

Chapter Three

“Favor? Desmond, I’m already doing you a favor. It’s not good to owe a witch,” Perrine teased lightly, though her eyes shone both with mild curiosity and seriousness.

“Let’s call it more of an arrangement then. I’ll have some of my boys take down a gator for you and bring it to the voodoo shop if you’ll do this for me.”

The witch seemed to think the offer over, her singular eye focused on the ground as she thought while the glass one rolled lazily in its socket to stare directly at him. He shivered and quickly looked away.

“Alright. I do this favor, you bring me the gator. Now. What is it you need, cher?”

Desmond breathed a sigh of relief as Perrine agreed and he quickly told her about Marceline.

“Look. I know it’s stupid that I’m suddenly worked up over her. I mean, she’s right. She’s taken care of herself for years without me, but—“

“But you’re neurotic and anxiety prone and she’s your girl. I get it, Desmond. I’ll keep an eye on votre cher Marceline. I think she is right in saying Ramson won’t hurt her. He hasn’t yet, why would he now?”

Desmond himself didn’t have an answer for her. Part of him wondered if his unease at leaving her alone stemmed solely from the fact that she was his. He was jealous of the very idea that Ramson could do something to her, knowing Perrine would be close at hand in case something did happen made it easier for him to relax.

“Thanks, Perrine.”

The witch only nodded as she pushed past him, humming some jazz tune or another, not even bothering to wave in departure.

As soon as he was done talking with Perrine, Desmond closed his eyes. Testosterone raged through him to the point he was starting to feel light-headed with how aggressive his beast spirit fought to take control of their body. It would do good to blow off some steam. As a wolf, he’d be distracted enough to leave Marceline behind. Sighing softly, he reached internally into himself until he found the heart of the wild presence he harbored deep inside.

Primal instincts seeped deep into his bones until they began to shift and slide out of one joint or socket and into a different one. His ribcage elongated and expanded along with his lungs, as air suddenly tasted of muddy earth and swamp. It tasted of home on his tongue. His senses became alive until he could hear the world turning and smell the different individuals that had walked by in the past few hours. Finally, fur, the color of ash and soot, sprouted all along his body and his beast spirit, his wolf, pressed in on his mind, surrounding him in the savageness of the beast.

A howl rose up deep from the pit of his stomach, up through his chest and out past his snout as he threw back his head. As the sound of his howl echoed, thoughts of Marceline were pushed to the back of his mind. In the distance, a howl responded to his own and then another and another, until the song of his pack, though distant, surrounded him. While he had no desire to join them, he sprinted through the swampy marshland, taking the long, scenic route home, allowing their howls to carry him.

He remembered her running beside him like this. Playful and teasing. She was always so full of life, so vibrant, as her wolf. As the wind whistled through his sensitive ear fur, he could almost pretend that it was the sound of wind rustling the fur of another wolf running beside him. Marceline's wolf. A soft whine of satisfaction rose in his throat at the thought.

The run had worked for a while, keeping his mind off Marceline. The long run home had satisfied his beast, but the second he was human once more, Desmond was a train wreck all over again. His previous euphoria was replaced once more with raging arousal and angry testosterone. What was worse, he'd accidentally left his cell phone on his nightstand. It flashed with 2 missed phone calls and nine unread text messages, all from various pack mates.

The cell phone held a message from Arin, reporting they'd accidentally killed both of the remaining blood enraged wolves and then one from Corwin apologizing for dealing a killing blow. A few messages from Perrine, reporting that Ramson had yet to stop by the cabaret and she had begun helping Marceline clean up the place. Everything else was mundane, simple pack stuff; things he could deal with at a later time.

It was time for a shower. Despite his run, Marceline's sweet scent still curled in his nose and his length bulged achingly against the zipper of his jeans from the memory of her touches. He hadn't allowed himself to think about her like this since she left. Seeing her had broken open the dam that he'd locked all of his emotions for her behind.

