderful Luna and Queen, everyone loved her. Well, most everyone. I often thought about the night she was taken from me and where I went wrong. If I had been stronger or faster, would that have saved her?

I shook off the thought, I needed to have a clear head for today. I took a quick hot shower, I had to get that she-wolf's scent off of me. It bothered me more than usual today. I grabbed the first pair of dark blue dress pants in my closet and a white shirt to go with it. I was the King after all. As much as I wanted to wear jeans and a t-shirt, I needed to show some professionalism.

Today I will be speaking with each member of the Golden Leaf pack, from what Jackson has told me, they are harmless. I made my way to the kitchen, located on the first floor of the palace. My nose guided me, following the smell of freshly cooked bacon.

"Good morning King Edward, sleep well?" Anita asked.

Anita was our primary chef in the palace. She was my favorite chef we ever had. She always knew what I liked, how I liked it. She was an older Lycan, in her 80's. You wouldn't know she was an older Lycan, except for the slowly turning gray hair and a few wrinkles that gave her away. She still has many years ahead of her, but it's not often you meet a wolf of that age. Many fall to war, others to loss of their mate. Sickneses were virtually nonexistent amongst our kind. We healed at an accelerated rate both to injuries and sickness, by the time someone noticed they had a runny nose, they were already on the upswing.

"Not especially." My wolf kept me up most of the night pacing and whimpering in my head. If I could have kicked him, I would have.

"Sorry to hear. A good omlet and tall cup of joe will do you some good." She said, placing a hot plate of food and a tall coffee in front of me at the kitchen bar I was sitting at.

"Thank you Anita"

"Oh, anytime Alpha." she began cleaning a frying pan. "So, any good plans today?"

"Same as always." I retorted.

"Do you think you will ever find those responsible?" Her wrinkled eyes looked at me with sympathy.

"I really hope so."

Jackon linked me shortly as I was finishing breakfast, letting me know that the members of the Golden Leaf pack had been fully processed. Fingerprints and birth certificates were verified. Everyone was who they said they were and there were no outsiders and everyone in the pack was present. It was rare that it played out this nicely. Someone was usually missing, which delayed the process, or a rogue or two was picked up on the way. Today should be an easy day.

"Lets go", my wolf commanded as I was finishing my last swig of coffee.

Edmund was especially antsy this morning, driving me up a f*****g wall. You would think getting some action this morning would have settled him down some but it seemed to have only made him worse.

"Chill dog", I rolled my eyes.

He growled back at me, something he rarely ever did. Goddess, what has gotten into him today?

I took my place in the throneroom. It was a giant room with white and gold accents, the carpet was deep red, almost burgundy color, the ornate trim on the walls and doorframes painted gold. The

walls themselves were painted white, giving a clean look to the room. It was void of any chairs except my own throne and what once was my queen's, which was separated from the rest of the room, on its own raised platform that had a set of three steps separating us from where we were and the floor.

"Bring the first group in". I linked my brother.

A minute later, the first family shyly scooted into my throneroom, practically cowering by the doors they came in through. I could tell by the faint aura that emitted from the older gentleman that this was the Alpha of the pack and his family.

"Please, come forward." I gestured to the foot of my throne, a few feet past the steps.

They hesitantly made their way forward, barring their necks towards me as a sign of submission. Their eyes were cast to the floor clearly fearful. Fear was always the most common response of those who came before me. Rightfully so. I stood to my full six foot eight height, getting straight down to business.

"Did you kill my mate?" I asked using my Alpha command. It was something no werewolf or Lycan could resist. None except for another Alpha King or my mate at least.

The group furiously shook their heads 'no'. Good.

"Do you know of anyone's involvement in my mate's death?"

Again, all no. Good.

"Is there anything going on in your pack that you would like to report? All complaints remain anonymous" My tone softened, no longer using my command.

Their heads snapped up, confusion written all over their faces. Yeah, surprise, I'm not a monster. Not completely at least.

They looked at each other, clearly linking one another.

"Whatever it is you can tell me, I can help."

"My King," the Alpha of Golden Leaf spoke, "We have been having some awful power outages this past year and our pack doesn't have much money to spare to upgrade our equipment...without the power our security system goes down, leaving us vulnerable to rouge attacks. We don't have many warriors since many have retired and our newer recruits are still in training."

"I'll see that it is taken care of." I began jotting down notes on my tablet. "I'll have your equipment all upgraded, and a new security system put in place, one that will have a backup even if the power goes out. If you would also like, I can send a few of my men to train with you and your Beta, as well as offer additional support until your recruits are ready to join in patrols."

"That is very gracious My King, we humbly accept." The Alpha bowed.

"Is there anything else?" I asked. The once fearful looking group now looked elated with joy, shaking their heads 'no' once more. "Then you are free to go, there will be a lunch provided in the same processing center where you were last night and we will arrange transportation for those who need it." I added.

I normally wasn't so generous to offer transportation, but this Alpha seemed to only care about his pack. I had many come before me asking for more money when they had been pouring their packs finances into their own selfish wants. Yeah, I checked into those things ahead of time. This Alpha handled the packs' finances wisely.

Jackson had suggested a while ago that we offer some sort of transportation. Although it is a nice idea, I needed to keep the fear factor of coming before the King a prevalent thing. So I only offer it to our further packs, as well as the packs with more elderly and children, once I know they didn't have anything to do with Hope.

"Thank you King Edward" The group bowed and left through the doors they came through, the next group passing them on the way in. I just had to do this for the next six to eight hours and then I would hit the bar tonight. I always needed it afterwards.

"Last group" Jackson linked me. Thank f*****g Goddess. It was a long day, longer than I had hoped. The sun was beginning to set and we had been at this all day. I even decided against lunch and dinner to get through the mass quicker.

"Send them through." I answered. "Wanna hit the bar later?"

"Not tonight. I promised Ella I would be home early today."

"Not a problem, next time." I said indifferently. I planned on getting wasted, I didn't need company for that.

"There is one other thing, there is a prisoner for you to vet." Jackson added, effectively ruining my mood.

"I'll deal with him tomorrow. What is taking this group so long?" My annoyance getting the better of me.

"They have children, brother."

Two women, one obviously pregnant, and four young children walked into the throne room. Some of the children were young enough to not know what was going on, seeing how they were completely care free as they approached me, pointing to some of the decorations around the room in pure awe. So innocent. The mothers bowed politely before me. I asked them the same questions, already knowing they were harmless but needing to ask none the less.

"You need not worry..." I started as I approached the women, about to escort them out so I could get the hell out of here when something caught my eye. "What happened here?" I squatted down to get a better look at the youngest of the children, a boy, who had a cut across his cheek, it looked like it was recent and there were even a few stitches.

"Apologies King Edward, my son got away from me and one of your men was going to whip him." The pregnant woman's shaky voice matched her equally terrified look.

I was immediately taken back by her statement. Why would one of my men try to hurt a child? And what the hell could have possibly stopped them? Jackson didn't mention anything happening.

"Was? What stopped him?" I already had an idea of who the culprit was, douche bag Henry. He was the only one who ever carried a whip. I told Jackson to get rid of him once before, but Jackson said we needed help. I knew I should have stood my ground and let him go.

"There was a girl, she jumped in front of my son before..." She fought back tears. "She took his lashings."

"I see"

I don't recall anyone coming through with lashings on them. If it was Henry who did it, they wouldn't be able to stand the next day, not with his grueling silver whip. He could have killed the boy. That fulfilled my rage even more.

"I will send a medic to check on your son before you leave. I would also like to offer you compensation for my guards' inappropriate behavior. You'll never have to work again." Their faces visibly relaxed at my offer, tears of joy falling freely. Neither of the women came with a mate though they were both marked. My assumption was that they were no longer in the picture, rogues were on the rise and this pack had made it clear that they were under prepared for any attacks. That would all change soon, but it wouldn't change the past.

"Thank you King Edward!" They gushed.

"No need to thank me." I stood "You are free to go." They bowed once more and went on their way. It wasn't until they were almost outside the door when I noticed one of the little girls had dropped her doll.

"Wait, her doll!" I called as I went to pick up the child's toy.

The doll looked just like the little blond girl, with the same hair and freckles and even matching dresses. It wasn't until I picked it up and brought it close that I smelled it. That same sweet apple smell I had found at the hospital.

"Has anyone else had this doll recently?" I asked.

The mothers exchanged a quick glance before answering.

"My daughter dropped it on the way to your kingdom. There was a young woman that picked it up, but I didn't recognize her from our pack."

I would have picked up on the girls' scent in passing. She obviously didn't come through my throne room.

