

Traded To The Lycan King by MG Wattsons

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Chapter 11

Penny leads me away from the training pitch where I can hear the warriors yell and grunts as they spar. I look over my shoulder as it grows more distant and I frown to myself, confused. I know what it sounds like when warriors train, what a pitch looks like, and that was definitely it. So if I'm supposed to be training, why the hell are we going the opposite way?

My stomach churns and realization dawns. Maybe Merikh isn't ready for his pack to meet me yet. Perhaps he fears they will find me weak and unworthy, as I originally thought. Words are empty when there is no action to back them and while He says it's me he wants as his Luna, he sure has done an awful lot of making it feel the opposite.

"So that's the training arena behind us," Penny says, as if she can read my mind. "You'll be in there once your leg heals. It's really only used for sparring with the uppers."

"I see," I mumble, my eyes scanning the surrounding area.

This pack is massive, less concise than I expected. The pack house, which is the only place I've actually been, is the closest to the water's edge, looking over it like a proud parent. The rest of the pack? Nearly every building has its own average of fresh grass and trees. There are a few tall buildings but most are single story making it feel...well a lot like I've stepped into a fairytale village.

"This is what we call Old Town." She says, spinning with her arms out like it's a marvel even to her.

"So I assume there is a new town?" I ask, and she laughs.

"We have a more modern section, yes. But this...this is our slice of the past and it's really our senior pack members' village. The hustle and bustle of city life is that way." she points to my right and I can see the way the buildings change and the sea of people.

"And so we are going....?"

“Ah. Yeah. Sorry. We are going to the lake.” She grins.

“The lake?”

“Mmhmm, the first order of business is a gentle walk.”

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My brow is already sweating and my leg aching as we walk to the place I’m supposed to start my walk. How damn ironic that the walk there may kill me before I get the chance to start.

“Okay.” I try to remain positive. I mean, what kind of training did I expect with a bum leg, really?

I am so focused on my steps and reminding myself that I’ve had worse pain, worked harder when I felt way worse. I can do this.

When we get there, Penny spins to face me. She gives me an awkward fake curtsey with a wink and then flounces off, leaving me behind.

“Wait!” I call after her. “What the hell am I supposed to do now?”

She lifts her hands in a shrug as I frown at her back. Am I just supposed to wait here? Or start my walk on my

own? This is the first time I am outside in the pack and she expects me to just find my way back to the pack

house? If I’m lucky, I will find my way back before dinner.

I groan in frustration before exhaling a huff of air and turning to look at the water.

“Which way would you like to go first?” I hear Merikh say from behind me. I look over my shoulder, a little

shocked to see him.

“First?” I squeak out.

The thought of walking much more tires me out. My leg is aching and though I feel stronger than I have in years, but the pain is draining. He chuckles as he comes up to my side.

“Training is for the entire day,” He says, like the answer was so obvious. My eyes slide down to my throbbing leg and I muster a fake smile.

“Of course, let’s go.” I say, brushing past him, losing my balance for a moment before I clear my throat and straighten myself up.

Merikh seems to saunter behind me, either trying to keep from laughing at me or he is worried I will try to turn around and run. I push on for a little while; the pain creeping up my thigh and into my pelvis before my side aches and I realize not only is my injury pretty severe, so is my lack of fitness.

“Stop,” he says finally, his voice clipped and an edge to it. I frown, disappointed as I turn to look at him and he tilts his head, looking me over from top to bottom. “How bad does it hurt?”

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“It’s fine,” I assure him, but he frowns.

“I do not tolerate lies. In fact, I punish for them.” He steps forward and my eyes grow wide at the simmer of anger I see there.

“I—

I’m sorry. It’s a habit...I didn’t mean to lie. I’m just used to having to work through my pain.” I admit, as he watches me closely. Merikh sighs, his anger melting as he shakes his head.

“Not here, not with me. If you feel pain, I want to know. I care about your well being. Have I not made that clear?”

“I’m sorry.” I mutter.

“Stop apologizing and be honest. How does it feel?”

“It hurts.” I whisper. “Walking is still...hard.”

“Good thing we won’t be walking for training today.” He says, passing me and taking the lead. I scrunch my nose,

confused.

“Then what kind of training will we be doing?” I call to his back, but it falls on deaf ears as I struggle to catch up with him as the dirt grows to sand and we trudge to the waterline. Merikh stands there, his eyes watching me as I stumble next to him, my breathing ragged and sweat dripping down my cheek. It’s hot as heck here in the sand.

“Take off your brace,” he says, pointing to the contraption at my hip that runs down my outer legs to just below my knee. I wince at the thought of losing my crutch, but I quickly unlatch the buckles and velcro relying heavily on my other leg for support.

“Okay, now what?” I ask, and he smirks.

