Chapter 56

Three days later I walked into my parents' guest bedroom where Sebastian was lying on the bed. He held a book in his hands, reading with his back against the wall and a cup of ice on squeezed between his thighs. He looked like an image of peace and I wanted to get out of this dress and curl up beside him.

His head came up when he heard me enter, but his trademark smile didn't appear. If anything, seeing me in a black dress with pin straight hair only made him grimace more. There was no room for floral print or wavy locks today.

"Why are you being so miserable?" I sighed, carefully lowering myself onto the bed beside him. "I thought you would be happy. This is a big step for you. The world is finally going to know the truth."

"I should be the one going out there, not you. They are going to rip you limb from limb. Denial is a powerful thing, Char. Remember what it did to you? Imagine how angry and upset people are going to get when they don't have all of these conflicting facts in front of them. They are going to be blindsiding them. They could really hurt you," Sebastian said, shaking his head. His book was tossed aside and the ice we was plunked on the nightstand. "That's it. I'm getting dressed."

As he moved to stand up, he winced. He might have had impressive healing rates normally, but the wound on his chest was intensive and still lacked with silver. A couple days of bed rest had brought colour back to his skin, but he still had a massive gash over his heart. I refused to see him this hurt ever again. If he thought I was going to let him be a hero again he was bold.

"I swear to god, if you try and put on that button up shirt I will drive home and push all of your motorcycles + their kickstands and onto their sides. Imagine all the scratches and sca s," I warned, grabbing his wrist.

The threat was useless. If Sebastian wanted something, especially in the form of protecting me, he would take it no matter the cost. But something in my tone made him stop. When his amber eyes scanned over my face all he would've seen was frustration and decisiveness. I was doing this. Without him.

"They might go a er you," he argued, but sat back down.

"I know that you see me as your mate, all so and sweet, but remember that I tend to kick you around like a proper lord of the underworld, okay? I'm not scared of going out there. People need to know. And these are my people. I'm the daughter of their alpha now. If that's not enough to keep them tame then I'm going to be standing right beside Ajax for most of it."

"This is my battle," Sebastian protested.

I cradled his head in both of my hands, smiling down at him before I pressed my mouth against his in a ser kiss. I could feel him melting under my hands.

"I let me take care of pep for once," I whispered.

There was a heavy pause and I thought he would fight again. But Sebastian just nodded his head, his eyes still downcast. "If Ajax hits on you, I get to kill him this time, though."

I laughed and kissed him again.

But all of the laughter was dead and gone when I stood on the small stage on the community center. Most of my pack members filled the seats, but there were a few werewolves from neighboring lands that had been granted permission to come watch. The majority of the werewolves across the country would see this announcement live on television. And seeing the massive camera swiveling around my stomach was in knots.

"I'm surprised Sebastian didn't force his way out of that house," Ajax stated, watching the crowd move about with his hands folded neatly behind his back. His auburn hair was slicked back and a black suit hung o his large frame. He was just as somber and as serious as I was.

"It took a fair amount of convincing, but he was mostly concerned about a certain king stopping out of line and hitting on me." I shot back, my words a little sharper than I had intended. Maybe I was still a little bitter about our initial meeting or maybe my nerves were just getting the best of me.

"I swear on my life that I will never hit on you again," Ajax vowed with a small smile. He made a cross over his heart in a surprisingly boyish gesture. "I don't think I ever apologized for that, did I?"

"No, you haven't." A few months ago I would've been stunned that I had the brass to talk to any royal like that. But I wasn't the so meek girl who was struggling to please her family and could hardly stand to look at herself in the mirror. I had fought my own pack, handled a siren, and attacked a man no one dared to touch.

"Well, I am sorry. I've always been the elite, the best. It comes with being king. Sebastian was something I never thought I would encounter or have to address. I should have never put you at risk that way for something so petty. I'm sorry if I stunted your relationship in anyway or just even made you uncomfortable. It wasn't fair of me."

I curled the corner of my mouth in a half smile, my gaze reverting back to the camera crew.

"First time on TV?" Ajax asked, his voice low.

"Yes. I don't think I have ever been so nervous in my life."

"Don't let the nerves get to you. You have a message and people need to hear it." As he spoke the lights in the community hall dimmed and the two hundred or so couples sat down. "You're doing this for Sebastian and your future together. And you're doing it for all of the victims and the families that were le behind."

Ajax's attention was snatched away from me as a member of the camera crew gestured to him. He adjusted his lapel, rolled his shoulders back, and walked out before the public. They all applauded his arrival, smiling with delight that they were able to see their king.

He remained stoic.

"Hello everyone. I am afraid that this address is not going to be a pleasant one, but it is long over due. The man who was once considered myth and legend is real. Some of you may know him as Hades. For years he has terrorized communities and been a scary story to keep misbehaving children in line." The crowd leaned and peered. Ajax didn't flinch. He held onto the podium in front of him and ran his eyes over the crowd. "What the myth leaves out is that Hades is a cleaner. He is the man who is burdened with the task of handling the most barbaric criminals that stalke authorities or detection all together. For years, he had been under royal protection. Myself and Queen Keiko have protected this man, keeping him secluded and out of the public eye for his own safety, but no more. It is time that the world know the real Hades."

Ajax explained how he and Keiko had come across Sebastian initially, how there was no way to control or kill him. He talked about using silver suppressants and how the wolf fought through them. Then, he explained the nightmares that Sebastian endured, the vivid images of all the wrong doers going out for. He talked about the evidence that had been against those who Hades had killed and referenced werewolves from the past who took on the same crime.