"Tell me, what happened to this woman? Did you happen to catch her name?"

"We don't know her name but..." The pregnant woman began, exchanging another nervous glance with the other mother.

"But?" I implored.

"My King, she was the one who saved my son. She was taken to prison after your guard punished her in front of our pack." She said, pulling her son close to her.

I'm going to f*****g kill Jackson.

"Thank you ladies for your honesty. I apologize again for the trouble that this has caused you and your families."

Chapter 13

Edward

I stormed out of my throne room in a fury. Jackson had some explaining to do.

"Any luck?" Jackson said, without tearing his eyes from the clipboard he was writing on.

"The girl, where is she?" I could feel my tension radiating off of me.

Jackson immediately stopped what he was doing, picking up on my less than friendly tone of voice, and looked up at me.

"What girl, Edward?"

"The girl who was whipped protecting a child! Where is she?!" I was using my alpha command now

"Henry said she was being uncooperative. She wouldn't give anyone her name..." He began.

"Where is she?" I could practically taste the venom dripping off my voice.

"Last cell on the left." He spoke softly, his eyes cast to the ground the same way he did when he was in trouble with our father.

"We will discuss this later. Come with me." I said as I all but sprinted out of the palace and towards the prison.

If I was correct, this was the same girl who killed the doctor at the hospital Gloria was taken to. I had many questions for her.

"Edward, she isn't in great shape. Henry did a number on her. Dr White and Ella did their best to stabilize her but I don't know if she'll be awake to talk. She lost a ton of blood...."

I froze in my tracks and spun around, causing Jackson to stumble in his haste to avoid plowing into me.

"Tell me Jackson, when did you think it would be a good time to tell me that a young boy was almost killed by Henry? Or that he took it upon himself to whip the girl in front of an entire pack, a pack filled with women and children? How about letting me know there was someone who refused to give out their information? Or that they were currently bleeding out in the prisons?"

"I did tell you there was a rogue in the prison..." He tried to defend himself.

"Goddess!" I rolled my eyes and turned back around and continued to beeline it to the prison. I decided against taking a vehicle. I needed to blow off some steam before I killed someone.

It was normally a comfortable ten-minute walk, in this case I arrived in under five. I seldom had to use the prisons, I kept my Kingdom on a tight leash. It was mostly used for drunk wolves who got a bit out of control, which was rare since our metabolisms neutralized the alcohol so quickly. Or when a female goes into heat. We had a separate facility where we would send the unmated she wolves to ride out their heat. It was heavily guarded so no unmated males could enter, though some would still try, blinded by lust, so they would spend a few days in the prison to avoid any incidents.

We kept our prison underground, not wanting to raise alarm to bypasses and also ensuring a more secure facility. There was only one way in or out. I approached the building that sat on top of the prison. It was made of big gray slabs of concrete. We used the upper portion to show face mostly, but also as a place for on-duty warriors to take breaks and a spot to leave their things. I wasted no time entering the building and heading straight for the elevator that led to the holding cells. I punched in my access code, Jackson hot on my heels. We rode it down and approached the security gates. They let us through without any difficulty, knowing that if they tried to stop me to search me, they would soon stop breathing.

Our prisons were lined with silver, preventing any wolves from shifting, and even stopping Alphas from using their command. It blocked our aura, which came in handy. If one of our warriors ever needed to interrogate an alpha, there would be no resistance or rank.

My wolf was going berserk inside of me, his pacing from this morning turning to running, threatening to shift on his own despite the silver. I continued down the long hallway, making a sharp left turn, and that's when it hit me like a ton of bricks. That sweet warm apple smell.

"Mate" I said before I could even catch myself.

"Mate!"

"Impossible." I snapped back to my wolf.

"MATE", he yelled back.

"We had a mate and she is dead!"

That didn't stop my feet from going into a full sprint down to the end of the hallway.

"Alpha!" My brother called after me, using my title now that we were in public.

All I saw was red. Blinded by rage, I came to an abrupt stop in front of the girls' cell. She was lying face down on the metal bunk with an IV in her arm. Her back was wrapped up in bandages and gauze, blood effortlessly seeping through, forming a small puddle on the ground. Her breathing was shallow and labored, but that didn't stop me. I all but tore the door off, Jackson fumbling with the keys to get the door open. I flew inside, my head clouded with a slew of emotions. Grabbing her by her long, light brown hair, I dragged her off the bed and pinned her up against the wall, her feet a few inches off the ground. She had a pained expression on her face, her eyes pinched shut.

"WHO ARE YOU?" I roared.

She let out a tiny whimper and for a moment I was unsure if it pained me or turned me on. What the f**k? Her eyes slowly cracked open and I was met with the most stunning blue eyes. It made my heart twist in pain seeing the bloodshot and puffiness surrounding her irises. This can't be real... It's impossible.

"I SAID, WHO ARE YOU!" My voice almost sounded unsure of itself.

I moved a hand to her throat and began squeezing, the she wolf struggling under my grasp. My own breathing became labored and ragged. She let out a choked breath, before whispering out the only thing that could rock me to my core.

"Mate"

Her hands came to my arm, desperately trying to claw at it. Her hand slipped off my sleeve and made contact with my bare hand. Sparks immediately erupted and I dropped her to the ground. Edmund was howling in despair at her pain.

"Did she just say what I think she said?!" Jackson exclaimed. "Is she your mate?!"

"Its impossible" I said, bewildered. "It must be a trap, get her to the interrogation room." I stumbled out of the cell, glancing back to look at the she wolf who laid limp on the floor.

"Edward!" My brother exclaimed.

I ignored him and stormed back down the hallway. I heard a faint cry, her cry. My body stilled, my blood running cold. I felt like I couldn't breathe.

"This can't be possible" I kept chanting to myself, praying I wasn't wrong.

Second chance mates were basically one in a billion. I was still looking for whoever killed Hope. The moon goddess wouldn't put me through this. I wasn't able to protect my first mate, she wouldn't give me another. My feet carried me to one of the interrogation rooms we had. I paced the interrogation room waiting for Jackson to bring the mystery girl to me, running my hands through my hair only about a hundred times. Less than a minute passed before I couldn't wait any longer and practically flew back to her cell. I found Jackson carefully trying to lift her off the ground, unsure of how to do so without causing more damage. Edmund fought me for control, letting out a warning growl to Jackson.

"Move!" Both Edmund and I barked, he was near the surface about to break through.

I kneeled to the ground and tried to help move the frail she wolf. My senses went into overdrive between Edmund screaming at me to mark her and her touch and scent. Was this truly my second chance mate? Goddess, what have I done?!

"Call Dr White, tell him we are on our way." I gently scooped up my mate.

"Does that mean..?" Jackson hesitantly asked, his fingers dialing the hospital.

"I don't know." I answered, still in disbelief.

Taking careful steps, I took my mate out of the prison and to the surface again, receiving quite a few double takes and gasps of horror.

"I need a car!" I barked, continuing towards the parking lot.

"We can take mine." My Gamma, William said, holding the prison station door to open for me. "Black F150 on the end."

William drove us, Jackson riding shotgun, and myself and my mate in the back seat. The drive to the hospital felt impossibly long. My emotions played with each other like they were in a pinball machine, bouncing all over the place. Confusion, anger, grief, joy, pleasure, worry, surprise, doubt, happiness, fear. What if she was my second chance mate? How could the moon Goddess allow this to happen to her? What would I do if they found her, like they did Hope, before I found them? Would she even want me? Should I even allow this to go anywhere, knowing she would be in danger? What if it was a trap? My head was spiraling downhill fast.

"Drive faster."

William hit the gas pedal and came to an almost screeching stop in front of the hospital emergency entrance, a group of staff gloved and gowned up already waiting with a stretcher. Not a second after I placed her on the gurney, they rushed her inside.

"I cant promise a good outcome." Dr White spoke grimly.

"Do everything you can."

"She will need a lot of blood. Do you think you can donate? Your blood is more powerful than others."

"Sure. Fine. Anything she needs." I continued the near running pace with the doctor and staff.

"Alpha, this is where we say our goodbyes." He said as he came to a stop outside of two blue double doors with 'Surgical Dept.' written above them.

"I can't leave her," I pleaded.

"I won't allow you to come back. You will do more harm than good by being there. Now go to the blood bank and have them draw your blood. That will be the most helpful thing you can do right now."

"Fine"

"I will have someone update you hourly" Dr White said, turning on a heel, disappearing through the double doors.