“Now you swim.”

My eyes nearly bulge from my face, my mouth falling open to protest, but nothing comes out. I don’t know how to swim. Hell, I swear I told him I’ve never even had a bath. But now he expects me to just...wade into the dark unknown and prove I can swim? What monsters lurk in the water that I can’t see? Aren’t there all kinds of fish that can bite me?

“Um.” I tilt my head and look at him, then down at myself. “I don’t think Penny gave me the appropriate clothing for swimming...” I try to reason with him, but he simply smirks, only pointing at the water like he demands me to go in like this.

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I whine as I slide my shoes off, wincing as a jolt of pain travels up my leg and to my chest, but I bite it back, refusing to let him see me as any weaker than I’m certain he thinks I am. My bare feet touch the water and a shiver runs through my body as a squeal

arms and he trudges into the rips from my lips. The next thing I know I am scooped up in Merikh’s powerful

*arms and he trudges into the water as I cling to his n*ck, not wanting to touch the frigid water with anything more than my feet.*

My hair flies into my face as my heart soars to my throat and fear grips me. I am floating through the air, hitting the cold water first with a sharp inhale before I am plunged under into the darkness of the water.

my

y back

I flail as best as I can, my legs tearing through the icy waves and my arms reach for anything to help me get my head above the water. The water muffles his laughter, but I know exactly what it is which only fuels my anger as I surface and squeal.

*“Just stand,” he says with a smug look and I go still. My feet hit the ground, my b*dy settling and going upright as I balance easily on my good leg and I find my center. My eyes find his not bothering to hide my scowl when I look at him and his eyes lock on mine, looking pleased.*

“I almost drowned.” I mutter, and he shakes his head.

“You are standing just fine.”

“I’ve never been in water like this before!” I squeal, my anger and embarrassment taking over my thoughts as my wolf simmers below the surface. Merikh wades closer to me, stopping just before touching me.

“Your wolf is stronger now that you are here. It is okay to trust her, rely on her as she continues to grow and heal with you.”

“It’s not her I am having trust issues with,” I mutter and his lips twitch, trying to hide yet another smile.

“How does the water feel?” he asks, tilting his head, watching me curiously. I give him a side eye before looking around.

“Uh, wet...?” I say and he waits for more from me. “And cold. Why is it so cold?”

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"Do you like it?"

*"No." I bite out as a shiver runs through my b*dy. It grips me tight, making it nearly impossible to keep my balance as I lean forward and into his warmth, my wolf and b*dy seeking the heat he seems to radiate. Lycan's must just run much warmer than werewolves. And that is saying something. We run damn hot. His chest rumbles*

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with a quiet laugh and I look up to see him shaking his head.

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*"You are becoming more comfortable," he says finally, smiling down at me. I don't want to admit it, but yes, longer I remain in the water, the more my b*dy adjusts to the temperature and I become comfortable. My leg's throbbing has reduced more to a whisper of pain.*

"It feels better on my leg, the lack of pressure."

"Now," he says, taking a slight step back and to my side. He grabs hold of my hand, and I swallow roughly as he gives it a squeeze. "We will walk in the water to help you strengthen your leg again. Each day, we will move closer to the shore until you can walk on your own."

"How long do you think that will take?" I ask curiously, and he shrugs.

"A typical werewolf? Maybe a week or two. With you I expected it being much longer, but you seem to be getting stronger relatively fast now that you are here." I know it is a statement, but I can hear the question in his voice, the way he is saying it, in hopes I might have some insight to offer.

"Is that because I am mated to you?" I ask him and he hums in thought.

"Could be. But we aren't fully mated. We have accepted each other, but the mate bond hasn't been fully..."

"We haven't marked each other yet, hmm." I finish for him in thought. I furrow my brow, my brain running rampant with thoughts, and then it hits me. Maybe it's not just the bond, perhaps there is something here that is making me grow stronger or...

"You are thinking again," he mutters and I frown, stopping as I look up at him.

"Do you think...I mean, I don't see why they would...no..." I fumble through the awful thoughts. As much as I hate Leslie and she hated me, she couldn't have...no, she wouldn't have poisoned me all this time...would she?

"You think Leslie was poisoning you?" He asks, no judgment on his face as he watches me curiously.

"I mean...I do feel better than I have since I can remember...is it possible...do you think?"

Merikh shrugs.

"Possible? Yes. Likely? Maybe. The question now would be, why did she feel she had to keep you weak? Any thoughts on that?"

Chapter 12

It's been a week already and every day has been the same routine. Wake up, grab something to eat on the way out and walk with Merikh. My healing is insanely fast and I am more convinced every day that Leslie or someone at the pack was keeping me weak. My wolf is more alert, and like me, she craves being near Merikh more and more every day.

