

## Chapter 0003

Genevieve:

I sat on the royal chair alongside my father, accompanied by his seer, as we faced the pack members gathered before us. A week has passed swiftly but I : s still not prepared for yet another humiliation.

All eyes were on me, murmurs swirling around like a whispered storm. I caught sight of my school bullies, pointing and snickering at the cancellation of my wedding.

Among them was Kit, a thorn in my side. For a cousin to betray her family like that, I expected her to look a little guilty. But she was proudly smirking and joking around with the pack members. The wound was still raw.

"Your highness, let's begin with the ceremony," the royal gamma, Kit's father and my uncle stepped forward, bowing to my father, his gaze ~~betraying~~ ~~ease~~ as he signaled for the guards to open the doors ~~participat~~.

The grand doors swung open, revealing an elderly man of around 80, clutching the head of some rogue wolf.

Gasps rippled through the hall at the stark age difference, followed by laughter from Kit and her friends.

"Your highness, I seek to wed this exquisite princess and pledge to protect her," the old man declared, making everyone laugh at the way he used the heavy words to impress my dad.

I gripped the fabric of my blue gown tightly, blinking back tears that threatened to spill.

"You're 80, Harriot. Why didn't you send your son?" my father's voice held a note of visible frustration, though he couldn't retract from the contest he had announced.

"My son? No, my lord. He seeks a mate with an active wolf. And I have no wish for him to perish protecting someone who can't even give him a powerful heir," the old man shook his head emphatically, prompting understanding among the assembly.

Nobody desired a bride without a wolf, especially one deemed a target of the evil forces coming after her.

"Very well, that's just an ordinary wolf. Anyone could kill it," my father dismissed him with a wave of his hand, and the old man retreated into the crowd.

"I think Uncle Bernard should give it a thought. After all, who'd go slayin' a dragon for her?" Kit's laughter echoed through the crowd, drawing chuckles from those around her as she sauntered over to join me on her chair, her little minions trailing behind, their mockery ringing in my ears.

The next contender arrived, a wild wolf in tow. I recognized him—rumors of his mistreatment of his twenty concubines preceded him.

Tension coiled within me as I glanced between him and my father, a silent plea in my eyes. He bowed before my father, who let out a weary sigh.

"Brother, seems they're all cut from the same cloth. Looks like we're left with no choice but to select those with even remotely dangerous beasts," Mr. Browning murmured in my father's ear.

"But how can I hand over my daughter to a man like him? With twenty others waiting for his attention, how could he possibly protect her when he's busy with his other women?" My father's concern was valid.

And the way that man leered at me from across the room sent shivers down my spine, lling me with dread at the thought of being in his grasp.

"She thought charming nights would come slayin' for her," my auntsnickered, clasping her daughter's hand. Kit returned the same mocking grin before casting a dramatic pout in my direction.

At this point, I couldn't fathom why I was subjected to such ridicule.

"I really think you should settle for one of these uncles. I don't think anyone other than them wants you," Kit snickered in my ear, prompting tears to well up in my eyes.

I kept my chin held high, but inside, I was shattered.

"What a pity! I don't even think she is worth protecting at this point," a voice from the crowd remarked, and I tried to rise and escape to my room as I had had enough. Yet, I couldn't even muster the strength to stand before my father grasped my arm, guiding me back into my seat.

"Daddy! Can't you see they're all laughing at me? No one wants me. Please, just let me go," I whimpered, swallowing back tears, unwilling to succumb to ugly crying in front of those who despised me anyway.

"You're not leaving until you've secured four mates who can keep you safe," my father hissed, his grip on my wrist leaving bruises.

"The guards can protect me," I protested.

"Huh! As if they don't have other duties. If someone shows up here slaying monsters, I'd gladly give your hand to them in marriage. If they can handle a monster, they can surely keep you safe," my father muttered before gesturing to the royal beta to bring in the next contender.

"Tsk Tsk Tsk! Lost your virginity to an alpha. Now you'll be spreading your legs for some old dudes with diseases," Kit whispered, stiing her laughter.