I ran to the blood bank and gave as much of myself as they would allow me to with specific instructions to give it directly to Dr White immediately. I'm confident the phlebotomist, Kim, was shaking as she drew my blood, terrified that it was the King she was working on. Kim offered me a set of scrubs to wear, my clothes having been covered in blood. Her blood. I declined, wanting to keep this mystery girl close to me in some way, even if it was borderline sadistic.

"King Edward?" Another mousey-sounding girl asked.

I looked to the corner of the room where a young nurse in blue scrubs waited for me. I sprang to my feet, ignoring the phlebotomist warning me to move slowly on account of just having donated so much blood. I felt slightly dizzy, from the blood loss or from the news I was about to hear. I was unsure.

"How is she?"

"Dr White wanted me to tell you she has a broken femur which he just set back into place. The surgical team is now working on removing debris from her back."

"How much longer until I can see her?"

"She will likely be in surgery for several more hours, then moved to the ICU. I will find you when we have another update."

Dr Whites POV

"Dr., Alpha is asking again." Nurse Rachael spoke from the doorway through her mask.

I sighed. He was asking every twenty minutes now. We had started this surgery over 4 hours ago and it felt as if we hadn't even scratched the surface.

"Tell him the next time he will get an update will be when I deem it necessary. His interruptions are not helping her." I carefully pulled a piece of silver from the shewolf's back using my thumb forceps.

"Yes Doctor." She said, leaving the OR.

"I cant believe she made it through the night." Ella stated.

"It surely is a miracle." I was just as baffled that I was fixing her up right now and not performing an autopsy instead.

"Why is Alpha so interested in this girl? I mean, this is the most interest he has put into anything since...you know" Ella, our Beta's mate, asked.

Ella was by far the best surgical assistant I had met in all my years. She and I worked flawlessly together.

"He didn't say," I said, carefully removing another piece of silver. "Gauze please."

"What is her name?"

"Not a clue. When your mate called he didn't seem to know either, he kept referring to her as 'the shewolf'." I put another piece of silver into the metal basin.

"Huh!"

"A mystery indeed."

Four more hours passed before we looked like we were in the home stretch. X-rays showed she had a broken femur, thankfully a clean break. We handled that first, putting her in a light pink cast. The girl suffered a substantial amount of blood loss but we were able to stop the bleeding once we removed the silver. She coded twice but we brought her back. I did what I could for her back. It was loaded with previous scar tissue. I closed the deeper slices, but the shallower ones I left to heal on their own. I hoped that I had gotten all the silver out, some of it was embedded quite deeply in her back.

"Ella, can you please update our very anxious Alpha? Tell him I am finishing stitching her up now."

"Yes doctor."

I applied a generous amount of numbing ointment to her back, though it wouldn't last very long with our werewolf metabolisms. I would need to keep an IV in her for a few days so I could easily administer her pain medications.

"Nice work everyone." I said as I tied the last suture and set down my tools. "Lets move her to ICU"

Chapter 14

Edward

I sat in the waiting room outside of the surgical department. I was the only person there, unsurprisingly. Lycans don't typically get injured. If they do, they heal at an accelerated rate, faster than werewolves even, making hospitals almost unnecessary. Dr White was one of ten surgeons we had at the hospital. All of our physicians specialized in a variety of fields given the fact that they were all older, nearing one-hundred years old. Our biggest use of the hospital was delivering pups, so they all specialized in OB/GYN, a requirement I established for any physician who wanted to work at the kingdoms hospital.

I had counted all of the white floor tiles, twice, trying to distract myself from my thoughts. Jackson hung around to check on me for a while but had left when the sun began to rise, making sure the Golden Leaf pack was transported back to their home safely. I had also given him strict orders to have Henry locked up until I could decide what to do with him. Death would be too merciful. Banishing him would only cause him to move to another kingdom and reek more havoc on innocent people. My wolf wanted to castrate him and shove it down his throat.

"Its not a bad idea" my wolf pressed.

"I never said no."

My vile thoughts were interrupted when a very exhausted looking Dr White came bursting through the double doors. Immediately, I stood to my feet, trying to prepare myself for the worst-case scenario.

"Well?" I asked

"She is heading to recovery now. We plan on keeping her under for a few days so her back has some time to heal. This was a rough one, Alpha." He sighed, his age now showing with the bags under his eyes.

"Thank you doctor, I owe you one."

"I'll be sure to take you up on that." He half chuckled.

"What room is she in?"

"Slow down there partner, she is going to the ICU. No visitors, not even you. When we move her to a regular room, you can visit her. Give it a week or so."

"A week?!" I practically spat.

"Yes, a week, unless there is something you wish to tell me, something that might help my patient heal faster." He said with a knowing look.

"Did Jackson-"

"No Jackson didn't tell me anything, you aren't exactly subtle and I've been around the block a few times, well enough to know it when I see it that she is your second chance mate."

"It cant be." I whispered

"And why not? The moon goddess grants this to her children every now and then." Dr White huffed.

"But why me?"

"Maybe it's not for you but for your mate. Maybe it's to make you a better man, a better King. Forgive me for speaking out of term, but you haven't exactly been present within your own kingdom the past few years. Yes, you have done good for the Kingdom as a whole, but what is the last time any of us have seen you leave the palace? You use to invite people in and now all you do is shut everyone out."

I looked away, refusing to accept reality. But deep down I knew he was onto something. I wasn't ready to face my demons and I certainly wasn't ready to put another mate at risk for my own happiness. That left me only one option. I would need to reject her as my mate. Maybe the moon Goddess would show her favor and grant her another mate, I'm sure. I would have to wait until she was fully recovered, the rejection could very well kill her. She needed to be healthy to even stand a chance.

"She will be in room number two on the sixth floor. Ella will be waiting for you. I'm going to go get some shuteye." Dr White said as he walked away giving an awkward-half-ass wave. He never seemed

intimidated by me as a person, probably because he delivered me as a pup, but respected me as his king. I appreciated that.

I made my way to the sixth floor by taking the stairs, deciding on the way that I would mask my aura to avoid any unwanted attention. One of the perks of being an Alpha was that I could mask my powerful aura, essentially putting myself into a 'stealth mode' if you would. Sometimes an Alpha's presence needed to be known, other times it needed to be concealed. Since I never found who killed Hope, I decided it best to keep my aura hidden while I was around my mate-shit, I did it again. I needed to stop calling her my mate. The less attachment, the easier it would be to reject her.

"King Edward" Ella greeted me, using my title as a sign of respect. She and Jackson lived in the palace on the floor beneath mine. In the privacy of our home she would call me by my name. She was my sister-in-law after all, but in public she would use my title, the same as Jackson would.

"Ella" I gave a curt nod, continuing on my path.

"Wait, you'll need these." Ella ran up beside me with a pile of clothing.

I quickly put on the personal protective equipment, or PPE, which included a mask, hair net, shoe covers, a gown, and gloves. Ella's small frame quickly led me down the hall to room two where my mate was. Damn it!! I wish I knew her name so I could quit calling her my mate! Ella started to warn me that she would look worse than she actually was, given that she was hooked up to a ventilator and 'a hundred other wires', according to her. Nothing could have prepared me when I actually laid eyes on her. She looked so small and so frail, surrounded by dozens of beeping monitors, each attached to her in some way.

I cautiously opened the sliding glass door and approached her bedside. Even in this state, she looked like an angel sent from heaven. She was lying on her side, her light brown hair was swept neatly over her shoulder in a braid. Her skin was a perfectly pale porcelain color, her eyes were closed, but it gave me time to appreciate her long lashes and her cute button nose. Her lips were full and plump, a beautiful shade of pink. I wondered what kissing her would feel like? Goddess I needed to stop these thoughts!! My eyes traveled downwards, a sickening feeling creeping up on me when I noticed the awful purple finger-shaped bruise marks that covered her neck.

"We hurt mate."

"I didn't mean to, I thought it was a trap..." I told myself, trying to dissipate the guilt that was eating at me.

I reached for her hand that wasn't covered in as many wires and removed one of my gloves. I had to know, I had to remind myself, I had to feel it once more. Her hand fit perfectly in mine, sparks from the mate bond erupting over my skin. That same breathtaking feeling comes back to me, reminding me of what I once had and what I can never have again.

I abruptly left just as fast as I had come, not bothering to close the sliding glass doors behind me. Ella called after me but I ignored her as I ripped off my PPE and tossed it in a wastebasket.

"Call me when she wakes" I yelled before taking off down the stairs two at a time.

After leaving the hospital, I had let my wolf out. He was itching to be set free. I let him run for a few hours, burning off some of the anxious energy brewing within us. I arrived home shortly after and took an ice shower. A simple touch from my mate had me worked up more than I would like to admit. Rejecting her would be harder than I thought.