Not once has he let go of my hand when we walk in the water and even though we often walk in silence, it's comfortable and occasionally he will flirt with me. Or rather, he tries to flirt with me with a gentle push or sweet words that make me blush and him smile. I wish I could spend more time with him, eat dinner or watch a movie like we did the one time, but Hayes usually rushes him away to do something or meet with a pack mate.

*"I can't believe he still hasn't introduced you to the pack yet," Penny grumbles as she turns my bed down for the night. A habit she is loving doing while I stand by awkwardly and wait to just crawl my sore b*dy into bed.*

"We aren't marked yet," I remind her and she frowns at me.

"An acceptance is like an engagement ring, Cole.

My heart stops and I inhale sharply as she says the nickname I nearly forgot. Or rather I have tried to forget along with the person who called me by that name. It still hurts, it feels like it will always hurt.

"Don't call me that," I snap and Penny freezes, her eyes sliding to gauge my reaction before she softens and

nods.

"I'm sorry, Luna. Sometimes I forget my place and I just sort of "

"You don't have to call me Luna, but just...you can;t call me that name...please,"

"Of course." She says, walking over to me. "I'm sorry,"

"It's okay," I sigh, "you didn't know. How could you?" Then I think for a minute and I smile. "Any nickname you want but not that,"

"Hmm...I'll think of one." She winks. "Now you should get some rest. You look exhausted."

"Ugh, thank you." I murmur, crawling into the bed as she walks to the window and closes it.

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"Could you leave it open...?" I ask her and she looks conflicted before she gives me a soft smile and nods, opening it back up.

"Good night, Luna."

I settle into my warm blankets, a smile on my lips as I know a good night's sleep is coming. I've had amazing, rejuvenating sleep every night since training started, and to say sleeping is now one of my favorite things would be an under

statement. My eyes drift closed and for a moment I am washed over with darkness. Until a green light enters my eyesight and I find myself unable to look away.

It feels like I am falling, my body light and chilled as suddenly I am dropped in a swamp. The muck comes up to my thighs and I grunt as I try to release myself from it, fighting with every ounce of my body as I try to pull myself out with my hands, only to fall forward. The muck inches toward my mouth as the hair on my neck rises in panic. I am going to drown here. And I don't even know where here is.

Then hands swoop me up, and I am freed, tucked into a warm embrace as the person runs with me, their hood up over their face as they look over their shoulder repeatedly. I try to speak, but nothing seems to come out, not until the woman stops and sets me down. I am small now, no longer my usual height but that of a child, and the hooded figure kneels before me, pulling off their hood.

The woman's blonde hair stands out in the dark, and her worried eyes meet mine. As I try to figure out who she is, why she is in my dream and then I feel it. The draw to her in my chest, the pain in my heart as she cups my cheek with a shuddered breath.

"Do not follow me, my little water bug.

"Mom..." I whisper, and she gives me a reassuring smile.

"Please.... stay and wait. He will be here soon."

Then she rushes off.

"Who?!" I cry out, chasing after her, breaking through the thick brush and sloshing through the soggy earth. "Mom! Come back! Wait! Please!"

The green light is back, a glowing little orb that seems to guide me through this dream state, pulling me in a different direction. I stay rooted where I am. Mom said to wait here. She said he would be here soon. Without knowing who he even is, I know I want to meet him, to see him. But that light grows brighter, burning my eyes the longer I remain still before it flies at my face, pestering me like a mosquito on a warm summer's eve.

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I swat at it, annoyed that it won't leave me, and as I hit it, my hand sparks and a wave of electricity shoots through me painfully. I cry out, trying to understand what the hell is happening as it comes for me again, and suddenly I am running from the menacing orb that is attacking me. It hums in a high-

pitched tune, making my ears ring, and I feel so utterly alone and desolate as I turn and run for

my life.

The moon highlights the darkness of the water to my left as I weigh my options. Can I lose this orb in the water? My stomach churns at the thought of being in the dark water alone with no idea how to swim, but I cut toward it, splashing through it until I fall forward and drop under the water.

I plunge into silence, one that calms me, and I allow myself the moment before I open my eyes and see the orb just above me. It dances over the rippling surface, like a bee trying to find the right flower to pollinate, and then it lunges

for my face. All the air in my lungs bubbles out as I try to push myself deeper, but the orb stops short of my nose.

"Find her," a voice seems to come from everywhere around me.

My wolf whining in the back of my mind, trying to tell me something, warn me, but I am too lost in the meaning

of the voice in the water. "Find her before it is too late. She needs you, Colette."

Then the orb shoots off and I break through the surface, dazed as I gasp for air. I rush to the water's edge, coughing and shivering as I try to figure out what I need to do next. Nothing makes sense, everything feels rushed and discomfited as I try to force coherent thoughts to my brain. Then I see her, my mother, running for her life and looking over her shoulders.

