

## Chapter 32

The men carried the scent of the Alpha Pack but I had never set eyes on them before then. Valens came up behind me and the men echoed their greetings in loud, cheery voices that were far divorced from their scary, domineering builds.

“Alpha! Luna!” The largest man in the group echoed, then he stepped forward and on instinct, I stepped backwards, leaning into Valens. “A hug?” The big man asked.

“I thought we all agreed on not hugging strangers?” Jabari stepped out from the mall. I frowned when I realized I’d been so caught up with Valens that I barely paid attention to Jabari materializing at different places around the mall, almost as if he was following us. Or me.

“The Luna is no stranger.” The big man took a step forward and I pressed into Valens. He casually moved me to his side, his hand draped around my shoulders and his actions plainly telling the newcomer to back off.

“I see how it is.” The man chortled before taking a step back so that he fell in step with the other men who looked on with small smiles on their lips.

“Is there trouble? Why are you here?” Valens asked the men without a trace of familiarity in his voice.

“Why are we here!?” The big man chortled. He had a loud, deep voice and he spoke very loudly, as in, people were actually pausing to look at us not because the alpha and omega were together but because he was pulling attention with his loudness. “Are we not to see our Luna? It’s not

enough to hear about her. We had to see her too but you wouldn't even let me have a hug." The big man almost pouted.

"He doesn't like others touching her," Jabari said. The men shared a look and snickered amongst themselves.

"Who are they?" I asked when the snickering threatened to turn into full-blown laughter.

"They are the keepers of my throne," Valens said and the men stopped laughing. "They are from home." The men had a somber look on their faces in a split second.

I didn't think home would be a pretty place for them considering the ruination the witch who cursed Valens left things in. Some people said those in the kingdom were frozen after the prince's curse, others said the land became dry and hard to cultivate so the people suffered thirst and hunger but others believed the kingdom never existed so it was hard to know what to believe; what was fact and what was a fairytale.

"How is home?" Jabari asked the men.

"It echoes now," one man from the six answered.

Whatever things the kingdom echoed seemed to be an awful and miserable thing because the men became even more somber.

"But it will be filled soon. The prince has found his curse breaker!" The big man exclaimed, filled with positivity while the other men looked about as if the world was about to collapse on their heads.

"The Sacred Knights are not supposed to leave the kingdom." Valens reminded them.

"It's just six of us. There are hundreds back home and we haven't had to fend off anyone for close to a decade now," another of the men replied.

"We have guarded your throne for over a century. The only thing we ask is to witness your mating ceremony."

“What are you carrying?” Jabari asked. I looked at the man he spoke to and noticed he carried something in a velvet box with him. Valens growled, his hand dropping from my shoulder.

“Is that what I think it is?” He stepped forward and the men shuffled to block the one holding the box.

“We come bearing a present for our Luna.” The big and boisterous man spoke but this time, his words were tight and his eyes uncomfortable.

“Get out of my way, Ewan.” Valens took another step forward. I tugged at his sleeve when his anger started to suffocate us in the open space. He paused, looked down at me before grabbing my hand then he stalked forward, pulling me along. “What the fuck were you thinking travelling with my mother’s crown?” He hissed at them.

“The – the oracle spoke to us,” Ewan replied.

“The – ” I tugged at his sleeve again when he almost crushed my palm in his.

“Maybe we should see the oracle.” I inputted before he started to clench his fists again. He glared at me, making me flinch.

“Fine, we will see the oracle.”

I’d never been to see the past or present oracle because I never had reason to. The goddess never had anything to say to me or about me so there was no reason to consult with her spokesperson. It didn’t mean I didn’t know where the oracle’s shrine was located; right in the middle of the pack lands.

It took hours to get to the middle of the pack lands during which Valens’ brooded and occasionally cursed underneath his breath.

“Why is this such a big deal?” I asked when he cursed for the hundredth time and almost hit the car before us.

“You wouldn’t understand,” he answered in a dismissive tone. I turned away from him, hurt with my wolf angry.

“How can I understand when you never say anything?” I muttered to myself but he heard me.

“What did you say?” He demanded, taking his eyes off the road long enough to kill us. He hadn’t been a reckless driver on the way to the mall but now he wanted to kill everyone on the road as he drove.

“I’m not ready to die, Valens. Please keep your eyes on the road!” He didn’t like it when I talked back at him or displayed even the tiniest bit of insubordination but he had to understand that I couldn’t afford to be docile all the time. ‘Afford’ because I knew what it’d cost me if I kept quiet all the time. He’d plough through me without looking back.

“What is –” His eyes returned to the road. “What did you say?”

“I said it’s impossible to understand anything if you don’t tell me anything,” I explained, making sure my voice didn’t leak with the frustration I felt. He was worked up already and I didn’t want to make things worse but in the past few days, I’d begun to wonder why my mate still remained a mystery to everyone including me.

“Why should I tell you anything?” My heart prickled at his harsh words.

‘You have to understand! You have to understand he’s never had a companion and he doesn’t know how to relate to you.’ My wolf rushed to defend her mate.

‘He’s not like this with Clover.’ I reminded my wolf which earned me a snarl but before I could get anything out, we arrived at the sacred shrine of Redville’s oracle.

The place was small and painted white but when we entered, I realized it was actually large and the insides were predominantly gold with a bit of red hue splashed about.

“I’ve expected you for a while, Prince Valens.” A quiet voice called from somewhere in the dimly lit room which we entered.

“Selene,” Valens called in greeting and a young lady walked out. I watched her in shock as I’d expected an old lady with white hair. She wore white baggy jeans and a white shirt, her thick hair pulled into a high bun.

She was young, about my age, but she carried herself with an air of agedness, something even Clover and Valens did not have.

She had a soft glow about her smallish body and an aura of power, a soft, effeminate power that could only be from the Moon Goddess.

“My Sacred Knights are here with my mother’s crown on your orders.” He spoke to her in a calm voice that did not hide his irritation.

“I give no orders, my prince, merely suggestions that the goddess whispers to me.” Even her voice had the soft glow of power infused into it.

“What use is this suggestion then? You realize what could happen if that crown falls into the wrong hands, don’t you?”

“The goddess has not told me the use yet and be calm about it. The crown knows its owner. It cannot be lost.” She turned to me finally and I was caught in the magnitude of her aura.

Where there should have been eyes, there were moons and I knew they could not see anything that the goddess did not allow her see. “Luna Aysel.” She whispered my name but before I replied, tears streamed down her cheeks.

“Ah –” I took Valens’ hand. I’d never been to an oracle but I knew it was not usual for the mouthpiece of the goddess to cry.

“The pain –” The tears fell faster as she whispered in a hoarse voice.

“The pain, Luna Aysel, the pain. I am so sorry. For everything.”