

CHAPTER 10: THE PIG SHELTER

BRIAR'S POV

I'm a shivering mess by the time he lets me go, covered in dirt from being dragged on the floors, my hair in complete disarray, and every bit of me aching.

My scalp burns from the force he yanked on it with, and my neck feels even worse. I know it will bruise by morning, but that's one of my lesser worries right now.

I'm as traumatized as I am in pain.

I can still hear her scream, see the blood gush out of her like a geyser as he ripped her apart like she was nothing to him.

All I can think of, as I'm pulled away by his guards towards an unknown destination, is my demise.

The terror continues to grow within my heart, and tears continue to fall from my eyes.

It was all a lie, an elaborate ruse from a cruel man I had thought to be so perfect. I had sworn my life to him in a heartbeat, like some fool.

Goddess knows what awaits me now.

My journey nally ends right outside what looks like an animal's shed, far enough from the main building yet well within Tavian's fortress.

The horrible stench wafting off the place hits me as soon as we're close enough.

The door is kicked open before I'm tossed in, face first, into what feels like mud but smells horribly putrid. I push myself up to gasp for air before the door is slammed shut behind me abruptly.

"Hey!" I scream at them, rushing forward and banging on the wooden door, confused, angry, terried.

Their chorused laughter echoes from the other side.

"Sweet dreams, princess. Alpha says to enjoy your new home." They mock me before their footsteps grow distant.

New home? I feel another round of tears coming up, this time from frustration, while taking in the environment.

I notice the pigs minding their business and sleeping at the far end, oblivious to my presence.

I can't stay here! I won't!

Yet I'm silent, knowing complaints won't get me anywhere.

There are more important things to focus on, like getting the f**k out of this place as soon as possible.

The morning nds me in even more pain, with knots and cramps in corners of my body I didn't know could hurt.

When I open my eyes, however, a different ceiling greets me—gold and silver plates shimmering above, with tall, ornately plastered walls that belong in a castle worth billions.

A small smile falls on my lips as I let out a brief sigh of relief.

Of course, it was all just a horrid nightmare, like my usual ones about a burning house, but more detailed and lifelike.

I had imagined the entire terrifying night with Tavian—the embarrassment, the bloodshed; all delusions from the stress of what happened with Lucas and Father selling me off like property.

I console myself with this thought, settling into my bed for more comfort.

Yet, instead of a soft, warm surface, the cold-tiled floors push back at me. The pain in my lower back jolts me back to reality, forcing me to sit up straight.

The sight of my lth-covered body in the rags I wore to keep warm last night in the lthy barn hits me like a slap across the face.

My heart crashes bitterly to the ground.

It wasn't a dream.

"No..." I curse under my breath, rising to my feet with some diculty. "No, no, no."

It really happened.

I really married some angry, vengeful brute who's made it his life mission to torture me.

The dread of yesterday settles heavily on my shoulders again.

It takes everything from me not to cry and scream out in frustration.

My chest tightens, and my throat burns as I swallow down the sobs threatening to escape.

I clench my sts, digging my nails into my palms, willing myself to stay composed.

After several deep breaths, I force back the tears and push away the urge to sulk about my situation.

Slowly, I open my eyes and take in my surroundings. Having accepted reality, I notice that it's very different from what I remember last night.

There are no pigs or mud from last night.

The smell is gone, replaced with a delicate, expensive scent in the air—something that smells like wealth.

Rather than a shed, it's a regal room with magnicently tall walls adorned with classic paintings and sculptures.

Gems and jewels are enclosed in elegant glass cases, their gold-plated name tags detailing their worth and origin—some dating back to the 18th century.

The walls are designed with elegant plaster, like one you'd only see in famous museums. Everything in here possibly amounts to billions in gold coins.

My jaw drops at the sight of the splendor.

The lady in me coos at the jewelry, especially wanting to touch the shiny stones and wear them, wanting to be adorned in wealth like I should be... not covered in lth.

As I look around the room, an odd stirring within me catches my attention.

It's a desperate desire for something I can't place, a restless whisper that leaves the hair on my arm standing.

The sensation is eerily familiar, pulling me back to the day I found out Lucas was my mate, and also down to the day of the accident that took my mum and the rest of my family.

I remember because it's a day that's impossible to forget.

The sensation had been so ckle, so light, that I must have missed it—the subtle suspicion that my wolf was trying to speak to me.