"Sebastian, our modern Hades, has sacrificed his life as an alpha from a successful pack. His nights are riddled with unspeakable sights. He faces the absolute scum of the werewolf world day a er day and he does this so that those who have killed, those who have hurt children, who have tortured, cannot harm anyone else. So, today, I ask you to give up the night time horror stories. I ask that you respect the work that has been done in your favor and that you trust in your royals as you have always done. I know that this may be hard to believe. I know that some of you think that a loved one couldn't have possibly been killed for a valid reason. We have opened up a hotline where concerned families can call at any time and a member from our investigation team will discuss what happened and how. In the mean time, I request that all of you put your assumptions aside and help us transition Sebastian into the life he deserves."

I watched the crowd from behind the curtain as tense as ever. Their expressions didn't change through the speech. They didn't care what he was saying. They all sat there with clenched jaws and narrowed eyes.

"As I said before, Sebastian has done what was needed to protect us. Unfortunately, much of his actions were reactive. I have brought Charlotte with me to talk about our response program."

My legs went to Ajax on their own accord. I reminded myself not to smile. No one clapped for me like they had for their king.

"Hello," I grated out into the microphone. It squealed in response. The crowd groaned. I glanced desperately at Ajax who just nodded his head, still as somber as ever. I swallowed and started again. "Thank you all for coming. I would like to start by saying that I understand all the hesitation I see. It's hard to release all those awful, vengeful ideas just because of one speech. I know this because Sebastian, my mate, killed someone very dear to me." My voice shook, but it wasn't from nerves. "I thought that it would be impossible to be mated to such a man. I hated him. I wanted him dead. But, Sebastian is not the villain that I once thought him to be. And the man I defended was not the saint I thought he was."

A couple of members from my pack perked up. They knew who I was talking about. They had seen me screaming and crying when Caleb had died. "You see, the man that had perfect pain on a wonderful face, but he was hurting the most vulnerable. He was preying on innocent children. The saying that it's those you least expect could not be more true for me. I didn't want to believe it, but the signs were undeniable."

A woman in the crowd flinched. Abby's mother. She raised a hand, covering her mouth, her eyes wide with horror. Maybe she hadn't known, but she had certainly had a hunch. But she was why I was here. She was why I needed to say these words.

"We can't bring people back from the dead and make them pay for what they have done. Sometimes, I wish we could because I can imagine you that Sebastian, even fully taken over by his wolf, is much more humane than any of you would be. But the damage has been done. People have lost loved ones, whether at Sebastian's hands or not. Families have been torn apart. Children have been hurt. Even when the criminal is dead the damage doesn't go away. So today, we are launching our recovery platform. We will be going through the files and any victims will be o ered free therapy sessions, starting with an initial assessment that all victims will receive. We are a strong community and whether we are healing from knowing someone we loved was vile or from wrong that has been done to us, we will recover. And we will come back stronger than ever."

Ajax stepped in to wrap up the rest of the announcement. No one clapped as we exited and we hid behind the curtains a awards, letting the audience leave first. Neither of us spoke, not knowing what to say a er something like that. Even just going in the space made me feel heavy. Helpless.

"You did really well, Charlotte. You should be proud," Ajax complimented, loosening his tie as we walked out of the building together.

"Thank you."

"I'm serious. If Sebastian had been in there, it would have been an uprisar. And I've seen him do better public speaking when he was on track to become alpha. It's pretty pathetic. He gets all clammy and sweaty."

"I just thought of all the people who needed help and then I wasn't so nervous," I reasoned.

We were half ways to my parents' house when I saw her again. Abby's mother stared at me with tears in her eyes. She was stopped dead in the middle of a playground area, just watching.

"I never wanted to believe it," she said. "I never wanted to think that something like that could happen to my daughter. And I never wanted to think that it would have happened at the hands of the alpha. I even accused my own mate, thinking that he was one of the only men who had access to her when she started showing signs because of all the people, I'm supposed to trust my leaders."

"I'm so sorry," I whispered, feeling the guilt slam into me.

"I still can't believe that it was Caleb."

"I know."

"I want to wish that it didn't happen to Abby. I want to wish that it didn't happen to my little girl, but he would have found someone else, wouldn't he? He would've knocked on someone else's door claiming he was getting volunteer hours for college and it would have happened to someone else."

"I'm sory that this happened," I repeated.

"But now, she gets to heal. She gets the proper tools and and I can help her again." She swiped a hand across her face, smearing the tears. "I was so scared. I didn't know how to make it better."

"She gets to heal and so does everyone else that Caleb has ever hurt," Ajax stated. He reached out palming hands and my own tears because he carefully stepped in front of me. "I promise that whatever resources you need access to to get your life and your daughter's life back on track will be available to you and her. All you have to worry about now is retaining and you will have support every step of the way."

And that was all I wanted for sweet Abby. I wanted her to recover from the vile things that she had been subjected to. I couldn't undo what had been done, but I could give my voice to those who didn't have one, could speak for those who were swept away by the undertow. When I fell apart, I would have Ajax and Keiko to guide me and Sebastian to lean on.

We would build a better community then there ever had been.

---Distraction Section---

Hello and happy Tuesday. I'm surprised I got to write this chapter with the mess my head was in, but writing this chapter was almost therapeutic so you get your scheduled update and everyone is happy! Just a little update that GHQ is now getting two updates a week and I have started a werewolf book if anyone is interested!

Question of the Day: What do you consider to be a sexy name?