

## Owned by the Alphas |

### The Balance

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We all spun to the noise, but I couldn't pinpoint exactly where that was.

The scream turned to a screech as my heart raced. I shivered, holding my arms as I squinted, trying to find out what the hell was going on.

The poison taste in my mouth came back, and I frowned.

"It's a vampire. I think." I shivered, and the alphas looked at me, confused.

"How do you know?"

"I don't know, it's like I can taste it when they are around. I can taste it now."

"Then they are the ones who pissed the witches off," Derik realized.

"Good. Hopefully it was Silas. Then they'll get rid of him for us." Kai laughed, turning to carry on.

We followed as Brax looked over me with a frown. "My shadows don't whisper to me like that," he said. "Yours are getting stronger. That's a strong whisper for being here."

I shrugged. "Isn't that a good thing?" I asked, following him up more pointy rocks.

"Hope so," he whispered, then kept climbing.

I shook it off; I couldn't do anything about it now.

Whatever the vampire had done to piss off the witches must have been decent enough because we were all getting punished.

The wind was still getting stronger, the snow was treacherous, and my human body was almost at its limit.

I wanted to be strong and get through it, but there was only so much I could physically do, and with the magic of the alphas getting weaker, they were slowing down too.

Nowhere near as much as I was, but it was enough that I noticed.

When we finally made it to camp, it was barely a reprieve. We were still being punished. There was no hot soup. Not big hut. Just a tiny triangle hut that had open flaps and one fur blanket.

I shivered and hobbled toward it. My feet were sore, my legs freezing and numb.

There was snow covering the tiny ledge, even smaller than last time, and I forced my eyes away from the edge so I couldn't look down, or I'd never get any sleep.

I couldn't see much in front of me, that was scary enough. Kai's hand came through mine and he dragged me toward the hut, pushing me inside and shrugging out of his clothes.

I wiped the wet snow off my face and hugged my body, still shivering.

"Fuck this shit," Kai growled, hauling me into him.

I sighed at the heat that radiated off him and seeped beneath my skin, defrosting me slowly. Derik and Brax ducked in then, pulling off their wet clothes too. I smiled, my eyes raking over them both appreciatively.

"Stop that, beautiful. Tonight we stay alert—and alive," Derik ordered, eyeing Brax and Kai, who nodded.

"Why? Aren't we safe here?" I asked.

Derik hesitated, and my heart rate sped up.

"We'll keep you safe," Kai tried.

"From what?" I shivered, my body trembling as it tried to keep the warmth, but it was just so cold.

"The vampire that we heard could still be out there, trying to get out of whatever torment it is being put through. Not to mention the distraction it might

be. We have to be careful. I'll take first watch," Derik said, going to leave the tent.

"Wait, you'll freeze to death." I tried to stop him, but he just grinned.

"We're wolves, beautiful. We run hot. Until tomorrow when we leave, we'll be able to keep you warm," he said, then left, tying the hut shut as tight as it would go.

I blew out a cold breath, trying to get closer to Kai, but I was already as close as I could be.

"Take your dress off, it'll help you get warmer quicker," Brax said, grabbing the blanket.

I peeled off my dress, stumbling a little, needing their help with the bits of it, my fingers still frozen.

I left my panties on, then lay down on the bottom of the hut, which was lined in a lumpy piece of leather that was better than the snow but still freezing.

My teeth started chattering, and I couldn't stop them.

"They know I'm human, right?" I asked.

My shadows stirred inside me then as if to remind me I wasn't completely. They swirled inside my body, but they were light, like a feather's touch, but they spread enough warmth that I let out a sigh.

The hut went silent. I peeled an eye open at Brax and Kai kneeling next to me, frowning between me and each other.

"You just used your shadows," Brax said, his voice and eyes wary.

"Yeah. Can you hurry up and get down here, please?"

I shivered again, choosing to ignore their worried glances and "What the fuck" comments in their heads.

Kai shrugged out of his pants, then moved up against me. I curled into him, shaking as my body tried to regulate. Then Brax was there behind me, laying the throw over us.

With my shadows, their body heat, and the blanket, I managed to stop shivering, but it was still cold.

“Will you still want me when I have frostbite on my nipples?” I asked through a dry laugh.

Kai chuckled and kissed my forehead. “You know we will,” he said, and I grinned against his pec, blowing on my icy fingers, my eyes closed.

Brax’s arm was over my waist, our legs all entwined, and eventually I was warm enough to fall asleep, but it was restless.

The wind was so strong, howling and crying all night, shaking the hut with a fierceness that had me waking up constantly. Derik came in a while later and switched with Kai.