I wanted to retort, but her mother's watchful gaze silenced me. She'd never allow me to so much as glare at her daughter.

It pained me to be treated this way. My father seemed indierent to the laughter echoing around me, his stubbornness won.

"Your highness!" a man stumbled in, holding the head of a dog, his frail form and unkempt appearance drawing disgusted looks from the crowd.

"This one seems like a choice, don't you think?" Kit chuckled, making me close my eyes and turn my head away.

"I'd like to make her my bitch!" the man slurred, con rming everyone's suspicions that he was heavily intoxicated.

"Throw him out!" my father bellowed, his patience wearing thin.

He turned to me, ~~hijers~~ digging into my skin as he kept holding my arm. "If no one steps forward to claim you today, I might as well end you myself. What a disgrace you are. You, an alpha King's daughter, and yet no one wants you."

I'd heard such cruel words before, and usually, they'd reduce me to tears. But now, witheveryone's eyes xed on me, I struggled to hold back the ood of tears threatening to spill.

"I suggest we consider the earlier contenders. The eighty-year-old and the one with concubines. Even the one who slayed the dog is not that bad," Mr. Browning nearly chuckled at his own joke, until my father's stern gaze silenced him.

"You are joking because you have a daughter like Kit," my father's words pierced through me, highlighting my unimportance in Kit's presence.

"That's why I think you should settle for these men. It is not like she is my daughter and alphas will cheat on their mates for her," the fact that my uncle thought Ron cheating on me with his daughter was something to be proud of really explained what mentality they had.

"Ouch! I wonder why everyone favors me over you!" Kit pouted, her friends joining in her laughter.

"I think I could a better match than her, and I'm sixty years old," a woman quipped, eliciting laughter from the crowd.

My breathing grew shallow, my composure slipping away. Unable to bear it any longer, I succumbed to tears, burying my face in my hands.

"Aw, someone please just accept her," a sympathetic voice called out from the crowd, though I felt nothing but shame at my display of vulnerability.

"You're such an embarrassment. Stop hiding your face. Let them see how ugly you look when you cry," my father seized my hands, forcibly uncovering my tear-stained face.

Now exposed, I watched as the laughter and mockery intensified, each gesture and taunt driving the dagger deeper into my already wounded heart.

"Please, just let me go. It's clear nobody wants me," I pleaded with my father, who loomed over me with a scowl, his gaze sharp as daggers.

"You should consider the older men," the crowd chimed in, attempting to persuade my father, while I shook my head frantically, silently pleading with him through my eyes.

"As soon as you're gone, I'll be known as the Alpha King's niece. Whoever marries me will ascend to the throne. I can't wait to show you how dashing my mate will be—," Kit yammered on, her giggles trailing o as the royal doors swung open, engulfing the room in silence once more.

But this time, the man who strode in, carrying the ~~dragony~~ ~~was~~ no ordinary suitor. He was a god among men.

Standing over 6 feet 7 inches tall, he commanded attention as he dropped the bloody trophy at my father's feet, sending a shiver through the crowd.

"I am Alpha Bellamy Holmes of The Bloody Claws Pack. I wish to wed your daughter and make her my luna," his voice resonated deep and husky, his gaze locked onto mine, as if daring my father to deny him, promising to steal me away if he did.

My father's gaze darted between us, mirroring my own shock. I couldn't tear my eyes away from his mesmerizing gaze, even as I noticed the torn shirt, evidence of his battle with the dragon. The pack members stared wide-eyed, sensing the gravity of the moment. He was extremely good looking. His gray eyes were narrowed and gazing at us through his eyebrows. His light blond hair was messy and sweat was dripping o every strand.

"Do you understand what you're getting yourself into?" my father inquired, voicing the confusion I shared as to why a young alpha would risk his life to protect me.

"That I will be spending the rest of my life shielding and taking care of the gorgeous she-wolf in front of me?" his voice was giving me shivers down my spine. And the way he addressed me left me blushing hard.

"Then—aye! I know what I am signing up for," the determination to be my savior was enriched in his voice.