"Brother?" Jackson linked me

"What is it?" I asked, feeling defeated.

"I have something you might want to see."

"Meet me in my office in ten." I shut off the cold water and dried off, throwing on a pair of navy blue sweatpants and a white cotton t-shirt. My personal office could only fit a few people and I used it mostly for my own sake. Any business meeting happened on the first floor of the palace in one of the meeting rooms or even sometimes in my throne room. Jackson knew this and didn't object to coming here, so it was safe to assume there wouldn't be a crowd, so dressing up wasn't necessary.

Entering into my office, I found Jackson sitting on the edge of my desk with a green, tactical backpack sitting on my desk. It smelled like apples, it smelled like her. My eyes lit up and I'm confident Jackson saw it, seeing how he gave me an amused look at my sudden change of mood.

"I found her alone in the pack, though she didn't smell like a rogue. I remembered she had a backpack and turned out one of the guards had grabbed it after the whole Henry situation." His face had a pained expression. "Anyways, I figured you might want to take a look." He stood to leave.

"Thank you." I said, my eyes fixated on the backpack that now felt like the holy grail itself.

"Of course. Any thoughts as to what you'd like to do with Henry?"

"Yes actually." My wolf had and I had an evil smile forming. "Double the punishment he gave her, twice as many whippings and break both of his femurs. Leave what's left of him to rot in the prisons."

"Yes Brother," Jackson said before finally leaving the room.

I stood before my desk, staring at her backpack. My hands found the zipper of the main compartment and began to unzip it. Was it an invasion of privacy? Yeah. Did I care? No. Did I make a sad attempt to justify my actions by claiming it was for 'security purposes'? Hell f*****g yeah.

I reached inside, retrieving two sets of clothes. I took a deep whiff, it smelled like her and... creek water? Huh. Odd. She had two pairs of long black jeans that looked like they had seen better days, two long sleeve t-shirts, one black, one dark green. Two long pairs of socks containing holes in the toes, and two sets of white underwear which weren't especially attractive looking, but I bet they would be when I slid them off of her wet...

Goddess!!

Putting her well-used clothes to the side, I continued my invasive search. I pulled out a water purifier, a compass, a knife, a single-person tent, and a sleeping bag, all looking well used. It looked like she had been living off the land for a while. How odd. Searching the smaller pockets next, I found a hairbrush, hair ties, a single bar of soap, and a bottle of some home-made looking stuff. I gave it a quick spray only to realize it was essentially a poor man's scent masker. Something typically used for hunting to keep yourself concealed. She was a werewolf, so there shouldn't be any need for it. All she would need to do was shift and other animals wouldn't be able to detect her.

I found a few arrowheads and a handful of gems cluttering the bottom of one of the pockets. I wonder where she found those. There were two maps in the smallest pocket in the front. I carefully unfolded the larger one and laid it out on my desk. There were a few circles on the map that were old and faded looking, as well as some newer looking 'X' marks over a few packs. One of which was where the doctor had been killed. Interesting. The next map had only 'X' marks in different locations

than on the other map. If this wasn't a conversation starter, I didn't know what was. She had no real personal items, everything seemed to have a purpose, well, except for the rocks. What was she trying to hide?

A few hours had passed and I had been shamelessly smelling my mate's clothes while I worked on some paperwork that I had been putting off. Jackson notified me an hour ago that Henry died shortly after his punishment, maybe even during. Good. One less thing for me to worry about. I called the hospital and asked Ella to get a copy of my-I mean the she-wolf's fingerprints and give it my Gamma, William, to see where she was from. Jackson filled me in on what had happened, but also had the other warriors fill out incident reports on the matter which I just finished reading through. There wasn't much to go by. I could only hope Ella could pull through with something.

PING

My phone called out, letting me know someone had sent me a text. I opened it up to find a message from William.

Her fingerprints were a dud. I'm surprised she went all these years without being fingerprinted. I took the liberty of doing a facial recognition search on all the pack's camera systems we have access to, as well as online, and nothing. Without a name I can't do much more. Whoever she is, she is damn good at flying under the raider.

Thank you William, keep up the good work. Let me know when you find out anything. I'll get back to you with a name soon.

I set my phone down, not sure if I was more pissed that we didn't find anything or proud that my girl-correction, the girl-was skilled. On the one hand, it did concern me that this she-wolf, who was probably in her mid twenties according to Dr. White, had gone all this time without coming to my palace to be questioned, meant that there were still others like her out there. But I began ruling when I was 18. I put security measures into place immediately following my father's death, yet somehow she avoided them? She would have been younger when I came to rule, still school age. No school pictures? No social media? No drivers license or permit even? I doubt it was dumb luck at this point. I suppose that was one redeeming factor; she knew how to hide in the shadows. A hard trait to come by these days with all the technology.

It was past 3am by the time I shuffled off to bed; only to be haunted by her mysterious blue eyes all night long. I eventually gave into my wolf's pleading request to sleep with an article of her clothing, bathing in her delicious scent. Only then did I sleep peacefully through the night. It was the best night's sleep I have had since...since Hope.

Chapter 15

Edward

A week had passed and my 'Jane Doe' was still on a ventilator and pain meds. Jackson called her that once and I decided to run with it in the hopes that I would stop calling her mine. I needed to reject her and the more I called her mine the harder it would be for me to follow through with it. Of course, that didn't stop me from going to the hospital every day and holding her hand. It didn't stop me from humming her wordless tunes, or helping Ella rotate her to prevent bed sores, despite all her objections.

Dr White told me yesterday that she is looking good enough to take her off the ventilator soon and ween her off the heavy pain meds. I pushed for one more day, primarily to make sure she had a little more time to heal, and secondly to buy myself more time. I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy having a mate again, even if it was all a one-sided relationship at the moment.

"Brother!" Jackson called from the hallway. I could hear him pounding on my door and then let himself in. Something he never did.

"What is it?" I practically flew out of my bathroom to catch him storming into my bedroom.

"Ella just linked me, she's waking up, they need you asap!" He turned on a heel to lead the way.

Jackson ran to his blue truck parked outside the palace, hopping into the driver's seat. My wolf and I agreed we would be faster if we ran in wolf form. In one swift motion I shifted mid stride and bolted.

As expected, it didn't take any time at all for me to get to the hospital. Especially with how frantically my wolf pushed us. Even though we didn't mark each other, I could still make out some of what she was feeling and right now it was panic, fear, pain. Being able to feel what she was feeling before marking one another only meant one thing: our bond would be exceedingly strong and hard to break. Goddess damn it!

I shifted back upon arrival at the hospital, hiding my aura as I had been all along. I sprinted up the hospital steps flashing my goods to a few nurses on the way. s**t. Maybe I should have let Jackson drive me. I needed to find pants at least. Finally, on the sixth floor, I looked around in search of pants. I spotted a tall male Lycan who was just finishing a conversation at the front desk, about to hop on the elevator when I stopped him.

"You. Pants. Now." I demanded

Without hesitation, he quickly rid himself of his jeans, "Yes King Edward." He said, handing them over to me.

"Your name?" I asked as I slipped on his pants. They were a bit small for me. I was an alpha after all, so I did have a few inches on the guy, but they worked.

"Eugene, Eugene Carpenter." He answered, avoiding eye contact.

"I owe you one" I said as I raced down the hall to my mate's room.

I could hear Ella yelling as well as the sound of clashing metal. s**t.

"Take it easy honey!" Ella tried to reason, her arms in the air as a sign of surrender.

"Where am I? Who are you?!" My mate, lying in the corner of the room, yelled back. Her voice sounded raspy, probably from the vent she had been on all week. She was tangled in the vast amount of cords and tubes, her bulky cast making it hard for her to untangle herself.

"Oh good, you're here" Ella let out a sigh of relief when I moved past her and got down to my mates' level.

"You're at the hospital, you were hurt and needed medical attention. You were under for a week. Ella is your nurse and I-I'm". My words began to run dry.

"You're my mate", she stated. Her eyes bore into mine, she studied me intently for a moment, as if she was committing me to memory. I could hear Ella gasp behind me, in shock at the new information. "Your name?" She asked.

"I-I'm Edward." Did she not know who I was? I was the f*****g King, how could she not know? Maybe she hit her head-

My thoughts were disrupted by the most unexpected turn of events.

"I Sienna Wilson of the Clear Water pack reject you Ed-"

"DON'T!" I yelled, putting my hand over her mouth. I could hear Ella gasp in horror in the background. "Please don't" I begged, "not yet at least. It could kill you" I tried to reason.