Shuddering, he shrugged out of his shirt, chest heaving slightly, though whether it was with pent up arousal or exertion, he didn't know. As he moved into his bathroom, his eyes, once more pale blue instead of striking silver, roamed over his form.

He had so many scars on his shoulders, his chest, his neck. Most prominent was the one on his nose. It'd been a battle to defend his role as alpha and his rival had crunched down on his snout. A shudder rolled down his spine at the remembrance. He remembered thinking once that he could never compare to his mate. Yet, she always assured his appearance came off just as attractive to her as her curvy form and flawless, ebony skin did to him.

Marceline...

Marceline...

His stomach clenched with heat and his groin begged for attention. He'd shower, take care of his problem, maybe cook something and then he'd bother Perrine.

His own musky arousal filled his nose, as he stepped into the shower, chasing away the sweet scent of his Marceline. As the water began to cascade over his body, he closed his eyes and conjured up Marceline in his mind's eyes. He could see her pouting lips and her perfect breasts. He could just make out her vo—.

His phone began to ring in the other room, the obnoxious, blaring sound of Scottish bagpipes cutting straight through the beginnings of his fantasy and over the hiss of the steaming shower water. He let it ring itself out, deciding the caller could wait a few minutes for him to finish.

Slowly, he closed his eyes again as his own, rough hand trailed across his scarred chest. Marceline's soft hand... Her soft, callous free, unwolf-like hands. He'd needed love from his mate for so long... A low whine rose in his throat as his beast spirit surfaced, panting heatedly in his mind.

The phone began ringing again, and his eyes snapped open.

"Can I have a moment to myself?" he growled out. Was he expecting the phone to cease its ringing? Honestly, he just wanted to jack off in peace, and yet, even before he had a chance to close his eyes a third time and create Marceline in his memory again, the phone blared once more.

Snarling in rage, he tore through the shower curtain, ripping it clean off the pole and grabbed his phone with every intention of throwing it against the wall. He would have, had he not caught Perrine's name scrolling across the screen.

His heart simultaneously dropped to the floor and leaped into his throat as it exploded in his chest.

"Perrine?" he answered.

Chapter Four

“Desmond!” the witch gasped. There were a swear, a low growl and a massive crash on the other end that already had Desmond hastily pulling back on his pants, forgoing even his boxers as he all but ran to his door.

“Perrine! What’s going on?”

“It’s Ramson! He...” another crash cut off what the witch was saying. “He’s gone crazy! I-I, I’m trying my best, but Marceline is... Mon ami, get out of here! Run, chere, run!”

“I’ll be there soon,” Desmond said, hanging up his phone and shifting into his wolf at the same time. He had run all of three steps in his human form before he’d fallen forward and started pelting down the road on all fours. His paws barely seemed to touch the ground, his ears were pinned flat to his head and his tail streamed out behind him. It was hard to picture that just an hour before he’d ran through the same marshland, marveling at its beauty and imagining running beside Marceline. Now, all it did was slow him down as his paws sucked into the peat.

How could he have left her? He knew! He had felt it deep inside that something would go wrong, hadn’t he? As he thundered along, his mind raged with all the thoughts of what someone like Ramson could do to someone like his Marceline.

He hurried down the asphalt of the road to the cabaret, stones and grit cutting into the fleshy pads on his paws, but he hardly noticed. The closer he came to the cabaret, the more he felt the familiar pull to his mate until it nearly bowled him over. He leaped through the broken front window and immediately launched himself at the pair of werewolves locked in a snarling ball of rage amidst the rubble that still remained from earlier.

Blood assaulted his nose and snarls roared deafeningly in his ears. Whines, high pitched and fearful, pulled at his heart strings. A massive red wolf he knew all too well to be Ramson had his teeth buried deep in the shoulder of the smaller silver wolf Desmond immediately recognized as his mate. To her credit, she thrashed about furiously to get him to let go.

Marceline.

Her blood splattered Ramson’s face. His chest. His paws.

