

## Owned by the Alphas |

### The Pain

"I knew you'd eventually be here with this request." Tabitha smiled, standing over an altar that hadn't been there last time.

The living room was dark, with flickering candles, petals, a strange scent, and a silver bowl on a stand covered in a velvet curtain draping down.

I walked forward to see what she was doing standing over it, sniffing the aroma steaming out of it.

"You're already preparing it?" I asked, letting go of Brax's hand and giving a little sniff of my own. The cinnamon and thyme were strong. Then lavender. It didn't seem so scary.

"Of course. This takes two days to put together, but you are right on time." She beamed and stirred the small pool of clear water in the bottom of the bowl.

"Of course she is. Then we don't know what went in it," Brax sneered, and Tabitha glared at him.

"Do not be disrespectful. You've already forsaken the gems you are meant to wear during this visit, which I have graciously forgiven due to the time restraints, but I will not tolerate the attitude, Braxton. Especially when you are asking for a favor," she snapped, and it was the most testy I had seen her with the wolves.

"A favor. Because you will want it returned," he bit back, and she smiled.

"Naturally. You well know, nothing is free."

"What do you want in return, Tabitha?" Derik asked, stepping in, which was probably a good idea because I was pretty sure Brax was about to piss Tabitha off even more.

I stepped back from the brewing potion and grabbed his hand again, soothing his shadows with my own.

“A time will come, soon, I’m sure, where Cain will need you. You will go to him. No matter what else you have to do or attend, you will drop it and go to him. All three of you.

“This is my price, and it will require a binding oath, I’m afraid,” she said, still stirring, sniffing, and sprinkling more things from weird pouches into the broth.

Brax’s hand tightened in mine, his anger polluting me as even Derik frowned.

“Tabby, that’s a lot to ask. I cannot promise to leave if it endangers Lorelai,” Kai said, crossing his arms.

Tabitha smacked her hands together, brushing the last of whatever powder she had into the bowl.

“You can and you will because you are here, which means my price could be higher and you would still pay it. Shall we continue?” she asked, putting her hands on her full hips.

Cain walked out from a side room then holding a dagger and handed it to Kai.

“Trust her, she knows what she’s doing,” Cain said, and Kai sighed, looking between me, Derik, and Brax.

“We need her linked before the Summit. I don’t see any other choice, and unless any of you do, I’m making the promise,” Kai said, pausing with the blade in his hand, ready to cut.

Derik narrowed his eyes, then gave a single nod. Brax clenched his jaw and glared as he gave the tiniest agreement.

Kai cut his hand.

His blood poured from the cut and onto his hand before his skin absorbed it and it became perfect calligraphy across his forearm. It looked like it burned, as Kai’s jaw clenched.

Derik cut next, then Brax. As soon as the oath was on them all, it sank into their skin and disappeared.

“If this backfires, I’ll kill you,” Brax warned Tabitha, and Cain growled back his own warning.

Tabitha put her hand on her son's chest.

"Settle down. I wouldn't have made the deal if I had believed it would end in that outcome," she said, hobbling back to her ingredients station against the wall and whispering something to one of the thick purple candles before blowing it out.

She dusted her hands off on her apron, then sighed and turned to me.

My heart raced as she smiled.

"You ready?" she asked.

I nodded, swallowing hard as I stepped forward to grab Tabitha's hand. She led me to the bowl, then looked at the alphas.

"You just gonna stand there, or do you want to be linked too?" Tabitha asked.

Kai and Derik stepped forward, but Brax looked hesitant, watching Tabitha with wary eyes, taking slow steps.

He finally joined us around the stand where the bowl was, and Cain began moving around us, outlining us with a purple dust. I wanted to ask what it was, but I didn't think it would matter, as long as the spell worked.

It seemed so surreal to be a human surrounded by witches and werewolves, like I had woken up in some strange dream that I didn't want to leave.

The humans in my village knew witches existed, of course, but when it had come to the great war, the witches had all stepped back, refusing to get involved in territories between vampires and werewolves.

They had spoken of balance and not being able to use their magic for anything but maintaining it. I assumed that was another reason to be wary of their magic.

I wasn't as wary now, though. I wanted the link as much as they did.

Maybe it was stupid or naive, or maybe I should take longer to explore my options, but if we did this, they would be mine in more ways than I could've hoped for.

Being human, my connection to them was limited, but I wanted everything they had to offer me, and being linked was the deepest that went. If it helped keep me safe too, then that was a bonus.

“What do we have to do?” I asked.

Tabitha stirred the mixture, more steam pouring out as it started bubbling. “Drop your blood in, you each drink, then your souls will do the rest.”

She hummed, then looked at Cain over my shoulder, where he had finished the circle. “Have you readied the bedchambers?” she asked, and he nodded.

“Yeah, it’ll be a tight fit with all four of them, but it’ll work,” he said, and I frowned.

“All four of us to do what?”

“A forced mating, a marriage in magic, a link of this kind. All require consummation, my dear.” She smiled as if that wasn’t turning my cheeks scarlet.

“Well, that’s going to be weird,” I admitted, and she laughed.

“Don’t worry, once the link hits you and demands consummation, you won’t care where you are.” She chuckled.

“Like the heat?”

She thought about that, then grinned.

“Hmm, similar. This will be more internal though. You may not even connect physically, but the rest of you will link to whatever it is in the alphas’ souls that appeals to you most.

“Physical attraction is weak, easily manipulated, a simple, breakable connection; this link will run so much deeper than that,” she explained, still pottering about with ingredients and stirring.

“Will it hurt?” I asked, not sure what compelled me to.

Her smile wavered, and she paused before nodding.

"If the link does what it is meant to, then yes. The pain at first will be excruciating," she admitted quietly, then carried a bottle of liquid over.