Her eyebrows furrowed in disapproval for a moment before they softened and I cautiously removed my hand from her mouth.

"The longer it's there, the harder it will be to break." Tears filled her eyes. "I can't keep you."

Did she already have a chosen mate? No, she couldn't...Our bond wouldn't exist then...I looked to her neck, her hospital gown was disheveled, revealing a clear shot of her marking spot, the spot I was supposed to mark, the spot that already held someone else's.

"Who is he?" I asked.

She shook her head, avoiding my penetrating gaze.

"She then?" Was she a lesbien?

"I'm doing this for your own good."

"I'll be the judge of that," I said firmly. What in Goddess's name was I doing??

She wiped the fresh tears from her eyes. The only thing I could feel from her now was sorrow and despair.

"Lets get you off the floor" I said as I began to trace each wire, removing the easy ones like the blood pressure cuff and plus ox, but keeping her IV and catheter. Not exactly how I imagined today going, but I'm just rolling with the punches at this point.

Ella and I helped Sierra back into bed, careful not to touch her back or bend her leg wrong. She looked so beautiful even in a hospital gown.

"Where is my backpack?" She asked, searching the room with those big beautiful blue eyes, her pouty lips conveying her disapproval when she couldn't find it.

"Don't worry, it's safe. I have it."

"I'd like it back." She deadpanned.

Straight to the point, I see. I liked a no-nonsense type of girl.

"I'll bring it back tomorrow if that's alright?"

"Fine" Her lips did that pouting thing again and all I could think about was sinking my teeth into her soft pink bottom lip. Id show her fine. Damn it. I needed to stop thinking these thoughts. I could feel my d**k turning to concrete beneath my already too tight pants.

"I'll fetch Dr White, he will want to see you before discharging you from the ICU" Ella said. She linked me privately and said she would give us a few minutes alone first. She was turning out to be a better wing-man than my brother had ever been.

"Sounds good." I gave her a quick nod.

My attention flew back to Sierra who, to my pleasant surprise, was shamelessly checking me out. I could hear her heartbeat quicken and her breathing was getting shallow. Damn right, I still got it.

"See something you like?" I called her out.

"I-I um.." She cleared her throat "I've just never seen a lycan up close before. You are....bigger than I expected." Her face flushed crimson red and she turned away from me.

"I see." I took a seat on the edge of her hospital bed. "Wanna tell me where you were headed when my brother picked you up?"

"Your brother?" Her nose crinkled.

"Yes, my brother, the Beta of this Kingdom. He tells me he found you on your own in the woods, and from what I found in your backpack, you seemed to be living off the land? Is that true?"

"You searched my bag?!" She eyed me up like I was a disgusting piece of s**t. Maybe I was.

"I had to know if you were a threat," I retorted.

"Yeah, okay. The tiny she wolf dying in the king's prisons is surely a threat to the massive lycans." She said sarcastically "I bet you wanted to search my bag, I bet you begged for it. You wanted to see what your mate had, to touch it, to smell it." Her eyes gleamed with deviousness, a touch of silver pulling through. Even her wolf was in on this. My mate was trouble.

She danced on the line between harassment and something much more primal and sensual. I wasn't ready to throw all my cards on the table just yet though. It seemed like she didn't know I was the King. Maybe I'll keep it that way for a while. It might prove to be beneficial. Maybe she'll open up to me about what happened at the hospital with Gloria. I wasn't going to push my luck anymore today. I needed information. I could use the mate bond to earn her trust faster, I just needed to make sure she didn't reject me in the meantime. I had to play the game until she was healed and I knew what she was hiding.

"You got me." I put my hands up in surrender, admitting what I told myself I would keep a secret. I quickly linked Ella and Jackson, asking them to refrain from calling me Alpha or King in her presence, as well as Dr White, who I knew would be in shortly.

She smiled victoriously but her victory seemed to be short-lived. Her face fell, shoulders slumped and her hands started to fidget with her bedsheets. It made my heart constrict to see her this way. I wanted to fix it somehow. I was about to ask her what was wrong when Dr White came waltzing in.

"Welcome back to the land of the living young lady! I'm Dr White, can you tell me your name?"

"Hi, its Claire." She hesitantly answered.

Liar.

"Well, Claire, can you tell me where you are?" Dr White began flashing a bright light in her eyes.

"A hospital."

"And what day is it?"

"I honestly have no clue."

"Fair enough" Dr White laughed. I would like to take a look at your back, see how things are healing up?" He asked permission.

"Um, sure..." She answered carefully.

Dr White had me move off the side of the bed and had Sierra sit on the edge with her legs dangling off. Well, one leg was dangling at least. I clumsily helped her move her broken leg to the edge. She winced only once, which I took as a win. He untied the back of her hospital gown which made her flinch at the contact, her arms protectively wrapping around her center. I could hear Dr White removing the sterile coverings letting out a long whistle.

"That bad, huh?" She almost chuckled.

"Its nearly healed...it does look like there are a few stubborn spots though. I'm concerned that there might be some imbedded silver still hanging around."

"That would explain the burning feeling."

"Hmm...Your pain meds are wearing off quite quickly. I should do this now. Where does it burn? "

"2 o'clock on my shoulder blade. 5 o'clock near my kidney, and 8 o'clock in the middle", she explained, carefully pointing behind her.

"I'm going to go grab a few things. I'm not going to give you any numbing agent. I need to know if you still feel the burning from the silver. I need to get it all out. I suggest you and your mate get comfortable. That should help ease the pain."

Sierra

Goddess, how did I get myself into this mess?! It would of course be my awful luck to find my mate here, of all places! I even tried to reject him and he had the nerve to stop me! I couldn't have a mate, my life was too dangerous. I apparently couldn't even have a pen pale. Gloria was a perfect example of that!

"Mate looks like a Greek god." Sienna drooled.

She wasn't wrong either. He looked like he had been sculpted by the moon goddess herself. He came in here wearing only a pair of jeans that were obviously too small for him. He must have shifted and forgotten to bring clothes. His body shamelessly flexed and rippled in all the right places, an eight pack, if I counted correctly, led down to his perfectly carved Adonis belt. His jeans just barely covered his happy trail, leaving my imagination running wild as to what else was beneath the tight fabric. He looked like raw s*x in physical form. His eyes captured my heart. I had never seen such green eyes. I could get lost in them so easily. His dark brown, almost black hair was styled in a pompadour fashion, faded on the sides and longer on the top. I wanted to run my fingers through it. He also had a short beard forming, matching the color of his hair.

Goddess, this man had me thinking some very dirty thoughts. I had to focus. The doctor was about to carve some silver out of me. Now was not the time to get hot and bothered.

"Why did you lie?" His deep, velvety voice pulled me back to reality.

"Huh?"

"Why did you tell the doctor your name was Claire?" He asked.

I didn't want to answer that question, I knew if I did, hundreds more would fill its place. "Why did you choke me when I was in my cell?" I threw back, effectively quieting him. A tense silence took over the room as we waited for the doctor to return.

"I'm sorry...I didn't mean....its just complicated. But I should never have hurt you. I hope you can forgive me." He reached for my hand, placing it in his calloused ones and began gently rubbing circles into the back of my hand.

It took everything in me to stifle a moan, his touch was like any other. It gave me the most deliciously charged sensation, almost like electricity flowing through my veins. Not to mention, I haven't been touched by anyone since...well, Brandon. The feeling was well overdue.

"Nothing to forgive. I get complicated. Which is why I hope you can forgive me when I eventually reject you." I looked into his forest green eyes that seemed to hold a miniscule of understanding in them.

"I want you to be fully healed up first, it could kill you. And if nothing else, please do one thing for me. Warn me first." He pleaded.

I nodded in agreement, surprised at how easy he was making this. Something was off.

"This will probably suck. Dr White is right, my touch should help. That is, if you want it?" He offered himself to me.

"Yes please." Sienna purred.

"Oh...um yeah, sure." I tentatively agreed. I had enough pain for a lifetime. If my mate could help take the edge off, I would take it.

He stood to his full height, towering over me. He had to be at least six foot eight. I was on the taller side myself, but he even made me feel short. In one graceful motion, he scooped me up into his arms and sat down on the bed with me perched on his lap. I squirmed a little bit, trying to get comfortable, when I felt his very erect manhood underneath my leg, begging to be set free. I stilled immediately, a wave of heat rushing to my face.

Edward took notice immediately. "All because of you babe". He whispered in my ear, his breath fanning my neck, sending chills up my spine.