"Mom!" I cry out once more, my voice cracking with emotion as I watch her look back at me and then she speeds up, pushing herself to move further away as tears well in my eyes and I try to catch her. Why is she running from me? Doesn't she love me? Doesn't she want me?

“Wait!” I scream after her, fighting against the wetness in my clothes that tries to restrict me as I run after her.

I chase her for minutes; her looking back at me with heartache in her eyes as she dodges tree branches and leaps over roots that seem to claw at me, dragging me down and helping her escape me.

My leg tingles as a branch tangles around my arm and I grow frantic, fear tearing at my chest as I think about losing her. She told me to wait, but I can't. I can see the distress in her and feel it as she slowly disappears and then she stops. My mother turns to face me, standing just far enough away that it feels so far, but I can make it, if I can only break free of these trees.

I growl as I rely on my wolf's strength for the first time, and I break free, sprinting forward. Victory is just a few

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yards away as my mother remains still, as if she is waiting for me, like she truly wanted me to come for her all along.

“Colette,” I hear my name, but it is distant, muffled as though I am under the water again, unable to distinguish who it is calling to me..

*My mom beckons for me with her hand, motioning for me to come closer to come to her and I take a step forward, only for a root to grab my leg. It winds up my b*dy, crossing over my chest and pulling me back against a trunk, holding me there.*

“Mom!” I scream, watching as she takes a small step toward me, only to stop as she screams out in pain and falls to her knees before me. My vision goes static for a moment and a vibration seems to speak to my wolf, making it whine and pace. Then I feel the heat in my ear.

“Colette, I need you to listen to me,” Merikh's voice breaks into my mind. “Focus on my voice, little mate.”

I whimper as a spear breaks through my mother's chest, and she cries out my name. I fight as hard as I can; the branches growing tighter.

*"No! NO!" I thrash, not caring about the pain that seems to grow more prominent in my leg and spreads through the rest of my b*dy. "Look at me, Mom. It's okay, you are going to be okay..." I lie and whimper as she slumps forward and then her b*dy disappears.*

*Gone in a second and I blink, my tears ceasing as I stare at the figures before me with red eyes. They watch me, my b*dy shivering despite the warmth at my back.*

"Are you back?" Merikh whispers. "Are you with me?" I crumble in his arms, my head pounding and my leg searing in pain as he takes a step back, dragging me along with him. He lifts me into his arms, and I see shadows on either side of us stepping forward.

"Kill them if they step a damn foot over that line." He growls as he carries me away quickly.

"Merikh," I croak, my voice raw and painful. "What happened?"

"I was hoping you could tell me." He answers in a clipped tone.

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Merikh POV

Colette shivers as I set her on the bed, rushing around to grab her dry clothes and a towel. She is catatonic, sitting on the edge, staring out the window. I don't know how to help her, how to comfort her as I wrap the fluffy white towel around her and rub it over her arms. Not once does she acknowledge I am touching her, or even near her.

"Colette," I say, trying to get her to wake up from this shell shock. But she doesn't move, not a damn inch as she stares into a void beyond me. My lycan whines in my head, teetering between anger and worry as I fight to control my own emotions.

"Colette," I growl, my voice is louder, more stern as she just stares into nothing, past my head. My fingers tickle along her jawbone, trying to force her to look up at me. She follows my movements, but her eyes remain unfocused. Worr

y prickles

*at my n*ck and anger rises, boiling over when she turns her head away from me.*

“Colette!” I scream, using my alpha voice to command her back to the present . She jumps in fear, a gasp escaping her lips as looks at me completely broken. I have no idea what happened in her head, what lead her to run away, to leave me, but whatever it was, it fucked her up good.

***Merikh,” she whimpers, her voice small and cracking with emotion. Shit, I may have been better off with her*

being lost in her own head rather than watching her hurt like this.

“What were you thinking?” I ask her, my voice clipped.

“I wasn’t-”

“Clearly not. You made me a promise. We had an agreement. We are mates now. You can not escape it. Yet I find you at the border edge, trying to break free of Percy and Penny when they tried to stop you. Not to mention you. tried to fight me! Your Alpha!”

My anger is unreasonable and I know I should step back and give her space, but my lycan’s intense emotions are melding with mine and the strength of the second chance

mate bond only grows stronger every day I am near her. The draw to her is becoming mind numbing and the thought she would leave me. That she might have wanted to escape me and her promise. Like Lauren tried to...

“I’m sorry,” she whispers and I sneer at her, I’m a wreck and feel like I’m losing control as I tear away from her

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*and fly out the door ready to f**king tear Penny and Percy apart for letting her get so far. I stop at the doorjamb,*

exhaling sharply.