The blizzard kept going.

Then it was Brax’s turn.

“Are we staying while the storm is here?” I asked, not sure what time of the day it was or how long it had been, but I was starving and impatient.

Derik hesitated before he nodded.

“I told you before, once we leave here, we have no magic. We’ll be vulnerable like you are. No shifting, and we won’t be able to protect you. We’re making sure they aren’t waiting for that.”

“But the witches?”

“Are only allowed to maintain the balance, not interfere. What happens to one, happens to all here. So either it hasn’t killed whoever pissed them off or the vampires purposely did this, came up with bad intentions knowing we would be vulnerable and they would be able to stall long enough,” Derik explained, and I gulped.

“So we’re just going to sit here and wait?”

My alphas looked at each other before Brax nodded. “It’s safer.”

I sighed. Maybe it was, but I couldn't survive on no food like they could. There was water in the hut, the witches had granted that reprieve, but it wasn't enough to stop my stomach rumbling.

"Can you still taste the vampire?" Brax asked, and I shook my head.

"Not since we heard it ages ago," I said, and Brax nodded, stuck in his own head. I didn't pry.

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The storm finally cleared after what felt like hours, and even then it wasn't completely gone, it was just less.

We dressed in our soggy clothes and climbed from the hut. It was already warmer, a hint of sun trying to break through the snow.

I sucked in the fresh air, looking around at all the snow. It had covered everything. It was kind of beautiful when it wasn't so deadly.

I let out my breath and turned to the alphas, who were all frowning. A queasiness settled in my stomach, filtering weakly through the link that was barely there.

"What's wrong?" I asked, and Brax stood up, holding his hips.

"Being separated from our wolf is hard. A little dangerous," he admitted, and I felt the fear in him.

"How dangerous?" I demanded.

"If we're separated for too long then we die," Kai said, not sugarcoating it, before grunting and shaking out the headache that pierced my brain and his.

"This link has its downsides," I murmured, holding my stomach as it intensified.

Derik frowned at the movement, then stood up, somehow separating me a little further from the link. It was the only magic we had now, and even then, it was minimal.

"We should get going. We have no idea how much time has passed, and we need to get back," Derik said, and headed off up the snowy, never-ending hill.

At least the rocks were gone.

I followed him, just as anxious to get back. The alphas kept pace with me this time, and I tried to keep my distance. The closer I was, the more I felt their nausea and headaches. They were horrible.

We hadn't been moving long before Brax was vomiting. He wiped his mouth and swore under his breath, scooping up some snow before spitting it out.

"Are the vampires going to be like this too?" I wondered, hating the idea of facing them when the alphas were feeling so human.

"They will. Their body will function as a human and not run on blood like normal. It makes them sick too. We should be better by the Summit," Kai said, refusing to show any of the weakness I knew he was feeling.

I looked over at Derik for a split second, right before the hill abruptly stopped, opening up to a huge clearing on the Summit, coming out of nowhere.

I sucked in a breath and stopped behind Derik, who straightened his spine.

The vampires were already there.

They looked less intimidating too, and I wasn't sure whether I was meant to be reassured by that or not because they looked pissed about it.

I walked forward between the triangle of my alphas surrounding me, keeping my head down, refusing to inspect the vampires like I so badly wanted to.

They stood in a straight, two-row formation. They all wore red robes, all looked forward at the rock barrier that separated the sides of the Summit.

"Where are the witches?" I whispered.

"They're here. You won't see them unless you're about to die. They hide from our human sight up here," Brax whispered.

"I can feel them," I whispered back, the weight of magic in my shadows making them—and me—dizzy and lightheaded.

Brax frowned and looked around as if he should feel something but couldn't. "You shouldn't be able to."

I shrugged and kept walking, until we were facing the vampires on our side of the Summit.

Silas stepped forward and put his hand on a stone platform like the ones I had taken my oath at on the blood moon. Derik did the same on our side.

They both grimaced as they cut their palms open and placed the blood side on the stone.

A shimmering sheen, not unlike the portal we had come through, dropped between the sides.

“The blood offering has been accepted. Our intentions have been read as pure,” Kai explained, and I swallowed, looking up.

Silas’s eyes snapped to mine the second the veil between the sides dropped, and I knew what it meant. He had felt the link. I swallowed hard, all of their eyes falling on me, the glares making my heart race, my palms clammy.

“You linked yourself to the winter born?” Silas demanded, and the eleven other vampires behind him looked like they were each choosing which part of me they were going to tear off first.

Silas pinned me with a hard stare, and I knew he was seeing my death, wishing for it, promising me it would hurt.

A lot.