Brax growled; Derik just grimaced and clenched his jaw.

"Tabitha," Derik warned, and she shrugged.

"To expect anything less from blood magic is just foolish at this point. You must be tested to make sure you want what the link is offering.

"Most creatures will yield when enough pain is applied. The spell will test your limits and ability to see it through," she explained, then put two drops in the bowl.

They turned the potion a clear blue color that swirled with darker hints to it. It almost moved on its own, and after being told it would hurt, my stomach was turning.

I hated being in pain. I shivered at the idea.

"Say we can't handle it. How would it know?" I asked, starting to freak out just a little that I might just fuck this up for them all.

Tabitha offered me a kind smile with crinkling eyes.

"You'll pass. But should the pain get too much, simply call out that you yield, and the spell will release you. Any of you. Keep in mind that uttering those words will not affect our bargain that was struck, and that this is a one-time thing.

"This link, this particular spell, especially in this strength, can only be attempted once," she warned, stirring one last time before rolling her shoulders back and placing her hands on the table.

My heart raced harder. I didn't want to fail, I didn't want to lose the opportunity or yield, but the idea of being in pain had me second-guessing everything.

"I'm not so good with pain," I stuttered, my skin raising as she blew through the steam and it swirled angrily.

"Maybe not, but it is a test, a challenge, and those I haven't seen you shy away from. You will also be rewarded for passing the pain.

"When the link connects you all, that is when you will feel everything but pain," she said, smiling knowingly, like she had the world of secrets at her fingertips.

Maybe she did. I didn't know much, so I had to trust her.

"How long will the pain last?" I asked, and Brax grabbed my hand on one side, Derik on the other. The warmth in their touch soothed me a little but not enough to stop my heart from racing.

"Depends." She shrugged.

"On?" I prompted.

"A few things. How deep the connection is already compared to how deep the link wants to burrow. And how much you fight it," she said.

I blew out a breath, hoping like hell that my connection with the alphas was already sufficiently deep to avoid being in pain for a ridiculous amount of time.

"Will all of us be in pain?" Derik frowned, and she nodded.

"You each must be tested."

"And she will be safe?" he asked.

Tabitha nodded toward Cain. "He'll keep an eye on you, make sure you don't wolf out on her, but the link is not designed to do that. It is a personal test. If you pass, you are rewarded with a successful link, if you fail, you are not," she said, then smacked her hands together.

Every single candle's light went out, and the crystal-blue water glowed. I sucked in a breath, the anticipation curling in my stomach.

"Have you ever done this on someone with shadows before?" I murmured, and she shook her head.

"Obviously not, but those variants shouldn't matter."

"Shouldn't?" I sputtered. That didn't sound very sure at all.

"We should get started. We've wasted enough time, and you will need time to get used to the link before the Summit meeting. I believe they requested an urgent meeting, but twenty-four hours shouldn't make them too testy."

She chuckled, like she knew something we didn't, and like usual, she probably did.

"Ready then?" she asked.

I looked to the alphas, who waited for my nod. I did, and they did the same.

Tabitha smiled, then handed me a long pin. I took it and stared at the silver needle in trepidation. Pain, my worst enemy, and I had to bring it on myself.

It sounded simple enough when I looked at the big picture, the alphas would essentially be mine, but getting there? I would have to endure something I had always shied away from.

It was terrifying, and physically making myself prick my finger was harder and harder to convince myself to do.

I had barely moved the needle an inch when Derik leaned down and captured my mouth with his. It was a distraction, in the back of my mind I knew that, but I welcomed it.

His lips covered mine in soft, tender pulls until I was desperate and breathless.

"Now, beautiful," he whispered against me, and I tightened my grip on the needle, pricking my finger as his tongue slid against mine and his hand tightened its grip on my face.

I winced against the kiss, the tiny sting worse because I had been waiting for it.

He broke away, then nodded to the bowl. I looked down at the droplet of blood pooling at my fingertip, then held it over the potion.

It dropped in just before Kai, Derik, and Brax put their own drops in, much more used to the idea of pain than me, obviously.

Tabitha nodded, a smirk playing on her lips as she began humming and stirring. Then she was whispering words in a language I didn't know, her voice echoing through the house.

She stirred and stirred the glowing water that was now deep purple, then poured it into four small glass tubes. She handed us each one, then sighed.

“From here on out, I cannot interfere. Once that potion has been accepted into your bodies, it will be up to you to decide the fate.

“Wolves, remember to keep the wall up on the link with your pack. Cain told me you have made them aware of what you are doing here, but I would advise against sharing this experience; it will only make it harder to get through the pain to your winter born.”

“As for you, Lorelai, you must remember your wolves. Everything about them that makes you happy, smile, laugh, and love. Keep them close, touch as much as possible, and it will make the next few hours more tolerable. I will see you at sunrise; the future will be clearer then.”

She smiled, then grabbed her cane and stepped back, waiting for us to drink.

I looked at the wolves, then back at the drink. I had come this far in their world; I couldn't bitch out now. So I emptied the vial in one shot.

I looked over as the wolves finished theirs, smiling at the way it made the red in their eyes glow through.

And then I felt it.

The searing, burning pain that felt like my entire insides were being boiled alive.

I screamed until my voice went hoarse, tears burning in my eyes. I couldn't form a thought through the blinding, excruciating sting, ache, and throb that filled every part of my existence.

It was everywhere, and I couldn't escape, but I wanted to. I couldn't breathe, I was suffocating, and I dropped to my knees, my voice still coming out in strangled gasps and wails.

Suddenly I wasn't so sure I should have trusted a witch so easily or taken a potion that promised such intense pain because I was pretty sure I was dying, and I didn't even want to survive at that point.

Not even for my alphas.