“Get changed. I will be back.” I mutter as I slam out of the room and down the hall.

As expected, I find Percy and Penny in my office waiting for me, along with Hayes. All of them wearing sullen looks on their faces as the door crashes open and I pace to the massive window overlooking the lake where I spotted her.

*The very f**king spot I noticed her splashing into the water with that f**king green orb looming over her frantic movements. The thoughts of it have my heckles rising as I growl in my chest and shake my head, trying to rid myself of the anger that just seems to loom.*

“Where the FUCK were you two?” I hiss, whipping around to face them, figuring concentrating my anger on a source other than Colette might be best.

“She was sleeping,” Penny says like it matters.

“Oh, so she is less important to me—to the pack—when she is sleeping?” I grit out. Her eyebrows shoot up in shock and her mouth falls open to retort, but Percy beats her to it.

“That’s not what she meant,” Percy says,

*“Shut up, Percy,” I shoot him a scowl and he swallows, down casting his eyes.
“You have one job. The both of you. What is your f**king job?”*

“Protect her.” They say in unison, looking at each other before looking back at the ground. It doesn’t matter if they are still in training or not. A gamma protects their Luna, and they failed.

*“Would either of you like to enlighten me on what the HELL happened and how she ended up in the f**king lake being chased by the green, glowing little light?”*

“It’s my fault,” Penny whispers after a tense moment of silence.

“And how, exactly, is it your fault?” I ask, hoping for some damn insight.

“I left her window open...She asked for me to leave it open as she likes to listen to the waves. I know I shouldn’t have but-”

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"There are no waves to listen to on the lake late at night with zero wind." I sigh, pinching the bridge of my nose. Then I freeze, my eyes snapping to Hayes, who looks like he is coming to the same conclusion.

*"Those f**king spelling weaving dicks," Hayes grits out, slamming his fist onto my desk.*

"Now the red-eyed wolves on the border make sense." I groan heavily, guilt hammering into me for losing my temper with Colette. This wasn't her fault, no this was an oversight on my part, one that will never happen again.

"They targeted her." Percy says, "Is it another ploy to get to you? Or is it Colette they really want?"

"Both of you

leave. Percy, scrounge up some food and hot tea for her. Penny, make sure she is getting changed and warm. I'll be there to speak with her soon."

Percy and Penny leave without another word, and Hayes saunters over to my side.

"This isn't just them trying to get to you. It's more and I think you know that."

"They don't know shit." I grit out. "They do not know who she is. They can't."

Silence falls over us as I stare out the window again, my anger slowly fading and regret seeps in and taking over.

"Colette wasn't trying to run away, Merikh." Hayes whispers, but I pretend not to hear him. He doesn't understand how much I needed to hear him say those words. It doesn't matter how illogical the thought was, it was there, lingering and baiting me every second.

"Okay," I say, clearing my throat.

"Why the hell are you still here?" He asks, sounding more annoyed,

"What?"

“Someone broke into her dreams and lure her into danger. Who knows what they put in her mind, what horrors she saw? She needs you to comfort her.” Hayes says, scoffing at me. “Get your ass out of here and your Luna.”

I hate

when Hayes is right. And lately it's annoyingly more frequent than I care to admit.

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comfort

I try to imagine what to say as I make my way to her room. What if she has fallen asleep already? I'll have to wake her up to check on her. Or come back tomorrow. Then again, maybe she is afraid to sleep now. She looked

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ragged, almost hollow, when she was staring off into space. What if...what if they got her in her mind? What if they broke her?

It doesn't take long for me to make it to her room, yet I find myself unable to enter. So instead I linger outside her door, looking for the right way to enter before Percy exits. He looks at me a little shocked before holding the door open for me to go in. When I walk into the room Colette is wrapped in a blanket, pacing the space between the bed and her dresser until she spots me.

She freezes, her eyes wide, not with shock, but with fear. Fear of me and I hate the damn feeling. Colette watches me for a moment, then I observe her shoulders as they drop and her face becomes sullen, like she can no longer hold the weight of her emotions.

Without wasting a moment, I make up my mind and cross the room, moving

straight for the bed. She realizes it yet, but she needs me here as much as I need to be near her, so I crawl under the blankets, pulling them up as I sit with my back against the headboard.

Colette blinks, a look of bewilderment on her face as she studies me. A frown tugs at my lips, and I sigh heavily. This is why it is so hard

to be nice, because when I am nice people are too shocked to move, apparently.

“What are you doing...?” she finally asks and I quirk a brow.

“I am making sure you don’t go for a swim again,”

“Is that what it was...?” She whispers, moving closer, stopping at the foot of the bed. I pat the mattress with my hand, beckoning her to come crawl in next to me.

“We have slept in the same bed before, Colette.”