"Okay folks, let's get this show on the road!" Dr White glided back into the room, thankfully blissfully unaware of the charged s****l tension between us. "Ill be as quick and as painless as I can be." He added.

I could hear him opening some packages, then he wiped something cold on my back. The smell of alcohol filled the room.

"Just breathe." My mate whispered, sensing my unease.

"Claire, I want you to talk to me while I do this, it'll be a good distraction. So, first question, where are you from?"

"I move a lot." I answered, barely getting the sentence out before I felt the first slicing pain. I let out a pained cry and Edward started giving me words of encouragement.

"Where did you get all these brand marks?"

"Brand marks?" Edward questioned disapprovingly.

"Pass" I squeaked out as he dug around for the silver shard that was trying to make a home in my back.

"Did you have a mate before? I noticed the mark on your neck."

"Its not a real marking, its a fake." I gritted out.

"You're doing great," Edward encouraged.

"What are your hobbies? One down two to go."

"Surviving?" I winced.

"That's not a hobby, we all do that." Dr White said as he cut into his next target.

"Rock collecting?" Edward asked. Cheeky bastard dug through my entire bag.

"Kinda I guess." I squeezed Edwards' hand.

"What do you like to collect? Rocks?" Dr White dug deeper, literally and figuratively.

"Aah...arrowheads and crystals mostly."

"Last one. Hold her still, this one is deep."

Edwards' muscular arms came around me and I didn't hesitate to grab on tight. I shamelessly let out a pained sob as Dr White dug his way through my half-healed wound. Tears streamed down my face, landing on Edwards' bare chest I was now leaning on.

"Done, you did wonderful. And I'm quite surprised actually. Your body was healing in the areas where the silver still was. That's highly unusual. You're not some hybrid are you?" He laughed as he bandaged me up again.

"No, definitely not." I answered, I almost sounded convincing. I could feel Edward staring at me but he let it go after a moment. Guarantee that'll come up again.

"Well, Miss Claire, I'd like to keep you overnight for observation. Should everything check out in the morning, I will discharge you."

"So soon?" I asked.

"I see no reason for you to stay here. I'm sure your mate can take you back to your home. I'll see you in the morning." He said, grabbing his supplies and heading out of my room.

Shit. I was basically a rogue, I had no home and I had a broken leg still. What was I going to do? Food wasn't especially easy to get when you had to hunt for it, especially with a broken leg. Goddess I was still grabbing onto him!! "Ugh thanks." I said, releasing him from my grip.

"Yeah, of course." He got up off my bed and set me back down gently. "Are you hungry? I can grab us-"

"I would like to be alone now actually." I cut him off.

"Right, got it." He stood awkwardly at the end of my bed for a moment. "I'll see you in the morning?"

"Do you really think that is a good idea?"

He thought for a moment before answering "No. but, I'd like to see you anyway."

"Okay." I answered quietly.

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow, Claire." He winked at me before leaving the room.

I swear I almost combusted from that one simple devilish wink.

"Lets mark and mate him tomorrow" Sienna purred.

"You know we can't, he'll be in danger then."

"Tell him, he can help."

"Or he could be part of whatever cult is after us and kill us in our sleep instead."

"Mate means well, I can tell."

"You think with your libido, I can't trust that."

"Then give him a chance and you'll find out."

I rolled my eyes before turning on my side and getting comfortable in bed. If this was the only night I had here, I would enjoy every minute of it. This hospital bed was one thousand percent better than my pile of leaves out in the woods. I closed my eyes and drifted off into a deep sleep filled only with dreams of my mate.

Chapter 16

2492 Words

Edward

I left the hospital feeling more confused than before. She wanted to reject me?! I did not see that coming. Although it's what I wanted too, I couldn't help but feel possessive of her. The predator in me wanted to hunt her down and do things to her that would have her screaming out my name, making her forget why she ever wanted to reject me. Though it was reassuring that she wanted to reject me, it meant she wasn't a spy and this wasn't a trap.

"I don't see why we didn't just mark and mate her there..."

"Because not everyone appreciates being man handled by a complete savage. Because she didn't give us her consent. Because it wasn't the time or the place you animal!"

"Mate should come home with us tomorrow."

"Now we are on the same page."

From the way Sierra talked, it didn't seem like she had any real home to go to. No family either. I was going to offer her a place to stay at the lake house. I had been staying there intermittently over the years, so I knew everything was up and running properly. It was fully furnished and cleaned regularly also. Not to mention it was away from people, within walking distance of the palace, and had a gorgeous view.

Sierra will be in a leg cast for a week or two at most. Dr White made quite the observation, she did heal quickly. Wolves generally heal at twice the speed of humans, but Sierra seemed to heal faster than that. proven by her body healing while silver was still imbedded

King and His Second Chance / Chapter 16

Library |



< Previ

knew all bets would be off after that. She didn't hesitate to try to reject me before. What would stop her this time? The thought made my stomach turn. Even though I knew I needed to reject her, everything in me wanted to run to her.

I soon found myself outside of the lake house. I guess my brain went on auto-pilot. I walked over to the back patio and took a moment to appreciate the beautiful sunset that was just beginning to kiss the treeline off in the distance. I punched in my four digit code, successfully unlocking the big wooden door of the A-framed lake house. The kitchen was the first room when coming in through the back. It had a sleek, modern design with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. In the middle of the kitchen there was an island with a few stools on one side, while the other side had its own sink. The cabinets were made of dark oak and had glass doors on them, which matched with the woodwork within the house as well as the massive exterior windows. I padded my way across the cool tile floor to check the food status in the refrigerator. There were some condiments and a quarter of a gallon of spoiled milk, but that was about it. I need to go grocery shopping. Maybe I could ask Anita to help. She at least knows what she is doing. Closing the door, I made my way past the dining room and into the living room. Both were clean and tidy.

Trudging up the stairs, I checked each of the three spare bedrooms to make sure they were also clean before heading to the master bedroom. My little sister Abby still has some of her stuff in her old bedroom. It shouldn't be a problem. My stuff, however, was scattered all over the place. This was the only room with an attached bathroom, the other bathroom was just off the living room downstairs. I decided at that moment I would let Sierra have my room and began moving my things to the room next to hers. Even though I knew I couldn't keep her, I still wanted her to have the best of everything. She was my mate after all.

Stripping the bed of its sheets, I put in a load of laundry and headed off to bed, but not before sending Anita a text begging her to go grocery shopping for literally everything. I didn't know what Sierra's food preferences were or if there were foods she absolutely hated. I didn't think I could possibly go wrong if I just got everything. Anita thankfully responded almost immediately, assuring me that she would take care of everything. Now all I had to do was convince Sierra to come live here...Goddess help me.

Sierra

I tossed and turned all night trying to work out some feasible plan in my head. I had no money and had been living off the land for years now. Cyrus was a total loner and although I could ask him for help, I didn't want to. He had trained me to be self-sufficient and, well, a lethal weapon. I knew if he found out what happened, some part of him would be let down at my performance, or lack thereof. I didn't want to disappoint him, not to mention be a massive burden. It wasn't like I could be stealthy on crutches.

I also knew going to Tom and Gloria was completely out of the question. I don't know for a fact that the psycho doctor didn't link someone, telling them that Tom and Gloria could be used against me. I didn't want to risk going back and falling into some trap. I couldn't live with myself if something happened to them because of me.

Maybe I could find a temporary job somewhere in the kingdom, just to earn enough money to live off of until I could go back into hiding. Something away from people, somewhere I could keep my head down and my nose clean. But who would even hire me? Not only did I have a broken leg and no reliable way to get to work, I also had no references, no pack, no nothing. Who would trust an outsider like that?

"Good morning Sierra! Ready to go home today?" Nurse Ella said in her chippy morning voice.

I gave her a tight nod.

"Perfect, Dr White will come see you shortly to discharge you. In the meantime, could you please fill these papers out? And then sign the bottom please." She handed me a clipboard with a few papers on it.

I began reading through, name...address...phone number....emergency contact...

"I cant fill this out." I blurted out.

"Oh, do you need help?" She asked.

"No, I just...I don't...I won't..."

"I need at least your name to put on your chart. I know you told the doctor your name was Claire but I heard you say your name was Sierra?" She nicely called me out on my b.s.

"Claire. Claire...Smith. That's my name." I stood my ground with my lie.

"No."

"But-"

"I said no." I let my Alpha tone slip. I could feel my anger rising within me. I needed this conversation to end before I did something I had no control over. The last thing I wanted to do was level a hospital full of innocent people.