Red welled heatedly before Desmond’s eyes as he charged headfirst into the red wolf’s side, a murderous snarl exploding from his throat.

Somewhere, in the far reaches of his mind where his human soul still listened, he was aware of Perrine rushing to Marceline's side and pulling her away. But even that small part of Desmond was wrenched forcefully into the heat of battle, as the rival alpha reared on his hind legs, paw slashing angrily at his snout.

A low, guttural snarl erupted from his throat again and yet just as he prepared a counter attack, Ramson seemed to see exactly who it was he fought. He took one quick, almost fearful look at him, and turned tail, darting away with an echoing howl.

Something was off about the other alpha, but Desmond had bigger problems to worry about. The second Ramson was out of sight, he turned around in search of Marceline and Perrine. With his heart in his chest, Desmond shifted into his human form and picked his way over to them.

"Marceline!" he cried out. Desmond found the proud, beautiful woman in the arms of the slender witch, Perrine, having once more turned back into a human.

Had the situation been any different than it was, Desmond would have found Marceline's naked form too much to bear, but the woman was incredibly battered and not in the best of shape.

He had to grit his teeth to keep bestial growls from rising, even in his human throat, from the sight of her blood splattered form.

"Perrine. Thank you... I must ask one more favor," he whispered, not trusting himself to speak with any sort of volume, lest he'd explode with the pent up rage that boiled just beneath the surface. He'd kill Ramson for this. He'd gut him like a fish and leave his entrails strung up in a tree for the crows to feed on. Right then, though, Marceline needed him.

"I can drive you home, cher," the witch whispered before Desmond even had a chance to ask.

He nodded and bent down, scooping Marceline up in his strong arms with a soft whine.

"Hey, Desmond," she whispered lightly, her dark eyes glazed over with pain. "You were right. He... He showed up acting all strange, then he smelled you and..." she trailed off, her eyes fluttering as she rested her head against his shoulder. "I hate it when you're right."

A soft whine escaped past her lips and her face scrunched up in pain. The display broke Desmond's heart and left his chest aching.

“I’m sorry, Marceline,” he whispered as he climbed into the back of Perrine’s truck, his mate clutched desperately in his arms. “I wish I was wrong. I would give anything to have been wrong.”

A small, sad smile crossed her face as she raised a finger and brushed it lightly against Desmond’s lips. The alpha responded with a soft, choked sounding whine. Gentle tears streamed down his face and splashed silently against her cheeks.

“It’s not your fault, Desmond. My mama always said I shouldn’t go rogue. She always said it’d end up getting me killed or hurt. There was one thing you were good at... Protecting me,” she whispered.

Desmond just shook his head, a few more silent tears sliding down his cheeks. His usually strong, dominating shoulders were hunched in defeat as he cradled Marceline and pressed soft kisses to her forehead while his hand patted her thick, curly hair. It would be impossible to forgive Ramson for this, but even more impossible to forgive himself. His eyes kept roaming over the poor woman’s shoulder. White bone gleamed starkly against her battered, coffee colored skin, leaving him feeling sick to his stomach. Had he been even seconds later, she’d have lost her entire arm, if not her life.

Marceline’s eyes kept rolling back into her skull, only to jerk back into focus as she fought to stay awake. Despite himself, Desmond couldn’t help but smile, though the expression did little to lighten his grieved eyes.

“Rest, sweetheart,” he whispered to her, the truck rumbling beneath them as Perrine drove down the street. “We’ll be home soon, and we’ll get you cleaned up. I promise. I’ve got you now.”

It didn’t take more encouraging on his part for her to give in and fall asleep, giving him time to think before they arrived back at his house.

Blood enraged wolves from Ramson’s pack had gone and destroyed Marceline’s territory. Possibly because they were searching for her and then he shows up and attacks her, but not until after he’d already been there. Perrine had time to alert him that something was wrong and the battle had only just begun by the time he got there. Something wasn’t right. The only people who could answer any of his questions, he either wanted to murder, were unconscious and naked in his arms or were driving the truck he rode in.