“That was because you didn’t have anywhere else to sleep.”

“We are mates.”

“But you haven’t wanted to sleep in here with me before now.”

“I am worried about your safety now. I am a light sleeper, so if you get up to sleep walk again, I will feel you move and wake you up or restrain you.”

She reluctantly crawls into the bed next to me. Staring awkwardly forward as she twiddles her thumb, and we are encased in uncomfortable silence.

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“What happened to me?” She finally whispers as her voice cracks. “Was any of it real? The things in my dream?”

My chest aches. Hearing the pain in her voice, the way she seems to be so confused and hurt rolled into one small person.

“You were manipulated.” I say, watching her every breath and muscle twitch as she tries to understand.

“How?”

“A weaver. They are rare and wreak havoc in memories or dreams when their victim sleeps.”

She looks at me, chewing her inner cheek as she process

“How did they get to me? I mean, do they have to have something like my hair or blood for that?” She asks, and I try to bite back a smile. She’s damn cute making assumptions about the magical beings like they cook up these spells over a caldron:

“Sounds.” I say simply. “They imbed the spell into sounds that we find calming . For you, the waves breaking on the shore even though the waves aren’t large enough for you to truly hear that kind of sound with no wind.”

Her eyes grow big, as if she is having a moment of enlightenment.

“It’s because I slept with the window open...?”

“That is how they got to you, yes. We will discuss this more in the morning if you’d prefer. Your eyes are already half closed and I am sure all this has been taxing.”

She grows pale and shakes her head.

“I don’t want to sleep ever again.”

“You are safe here with me,” I whisper, reaching out and taking her hand. She shivers at the contact and gazes at me, words on the tip of her tongue, but she frowns instead.

“What if I try to run off?” she murmurs.

“I’ll hold you,” I shrug

“What if I kick and bite and scream?” She whispers, tears welling in her eyes.

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“I’ll hold on tighter.”

She nods her head before she sinks deeper into the bed, her eyes on me as she pauses and exhales shakily.

“W— will you hold me now?” She barely utters the words, but my heart races, my chest aching painfully as my lungs struggle for air. She wants me to hold her now. To comfort her...now.

“Would it help you?” I ask her, my throat parched and my tongue darting out to wet my lips. She nods and I

— move down, my arm sliding under her head with the other snaking over her waist, tucking her close.

Colette stares at me for a little while as her eyes grow heavier by the second, the mate bond working to calm her. I take the time to memorize every single little perfect imperfection she may have, committing it away for a day.

She sighs in content before snuggling in closer and I watch her as if in a daydream as she lifts her head and gently, her plush lips press to the corner of my mouth before she closes her eyes and falls asleep.

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Chapter 14

“Colette POV

I rub my eyes, certain I must be going crazy as I peek and see Merikh’s sleeping form. He stayed. Here I thought he would leave after I fell asleep. Not that he isn’t a man of his word, but he is a busy man. Lounging around with me in bed can’t be an entirely good way to run a realm.

*I press my lips together nervously, looking over his slightly stubbly cheeks and the way his lips are pursed open slightly, a soft whistling nose filling the room with every exhale. He is snoring, lightly and somehow in a S*xy way and I frown my brows, trying to understand when the hell I would ever consider snoring of any kind S*xy. Is that the mate bond? Working to make me want him more until I just eventually give in?*

I gently move closer, my fingers reaching out and hovering over his face as I frame his cheeks with my hands, being careful not to wake him.

“You are staring,” he says in a low husky voice that makes me reel back in shock, rolling away and nearly flying off the bed. His arm wraps around my waist, yanking me back as I twist, and he rises on to his elbow, his green eyes boring into mine.

“Sorry,” I mumble, my eyes skirting to his lips, where I watch a small smirk appear. I look away, toward the window, and fake a yawn. “I guess it’s morning.”

“Mmm,” he affirms with a vibrating hum and I fight back a shiver.

“We should get up,” I say, though it lacks confidence.

“Should we? Do you have plans I don’t know about?” He asks me and I chuckle.

“Yes, with all my friends I have here.” I say and slap my hand over my mouth. It came out snarkier than I’ve ever spoken before, but instead of being upset, he just smirks.

“Apparently, along with your strength coming back, so is your sass. I imagine you’ve been holding it in for years.” He’s not wrong. I look at him, worried, and he just shakes his head. “Sass me all you want, Colette. I find it

endearing.”

“For now,” I snort and he sits up, rolling from the bed.

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“Come, let’s get some breakfast.” He says, looking over his shoulder.

“Like...eat with you?” I ask, taken aback.

Merikh turns to face me with an air of amusement.

“As opposed to what? eating you?” He asks and my face flames in embarrassment.

"I didn't mean it like that?" I rush out and his smile grows wider.