"Why don't I go grab the doctor..." She walked off, worry etched in her face.

"Way to go asshole". My wolf chastised me.

"I'm doing this to protect her. You know we have dangerous people after us, and let's not forget the hairline trigger we seem to have."

"We aren't THAT reckless. Only when danger is near. You should have taken her help. What other choice do we have?"

"Knock knock"

I looked to the doorway to see my mate standing there with a bouquet of flowers, looking sinfully handsome. He wore dark blue jeans and a black shirt that hugged his form, showing off his impressive physique. Goddess I wanted to climb him like a tree.

"Hi" I mustered out.

"Sleep okay?"

"Not especially." I answered honestly.

"Sorry to hear." He paused for a moment, "I hope you don't mind me overstepping, but I get the feeling you don't have anywhere to go. I don't begrudge that at all, but I wanted to offer you a place to stay while your leg heals."

I stared at him in shock. Did he just suggest what I think he did?

"I know its probably not ideal, but I have a place on the lake, it's away from people and has everything you would need...I know you plan on rejecting me still, im not trying to stop you, but you are my mate and I do care about your well-being" He went on.

"Yes" I found myself blurting out before I even had a chance to think. What was I doing?! I was blatantly taking advantage of him.

"Really?" His face lit up. f**k. "Well, let's go, I have your bag in the car waiting for you." He left the room and came back with a wheelchair and crutches before I even had the chance to swing my good leg off the side of the bed.

"I hope you'll like it" he said as he unfolded the wheelchair.

"I'm sure it'll be more than enough, but-"

"I bet, but Edwa-"

"Here, let me help you up." He reached for me.

"Edward!" He looked shocked at me. "I don't have any clothes". I blushed "I don't really wanna flash everyone on the way out. Could you please bring me my bag?" I asked sheepishly.

"Oh right! s**t, im sorry. I'll go grab it right now."

Edward left my room in a flash, only to be replaced by Dr White a few minutes later. I couldn't catch a break.

"Good morning miss Claire, how are we feeling today?"

"I'm okay." I answered honestly. I was fine, all things considered. I was alive, I was breathing. I haven't been found yet. All wins in my book. Though I did feel like a flaming piece of s**t for using my mate. Goddess, what was I going to do?

"Good, if you don't mind, I would like to take a peek at your back before you head out. I'd also like to see you back in two to three weeks to remove your cast."

"Sure", I untied my hospital gown and flipped my hair over my shoulder, giving him a full view of my dismembered looking flesh.

"You are healing remarkably well, even since yesterday. I'm impressed." He said as he examined my back. "Though, I cant help but wonder what caused this," He touched one of my burn marks.

"It doesn't matter, it'll never happen again." I said softly.

"Goddess...What happened?" Edward's pained voice asked. He came to my side, dropping my bag to the ground.

I snapped my head over my shoulder, my mate's expression turning grim as he studied my back.

"I'm going to sign your discharge papers now. You are free to go. Stay off that leg and I'll see you again in a few weeks." Dr White interjected before scurrying off.

"Who did this to you?" He asked just above a whisper, his voice sounded broken.

"It doesn't matter," I dismissed. It didn't, not any more. I was never going back there.

His fingers gently brushed against my bare flesh, sending a shiver up my spine. Sparks erupted as he methodically traced over each mark on my back. When he hesitantly removed his hand, the tingling of goosebumps filled its place.

"This shouldn't have happened."

"But it did and there's nothing you can do about it."

"Just give me a name and I'll see that they pay."

"I won't have you put yourself in harms' way for something that happened to me in the past. If you go there guns loaded, even if you take down my offenders, the king will surely have your head."

He snorted to himself, staring at me a moment longer before handing me my bag and then running both hands through his hair in exasperation. I rifled through my pack searching for a full set of clothes, feeling very self-conscious.

"Privacy please?" I asked.

He simply nodded and turned around, not leaving the room. I rolled my eyes, it was clear that the mate bond was working its craftiness, I could feel his agitation radiating off of him from across the room. I tried to ignore it and dressed as quickly as I could, but soon ran into problems when I tried to put my pants on. I couldn't get my casted leg to fit through the leg opening.

"What's wrong?" He asked, his back still to me. He must have felt my annoyance.

"My leg cant fit into my pants." I huffed.

was wearing a bra and top but only a white pair of panties that were almost see through, almost. He stopped short to dig through my pack, searching for something. He pulled out my knife and, without another word, he took my jeans and sliced through the legs, turning them into shorts. I took in a sharp breath, effectively gaining Edwards' heated gaze. He got down on one knee and slid both legs through my new booty shorts, helping me dress. I swear to the Goddess my face must have been fire-engine red from his closeness. His scent filled my senses, the fresh rainfall and pine mixture proved to be intoxicating. I could feel my body betraying me, a slickness forming between my legs.

I stood on my one good leg with Edwards' help and finished pulling up my pants. I don't think I have ever worn something this revealing in my entire life. I had a nice body, but living in the woods wasn't exactly the place to be flaunting what the Goddess gave me. The less attention I was given the better. These shorts were anything but subtle.

Edward grabbed my bag and wheeled me to the fancy-looking black SUV parked outside the hospital. He helped me into the vehicle before tossing my backpack in the back seat as well as a pair of crutches one of the nurses had brought me on our way out before he hopped into the driver's seat and took off to our destination. The entire interior was made of leather and chrome, something I knew wasn't cheap. I wonder what he did for work? I was going to ask but decided against it. The less I knew, the less attached I would be. Nothing was going to change my mind, I was going to reject him.

Chapter 17

2442 Words

Sierra

A short fifteen minute drive later, we pulled off the road, following a rugged worn-down dirt path to a beautiful house that sat just off the water. It had big beautiful bay windows on the outside, the house itself a stunning grey-blue color with slate stone accents around the base of the house. There was a long dock that led directly to the lake, something about it seemed familiar. We exited the SUV and made our way to the back of the house. There was a hot tub on the back deck as well as a grill, pizza oven, and fire pit. The landscaping was immaculate, I don't think a single blade of grass was out of place, and Goddess, the view was spectacular. The sun was already up, giving the lake a beautiful sparkle on what would be another hot summer day. I could only imagine what it looked like at dawn and dusk. I couldn't wait to see it.

We entered through the back door. It took me a hot minute to get up the four steps onto the deck, but Edward was patient with me. The kitchen took my breath away, every room actually did. I couldn't contain myself any longer, I had to know what he did for work. How on earth could he afford such luxuries?

"So what do you do for work?" I asked.

"Work? Oh....I'm a warrior in the Kings palace."

"Oh, so you work with him often then? Whats he like? His name is Edward too, right?"

"Yeah, you're right." He coughed "He...he's been through a lot, but he is trying to be better."

"Better? Huh! What would be better would be if he went and visited the packs instead of making them come to him. I'm sure whoever he is looking for is trying really hard not to be found, he's not gonna find who he is looking for in an average pack if you ask me."

"I never thought of it like that..." He said.

"Well, it's not like you're the King. I'm sure your opinion doesn't matter just as much as mine. I heard that he would kill anyone who got in his way. I certainly wouldn't be first in line at the suggestion box."

"Suggestion box huh?" He laughed "The King truly cares about his kingdom, he has done a lot of good over the years, even though he has distanced himself." A sorrowful expression crossed his face.

"Well, he should show it more often. The little people need to know he is in their corner still."

"You are right, absolutely right."

Edward

Why did I have to be given a second chance mate? With each passing minute, I could feel myself falling for her. The way she took in the scenery, the way her lips formed an "o" shape when she was awestruck with something, the way she put me in my place with all her sass without even knowing it. Even the way she was handling her crutches was adorable. I could smell her arousal at the hospital. At least it wasn't just me feeling something. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I wanted to burry myself between her thighs. This woman was going to be the death of me and, honestly, I wasn't even mad about it.

My wolf was silently cursing me for lying to our mate, but the truth had yet to be revealed. I needed to know what happened between her and the doctor. Thankfully, I was able to get her name and her pack's name when she tried to reject me. I had William looking into it to see what information he could gather. Ella was less than happy that Sierra was being so...difficult on the matter. I had told her to keep her name anonymous on her medical records for now until we know more. She obviously had a reason for keeping things to herself. Only time would tell if the reasons were valid or not.

"The bedrooms are all upstairs. I'm sorry I don't have an elevator. I could carry you though." I offered.

"Oh no thank you. I'll manage just fine." She smiled.

I let Sierra go up the stairs first, making sure to be ready to catch her if she fell. Thankfully, she was getting quite good at navigating with crutches.

