

Chapter 46

"Are your eyes closed?" Keiko asked for the hundredth time during our kilometer walk. My feet felt I had stumbled millions of times and I was still suffering from all of the previous aches and pains.

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"What does it matter, you have me blindfolded anyway," I complained.

"You're going to love this surprise," Keiko assured, holding one of my arms while Ethel tugged me along with the other.

"I actually hate surprises," I pointed out.

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"I tried to tell her that, but she wouldn't listen," Ethel sighed, exasperated by the young queen already.

"I'm the Queen, I don't have to listen to anyone," Keiko pointed out then let out a beautiful laugh. "Alright Charlotte, stop," she instructed.

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I paused, feeling wobbly and unstable without my eyes, but leaving the blindfold on until Keiko instructed me to take it off.

And as soon as I could see there were tears in my eyes. I felt weak and immediately went speechless.

"Oh God, you hate it," Keiko gasped, covering her mouth. "It's totally fine we can fix it, please don't be angry."

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"No you idiot, I love it," I blubbered, throwing my arms around her and pulling her in for a tight hug. After giving her a bone crushing squeeze I did the same to Ethel. "I can't believe you guys did this. I thought I was just going to be sleeping in hotels and driving back and forth on good days."

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Before me was something out of a home show. It was a tiny little cabin with a little porch on the front, complete with brightly coloured flower boxes and a pale blue door that contrasted the wood. It was a wild blend of woody charm, modern colours, and simplicity.

"Come on, let's give you the grand tour," Keiko giggled, already bounding up the porch and gesturing for us to follow.

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As we followed Ethel leaned down and whispered in my ear, "I didn't let her pick out the seeds for the planters. She wanted to put orchids in them."

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I smothered a giggle as we grew nearer to the entrance, but shot Ethel a grateful look. We hadn't shared many moments together since the attack but the way her eyes twinkled told me that all was truly forgiven. Though I missed her and wanted her company more often, she was here now in spite of everything and that warmed my heart.

Both of them were so excited to show me the tiny house that they had created. It was small, that was certain. With the three of us in there it almost felt claustrophobic. But that didn't curb their enthusiasm and it certainly didn't tame mine either. Never in my life had I been given such a gift, such a grand gesture.

As we entered the space, landing right in the living room, Keiko explained that she wanted it to be a comfortable place for me to sit and read. The kitchen that followed was small and functional. It was a small fridge, a minuscule freezer, a sink, and a tiny stove top, just big enough for two pots. I peered into what I thought would be a pantry and was started to find another sink and a small toilet.

Then we moved on to the bedroom which held a dresser big enough for five outfits and a bed that would've fit better in Tabitha's room. Throughout the whole thing I was nodding along and laughing, fully aware of this little house's purpose. I wasn't meant to live here full time. This was just to keep me away from Sebastian on bad days. It had all the necessities and nothing extra.

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Or so I thought until we climbed into the loft. And there was a beautiful blank canvas propped on an easel. Behind it were shelves upon shelves of paints, colours that I hadn't even imagined existed and above them were hardcover books on botany. There was even a small desk with a new laptop and several books on bookkeeping as I had been applying for remote jobs in hopes that I would keep myself busy. It was a little haven designed to give me purpose when I felt like nothing more than a burden.

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I was crying all over again, hugging both of them at once as they soothed me and rubbed my back, secretly seeming a little proud of themselves. This was a beautiful, gorgeous gift that I didn't deserve and I could never thank them enough for it. In my darkest moment my beautiful friends had come through for me.

"Seriously guys," I sniffled, wiping away the final tear, "I couldn't do any of this without you. I would've packed up and left two days in."

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"Of course you would've stayed," Keiko stated. She playfully punched me in the arm. "You are so bad ass and incredible. You would've handled this like a pro with or without us."

"But we are more than happy to make the journey a little easier," Ethel added with her signature kind smile.

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"Speaking of journeys, Ajax and I have to get back home soon or my mom is going to turn Clementine into the most entitled, spoiled child on the planet. For someone who was so strict with her own child she's extra coddling when it comes to her grand baby."

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"Don't worry, I don't think anyone will ever compare to Ajax when it comes to entitlement," Ethel teased.

We all laughed and giggled about Keiko's bumpy progress into realizing what she and her mate were and how she tied into a world of royalty. The walk back to the main manor felt like old times, before everything had gone south and I had turned into a knife-wielding animal. For once, when we entered the kitchen, it looked like Ajax and Sebastian were having a decent time, sipping scotch on the rocks.

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"Did you like it?" Ajax asked when Keiko sat down beside him. His hand immediately fell for hers under the table. Ethel gracefully excused herself for the day, shooting us all another smile.

"I love it, thank you. I'm sure it couldn't have been cheap to get all those quality materials and have it finished and furnished so quickly."

"Can't put a price on things like this," Ajax dismissed. "Now, Had- Sebastian, we wanted to talk to both of you before we left. We have been meeting with our advising counsel and our scholars and we think we may have found something."

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"What?" I asked, immediately perking up.

"It's not much, but when we started talking about blood debts our team brought some things to our attention. The way she spoke and the words she said are associated closely with something from Greek mythology. Have you ever heard of the Fates?"

"The three sisters who determine someone's death?" Sebastian said.

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"Yes, those Fates. Again, we aren't sure, but there is a myth involving them, pertaining to an oracle, someone that the Fates speak through. We know that Fates are obsessed with cycles and repetition. Now, we aren't sure if it's true, but there seems to be a pattern involving the Hades curse in general, but there is also a potential, vague record of a mate killing someone else who was cursed."

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"I can't fathom why this would be a cycle that Fates would control. Frankly, we aren't even certain it is a cycle," Sebastian pointed out. "And I've never heard of Greek mythology being present in other circles of werewolf history."

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"We know that," Ajax agreed. "This could be nothing and it most likely is a shot in the dark, but we thought you should know. Maybe, as things progress, you'll see more clues that can give us insight. Eventually, we'll have a thousand fragments that will create a picture."

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"I can't wait for 'eventually'," I complained. "I have no idea what I'm going to wake up as from one morning to the next. It just takes one bad day for me to..."

"I know that this is painful and it's the worst kind of waiting game, but all we can do is collect information and all you can do is inform us if anything changes and call us every single time you have a dream. We'll get to the bottom of this, together," Ajax vowed.

But, in the pit of my stomach I felt we never would.

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~~~Question of the Day~~~

What has this pandemic made you grateful for?

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Yes, I know I posted this question in *Guarding His Queen*, but I liked it and I thought it was worth a repost. I'm grateful for having all of you wonderful readers. I'm grateful that I have a talent that allowed me to make this easier on some of you and that I have access to a platform that allows me to reach people all over the world!