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I see the twinkle in his eye, the pleasure he is getting from my heated skin and inability to look him in the face. Oh, he knows what I meant...unless...he doesn't and I'm just a dirty minded girl. I've never let my mind wander to such places before and here I am....

"Let's get breakfast and maybe you could recount what happened last night. The more we know, the more we can try to figure out what they are after." He mutters, moving toward the door. I scramble out of the bed and my baggy shirt and sweatpants all crumbled from sleep, but I don't feel like changing, not when he is planning to go in his sweatpants too.

"What do you usually eat for breakfast?" He asks as we leave the room and I furrow my brows, looking up at him.

"I don't usually eat breakfast."

"Coffee then?" He says, but I can hear his disappointment.

"Iced Coffee." I smile at him, and he grins, looking pleased. I don't dare tell him I drink it iced because it was always the day old coffee that I would sneak before the kitchen maids would empty the pot each night. Iced coffee is iced coffee, so why should he care it wasn't fresh or actually was more room temperature?

"The cooks will have a spread of food for you to choose from," he says after a moment and I can only assume he mind linked everyone.

"When will I have the mindlink?" I ask, and he tucks his hands into his sweatpants pockets.

"After we mate, fully. Your wolf acknowledges me as its alpha right now, and this as its pack, but you have not been formally accepted or presented yet," he says and I can feel the weight of his eyes on me, trying to gauge my reaction.

I hide the hurt well, though. He still hasn't presented me to his pack yet. Merik h claims to want me, he is kind

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and attentive and holds my hand through every grudgingly slow 'training' session I have.

Yet he still hides me away from everyone else. It is feeling more and more like I am his dirty little secret

and that's not a feeling I am keen on. The thought of him having a true Luna elsewhere creeps into the back of my mind and I try to shove it down. When I feel a tug on my hand and I glance to see his fingers wrapping around

mine.

My eyebrows shoot up as I glance at him, my mouth agape. But he isn't watching me, he is instead leading me gently as he looks down the hallway we are venturing. The moment is sweet, and my stomach seems to have joined a gymnastics team as it does its own floor routine inside me.

+5

My heart races and I give his warm hand a gentle squeeze. Not one that is entirely noticeable, but one that says I like the touch. Because I do. I feel safer when I can feel him or be near him, especially after last night.

The smell of bacon hits my nostrils and my mouth suddenly fills with saliva, the drool reminding me just how hungry I am, and then my stomach releases a ferocious cry for food and Merikh chuckles to himself, pleased.

"Looks like we made it just in time, any longer, and it sounds like your stomach would have tried to eat me." He wears a mischievous grin on his perfect lips and I bite back a laugh. He is right. Any longer and I may have gnawed on him.

As we enter the massive kitchen, I see the display of nearly every breakfast dish I can name, and I lick my lips. I wish she finally get to try all these things I have watched Leslie enjoy and taunt me with since I can remember. Oh, could s

ee me now, she would be damn livid. And that thought will only make everything taste that much better.

“Grab a plate and take what you want,” Merikh says and suddenly I’m stuck, rooted to the ground as my b*dy nearly recoils at the thought of breaking the rules.

Breakfast isn’t for people like me. I want to try everything that was prepared, but the thought of eating it brings back the memories of my maid training. The discipline I was told from a young age I had to learn. They would starve me for three days then make me serve everyone breakfast and all leftovers were scraped into a bucket that was tossed to the woodlands creatures.

I was lowlier even compared to them. Merikh ushers me to the dining room table before he maneuvers around my chair and loads up one plate, laying it before me. Then he grabs his own and sits next to me.

“Eat,” he says, pushing a fork into my hand as I look at him. All the memories of the painful beatings, the way my fingers ache in memory of being rapped on the knuckles for trying to eat when I hadn’t been told to do so.

Colette, please cat,” he says and I look up at him, a concerned frown on his lips as he stands at the counter, paused. “You need your strength.”

“Okay,” I smile, but it falters when I look back at the plate.

So instead of looking at the food. I close my eyes and shovel whatever I get on my fork into my mouth and I moan. The hash browns mixed with the perfectly seasoned and fluffy eggs tastes like heaven as I chew and swallow, opening my eyes and pushing more in.

Merikh sits across from me chuckling as he drops an iced coffee before me. I tilt my head, looking at it as he watches me closely, and I hesitantly reach out and take a sip.

“Holy shit.” I mutter, slurping more of it down. “What is this? It’s so good.”

“Iced coffee…” he looks at me confused. “Do you just drink iced black coffee?”

I nod, and he snorts.

“Are you a serial killer? Iced coffee should be flavored.”