"This is the master bedroom, where you will be staying. There is a bathroom through the door to your right and a closet to your left. Feel free to adjust the temperature to your liking, the thermostat is just outside your room."

"Where will you be staying?" She asked nervously.

"I'll be in one of the other guest rooms or at the palace, depending on the night."

"So this room....I have it all to myself?" She asked nervously.

"Of course. I'll also give you my pin to access the house so you don't need me every time you come in or out. The fridge is fully stocked, so feel free to help yourself to anything you'd like. If you're okay with it, I would also like to give you a cell phone in case of an emergency and I definitely want you to have at least a few new sets of clothes, you'll need some stuff that works with the cast."

"Okay, awesome". Her entire body relaxed, a smile spreading across her beautiful face.

"So beautiful." I said before I could catch myself.

She blushed and looked at the floor, avoiding my gaze. Boldness taking over, I took a step forward to her, gently tilting her chin up with my pointer finger.

"You don't ever have to hide from me." I searched her big beautiful icy blue eyes.

Her arms came around my middle, unexpectedly pulling me into her tight embrace. I hugged her back, careful not to squeeze her still healing back too tight in return.

"You have no idea how much all this means to me, thank you so much." Her voice quivered.

"Its nothing, really."

"Its everything." She hugged me tighter.

I gently kissed the top of her head, savoring the moment.

"I promise to pay you back once I can get back on my feet...literally."

I laughed at her crude humor, my girl was funny. "Don't, I want to do this for you."

"I wouldn't feel right about it. It will take me some time, but I promise I will repay you."

"Sierra..."

"This isn't up for debate, Edward." She released me from her grasp. I immediately missed her touch. I let out a sigh of defeat and Sierra smiled at her win. But this was far from over. If nothing else, I was her king. It was my duty to help those in need. We could rehash this later.

"Are you hungry? I can try to make us some lunch?" I changed the subject.

"I'm not exactly a good cook." I sheepishly admitted, rubbing the back of my head.

"How about I make some pizzas?" She offered.

"You can cook?" We turned to head out of Sierras' room and down to the kitchen.

"In my last pack I did all the cooking, cleaning, laundry....everything really....for the Alpha and his family"

"Sounds like you were very important." We took one step at a time down the stairs.

"As important as any slave I guess", she mumbled, grabbing my full attention.

"Sorry, what? You were a slave?"

Sierra turned bright red, hiding her face from me once again. We would need to work on her confidence. But more importantly, I needed to know who kept her as a slave. Slavery was strictly forbidden in my kingdom. I would kill the bastard who dared make my mate a slave.

"Um. Kinda, yeah. Only for a few years though."

A few years?! Goddess, how could this have happened! My wolf was just as angry as I was, but we had to keep our temper under control. She was skittish enough, as is, if I wasn't careful she would put up all her walls again and I wouldn't be able to learn anything about her. Even though everything in me wanted to go straight to her old pack and rip her alpha's heart out with my bare hands. I swear a vein was about to burst from my forehead.

"Oh? How did you get out?" I carefully asked.

"Oh...um...its kinda a long story." She said, chewing on her bottom lip as we reached the bottom of the steps.

"Sierra, you can tell me anything, I am your mate. I'm literally hardwired to care about you. I want to know about your life. Where you are from, where life has taken you, what your interests are. Everything."

"Edward, I don't want to make rejecting you any harder than it has to be. And I refuse to put you in danger." She hesitated "I'm not a safe person to be around. I shouldn't even be here right now. If something happened to you, I couldn't live with myself."

"If I'm being honest, I was planning on rejecting you, but you almost beat me to it. My life isn't exactly uncomplicated either. And no offense, but I don't need protection."

"What!?" She exclaimed."So you are okay with us not being together?"

"Yes. Don't get me wrong, I want you, but I know I can't have you. I wouldn't risk it."

"Huh. So what are we then?" She asked, perplexed.

"Acquaintances who care about each other but won't do anything about it?" Maybe?" I laughed.

Her face lit up and her voice made the most beautiful sound, laughing at our odd situation.

"Okay, that works for me." She smiled and continued the rest of the way to the kitchen, rummaging through cupboards and pulling out random ingredients,

"So tell me about your life", I sat on one of the metal barstools that the kitchen island held.

"Na-uh. You know more about me than I do about you. You're first." She began pouring what I assumed to be flour through a metal sieve and into a bowl.

"What do you want to know?"

"Tell me about your childhood."

I had to be careful with my answers. I couldn't reveal I was the King.

"It was good. My father worked a lot, he spent a lot of time teaching me and my brother.

"It was good. My father worked a lot, he spent a lot of time teaching me and my brother. He wanted us to take over his position one day. We would come here as kids during the summer and spend a week or two just to relax. We would paddle out to the middle of the lake, my siblings and I, and try to catch fish. My mom would cook them for dinner, even if it was only a fish or two."

"It sounds like you are close with your family." Sierra said, not taking her eyes off what she was mixing.

"Yeah, my brother Jackson and I still are. But not so much my sister Abby. She chose to study abroad"

"Beta Jackson?" Her eyes shot up.

"Um, yeah, how did you...?"

"I met him when he collected me to bring me before the king. You two look alike. Was your dad a Beta or something? I never paid much attention to the royal family or their appointed officials. It must get confusing when he talks, being that you and the King have the same name and all."

"Yeah..." I cleared my throat, it felt like the room was a million degrees. I still had my aura hidden but, Goddess, this was a dangerous subject.

"Hey, can you heat up the pizza oven?" Thank goddess she had no clue I was sweating bullets.

"Absolutely." I practically ran out of the kitchen. I needed fresh air. Edmund was cursing me out for openly lying to our mate. I started a fire in the oven, the cold stone slowly heating up.

"Hey Edward", Sierra poked her head out of the back door, "What pizza toppings do you like?"

"Surprise me. Whatever you like."

"Yes Sir." She winked.

My d**k twitched, becoming painfully hard from her tantalizing conduct. I don't think she even knew what she just did to me. How on earth was I going to live under the same roof as this woman?

Half an hour later, Sierra and I sat on the back deck eating the most mouth-watering pizzas I had ever tasted in my entire life. She must have had some superpower to be able to make three different pizzas in under an hour.

"I still cant choose a favorite." I said, biting into my third slice of BBQ chicken pizza. "They are all so good!"

"They are pretty good, huh?" She said smugly to herself as she bit into a piece of Hawaiian pizza.

"Amazing, really. Where did you learn to cook?"

"My mom taught me the basics, like making boxed brownies, scrambled eggs, grilled cheese sandwiches...pasta. But when I was placed in the orphanage it was all hands on deck. I learned most of what I know there and spent my time in the packhouse perfecting everything." She reached for a slice of classic cheese.

"You are an orphan?"

"Sorry for your loss." I looked her in the eye.

"It was a long time ago."

"Time doesn't take the pain away."

"No, but it becomes more manageable." She gave a weak smile. "On a less morbid note, I'd like to watch the sunset on the dock. Do you think you can escort me?"

"It would be my pleasure."

I grabbed two folding chairs from the garage and we took our time walking down to the end of the dock. I unfolded the slightly rusted chairs and helped Sierra navigate to her seat. We sat in silence for a while, fixated on the orange and pink sky that slowly faded to purple and blue. Sierra rested her head against my shoulder, taking me by surprise. She kept me on my toes, that was for sure. Sparks erupted over my skin where our bodies touched. I decided to push my luck and reach for her hand, and to my delight, she took it. I felt at ease for the first time in years. I didn't want this feeling to stop. If I could bottle the feeling, I would. If I could only get to the bottom of Hopes' death, maybe, just maybe, I could have a chance with Sierra.

end of the dock. I unfolded the slightly rusted chairs and helped Sierra navigate to her seat. We sat in silence for a while, fixated on the orange and pink sky that slowly faded to purple and blue. Sierra rested her head against my shoulder, taking me by surprise. She kept me on my toes, that was for sure. Sparks erupted over my skin where our bodies touched. I decided to push my luck and reach for her hand, and to my delight, she took it. I felt at ease for the first time in years. I didn't want this feeling to stop. If I could bottle the feeling, I would. If I could only get to the bottom of Hopes' death, maybe, just maybe, I could have a chance with Sierra.

Chapter 18

3080 Words

Sierra

What a perfect night! I carefully made my way to my new temporary room, looking forward to taking a hot shower. I was still riding on a high from the best non-date night but kinda date night with my mate, though I knew exhaustion was just around the corner. I grabbed a garbage bag and duct tape from the kitchen on my way upstairs, knowing I couldn't get my

