

## Chapter 0294

Five days. It's been five days of constant snowfall. We've gotten more than 24 inches of snow, which is unheard of for this time of year according to the friends we have been able to check in on. In reality the snow doesn't really bother us, neither does the cold since we all run hotter than the average human, but we have to maintain the secret so we have to act human in a human dense city.

Nickolas has been out to help some of the neighbors keep the sidewalks and driveways shoveled. I don't think he can help himself, always the protector and caretaker. We've been out to help a bunch too, but not nearly as willingly as he is. So we help to fill in the time, otherwise we would die of boredom since we can't go anywhere.

The major problem is we can't shift and travel as wolves, it's too easy to be spotted right now with all the fresh white snow. And I'm sure the humans would wonder at our sudden disappearance. And traveling in a vehicle of any kind just isn't safe with the amount of snow, icy winds and temperatures dropping so low at night that everything gets a sheen of ice. So we are still stuck.

There has been no power loss in our neighborhood though, but I think that is more due to Nickolas sneaking out at night to check wires and transformers near us to remove any ice and snow that could damage them. According to him we

have skills that are very useful, but the humans won't understand. But he is not about to have to rough it for the sake of keeping a secret. We both laughed at his declaration. I guess there had to be something wrong with his perfect persona, it was only a matter of time before we figured out he is a bit of a princess under all that tough guy.

Finally on the fourth day, our doorbell rings and Mina and I jump up and fight to get to the door first. Scrambling and laughing, we open it in a heap of tangled legs and arms to find a very somber looking woman who eyes us with suspicion.

"I'm looking for Warrior Nickolas, be quick about it and get out of the doorway, it's freezing and my uncomfortable journey has been long enough." Her voice is almost bored, but with that craggy sound someone would do if they were telling a witch story to little kids.

We both jump up and move out of the way. Neither of us is trying to piss off the woman who is about to make a dream come true. She steps past us and moves into the living room.

It's not much, but none of us needed much to be here. We have a job to do and sitting in luxury was not part of the plan. The basic creme white walls are what you would find in any cookie cutter development home, The place came fully furnished so the decorations are neutral with no personal touches at all. The living room, dining room and

kitchen are all open concept, which was a must for Nickolas. He's too big to have human sized doors and walls cutting everything off. The cream white theme travels the lower level completely. Some light and dark green accents are in the pictures hanging on the walls and some of the details, but off-white is the dominating color here.

"This space will need to be cleared." The woman talks to the air and points to the dining room. "I will need the bags and boxes from my car, be sure not to jostle anything. I will find my room, Warrior Nickolas can consult me there, come get me when you are done."


Without another word or introduction, she walks to the stairs and glides up.

"The hell?" Mina whispers next to me.

"No idea, but we better get started. I'm not giving her any reason not to brand us. We've waited long enough."

"Yep." Mina pops the 'P' and we both move to the dining room and begin to shift the chairs to other places around the living room and kitchen.

The table was a bit more difficult to maneuver. I don't think it was designed to be moved from this spot once it was put together. We had to shift the couches in the living room up against walls and then get the ten person table around the massive island that separated the three spaces. Eventually we made it happen though and then layered up in all our

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winter gear to bring in whatever supplies she needed for this ritual.

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## Chapter 0295

For only two people, this seems like a ton of stuff. What the hell goes on in this branding ceremony? There are five bags, but to be honest a couple smell like they could be her clothes, and four plastic totes of stuff that are not light, even with our strength.

"Perfect!" We both jump. Where in the hell did she come from and how did we not hear her? "Not to worry, I use a silencing spell. You will never hear me coming." She basically reads my mind.

I look over at her and she winks, tapping her nose. Did she just confirm my thoughts? Now I have to be careful what I let fly through my thoughts and that isn't always easy.

"Let's begin setting up. I think you girls have waited long enough. I'm here now and no one else can delay this process. It is meant to be and must happen now, before time runs out."

Well that was cryptic. Mina says over the mind link.

Might as well talk out loud, I think she can read our minds or hear our thoughts. Whatever it is, there is probably no way to keep secrets from her. I responded.

"You are a smart one." She looks at me. "You both are and you both are very important. I have spoken to Nickolas and

we will begin shortly. He is not a part of the ceremony, but he will be standing guard. Both of you will be vulnerable for a few hours while the spell works. This takes time even without all of the fluff your elders seem to think necessary.”

We both just nod and wait anxiously for directions.

Without words, the witch, who still has not said her name, hands us different items from the boxes and points to different locations of the room. She is consulting, what I think is a compass and some kind of chart while she does all of this.

There are candles everywhere, all different shapes and sizes. Many of them look handmade and have leaves, flowers and herbs mixed into the wax. Some look like they have been used many times, others are brand new.

We have drawn a large circle onto the wood floor with a white substance that is the consistency of flour or crushed up chalk. I’m not sure. In the center of the circle is a small metal bowl on three legs, like a mini fire pit, if the smoke smell coming off of it is an indicator.

There are small clumps of different materials from outside. Dirt, rocks, moss, dried flowers, gemstones in all sorts of colors.

“We are ready to begin.” She finally says after hours of setting up and adjusting the things around the room.

She waves her hand and all the candles light at once. My

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eyes go wide and I can feel my jaw drop open. It's the first 'magical' thing she has done all day. I wonder if she could have set all this up in ten minutes with magic, instead of the painstaking manual set up we did.

"Of course child, but no one appreciates the things that come too easy. You must first understand what things are for, where they come from and how to obtain them properly to truly appreciate what you have." And she at least confirmed that she can, in fact, read minds. "Please step into the circle ladies."

We both step forward looking at each other, not sure what to expect since this is the most she has said all day. The only other instruction we were given was to change into a black sports bra and shorts, like at training, and pull our hair back.

Our faces illuminated by the flickering light of candles. A sense of reverence and anticipation fills the air. The witch steps forward, as close to the circle as she can be without stepping over the line. Another wave of her hand and the herbs in the fire pit between Mina and I lights. I jump a little at the sudden spark and heat, but I don't move from my position.

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