By this age, most werewolves have fully bonded with their wolves, experiencing a seamless blend of human and beast, their wolves' voices and guidance ever-present in their minds.

But even at 22 years old, a werewolf of high caliber and standing, my wolf remains a silent entity.

I can feel its strength, a dormant power lingering just beneath the surface.

It's there in the faint prickle along my skin when I shift, in the rush of adrenaline that courses through me, yet the connection that should bind us—that 'yai' like the old tribes used to call it—eludes me.

I never hear its voice, never sense its thoughts.

My wolf just never speaks.

This silence had marked me as different, as defective.

It was the reason I was sent to wolf camp, a place meant to mend and rehabilitate problematic young werewolves.

I threw myself into every challenge, my determination a erce, unquenchable ame.

I had to prove that I could do everything a regular werewolf could, despite the gaping void where my wolf's presence should be.

But no amount of effort could change the fact that something was fundamentally broken within me.

Now, in this grand room, despite the years of silence, I feel the faintest charge of its presence.

It's like the light graze of the wind, a eeting touch that sends ripples through my mind.

Before I could understand what it meant, the sound of blaring sirens overthrow my thoughts suddenly.

An announcement blaes over what I assume is a telecom system: "The Luna is missing. I repeat, the Luna is missing. All guards are expected to cover the east and west wing and report her whereabouts!"

I'm missing?

But I'm... technically, I have no idea where I am or any recollection of how I got here. Yet I seem to be missing, and they're looking for me.

An idea immediately strikes my mind in haste.

It's the perfect opportunity to escape.

I begin searching for a door, only to be disappointed when I can't nd one. It's as if this room was constructed to prevent anyone from entering or leaving.

Frustrated, I lean against a wall, inadvertently activating a hidden mechanism.

The walls vibrate and slowly pull aside, revealing an exit into an empty hallway. I'm momentarily in awe, but the blaring siren and repeated announcement snap me back to reality

The second I step out, the door closes behind me, disappearing almost instantly.

I wish I could stand around and ponder it, but I remind myself of the urgency of my situation and run in the other direction, hoping to gure out how to escape before Tavian or his guards nd me.

The hallway leads me down an unrecognizable path, and at the end of it, I hear footsteps drawing closer.

Panic ensues, and I look around, trying to nd someplace to hide before they see me.

A door to the left shines in all its glory, and I rush for it, closing it quietly before anyone can spot me.

I wait at the door until I hear their footsteps disappear, then nally allow myself to breathe again.

That was close, too close.

I could have been caught and then what? Skinned alive? Ripped apart like that girl from yesterday?

My hand trembles at the thought of what Tavian would do to me, thinking I had really escaped on my own when it was an accident.

I can't stay here and gure it out. I need to leave.

However, exhaustion takes over, and I look for a place to sit, nally noticing the room I've stumbled into.

It's a bedroom, large and fancy with elaborate décor meant to show off—my exact style. Its luxury draws me in.

I'm especially captivated by the wide display of warm food sitting on the table, freshly prepared with steam still wafting up.

It smells delicious.

The sudden grumble in my tummy reminds me of how long it's been since I last ate.

I was too busy picking at my meal back home, excited about being mated and married. The so-called banquet thrown in my honor wasn't the best place to grab anything to eat.

I decide I'm hungry, so why not indulge myself? I can't escape on an empty stomach, after all.

I notice the food is prepared to my taste—from the delicately avored carrot soup to the tender llet mignon. I stuff myself shamefully.

Halfway through, chugging a glass of water, I'm already full and sigh with satisfaction as I lay back against the comfortable couch.

With a stuffed belly, other disturbing sensations bother me, like how bad I smell and how slimy I feel with the dried-up 'mystery mud' in my hair.

So why not also opt for a bath?

The bath is freshly prepared, with hot water and expensive bath products laid out for use—all well-known brands I've used in the past and like.

Whoever lives here might as well be my soulmate.

I soak longer than I should, the comfort washing away the pain in my body, the lth, and the smell. Every bit of distress and worry melts away in the heat.

I comb through the knots in my golden blonde hair until I feel like myself again—like Briar, the Beta's daughter; beautiful, elegant, and unstoppable, not even by a psychopath like Tavian.

There's nothing a nice soak can't x.

I'm completely lost in my own world until the bathroom door ies wide open.

And standing right in front of me is a man, his chiseled torso glistening with droplets of water, a towel hanging low on his hips, leaving so little to the imagination.