“I wasn’t-”

“Allowed. I’m seeing a trend here.” He murmurs, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the table, his eyes glued to me. But I can’t find the will to care as I set up a routine of scooping up food, then sucking down more

coffee.

“Can I ask you some questions about last night?” he asks finally and I slide my eyes in his direction.

“Feed me like this and I will tell you anything you want to hear.” I murmur and he grins.

“Now tell me, what was your dream about?” He asks.

My movements freeze and I sit back from my plate, looking out the window with a heavy sigh.

“It’s the same nightmare I always have. Well, kind of, it’s a little different from before.”

“What was different?”

“She spoke in this one.” I murmur, her words echoing in my head, the clarity and fear in the words. It was her

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voice, the mother I could never remember...

His brow pinch above his nose and he hums in question.

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“What did she say?” He asks softly. I press back into my seat, watching him before deciding I trust him. I don’t know him well, but I trust him nonetheless.

“She told me to stay, that they would be there soon,”

“But she has never mentioned that part before?” He asks, frowning, and I nod.

“She would say it, I think, but it was always silent...my dreams. More like she was

*mouthin*g the...

“Hmm, that is interesting.” Merikh says, getting lost in his thoughts before he shakes his head in thought and takes a sip of his hot coffee. “Did she say his name? Anything to help identify him?”

“No,” I frown, “just that he would be there soon. Then the green orb showed up and chased me into the water.”

“Did it hurt you?” He asks. “I saw you from my office window and you looked...” he pauses, clearing his throat and with the sound his face changes from distant to reserved. “You looked very distressed.”

“Yeah, it spoke to me, too.” I whisper. A shiver rolls through me at the memory. The voice telling me she needs me. That I need to hurry.

His brows rise in surprise. “It did? What did it say?”

“That I needed to go to her. That my mom needed me.”

“Did you save her? In your dream?” He asks softly and I bite my lip, looking down at the plate, dragging my fork.

over the eggs.

“No, I watched her die...” my voice cracks and his war hand covers mine. “I’ve never seen that part before...”

“Weavers can morph your dreams to fit what they want. But there are clues, little ways to tell what is out of the ordinary.”

“Like what?” I ask, peeking up at him. The image of her dying in front of me won’t ever go away, but if there is a chance I don’t have to see it again, that this nightmare wasn’t originally mine...then I will cling to that tiny bit of hope.

“Voices that aren’t meant to speak sound tinny. Like someone is talking through a metal can and images have a distorted outline, not too distinguishable but enough to make the figure look almost of focus.”

My mouth goes dry, my stomach heavy, and I stop playing with my food. The green orb’s voice was most definitely different, sounding like someone was hollering into a tin can. But my mom, watching her being impaled from behind...t here was no distortion on that. My brows furrow and the corner of

lips tug down in a

frown.

“And if the things I saw weren’t distorted...is it possible they are still fake?” I ask in a soft whisper.

“No.” he says, but I don’t see him. I can’t focus on his face, then my eyes are blurring with tears.

“Is there a way to tell if it’s just a nightmare or memories?” I ask, looking up and meeting his guarded eyes.

“Only you can determine that.”

“How?”

“Sometimes there are things we just know. We can feel it in our guts, but we can’t explain it...this is one of those. times to trust your gut, Colette.”

The tears break free, strolling down my face as I bite back a sob. Every fiber of my being is telling me I know the truth. I know the parts that are real and made up. And what I think I know is that I witnessed my mother’s

murder.

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“Colette?” Merikh calls out to me, concerned. I give him the best fake smile I can muster.

I can tell he isn't falling for it. The fake grin to hide the pain that was creeping in and taking over my heart. He stands suddenly, reaching down and pulling me up into a warm, comforting embrace.

My hands instinctively slide up his back, cradling his shoulders as my grip grows tighter. The replay of my mother's death in my dream plays on a loop in my mind. I wince every time I see it pierce through her, and he

holds me closer.

I didn't even realize the silent tears had turned to sobs as he strokes my hair and hums in my ear to calm me. I

don't want to let go, to pull away from him, but after what feels like a long time, I wrap my arms around his waist and press my cheek to his chest with a heavy sigh.

"Are you going to be okay?" he asks.

His voice is so tender and full of worry, and I feel the urge to look up at him. The need to see his green eyes and witness his gentle smile is too much to fight right now. For a man of so much death and destruction, he is so soft with me. So gentle and patient. He watches me curiously, his thumb stroking a loose strand from my face before a serene smile takes over his perfectly plush pink lips.

"Yeah, I don't really have any other options." I sigh.

"Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?" he asks, looking over my face from feature to feature. My usual blush creeps up my neck and seeps into my cheeks as they grow warm. He seems to melt into me. "Especially when you blush."

"Thanks..." I murmur, stepping out of his embrace. "I think."

"You are so much stronger than you realize. There is so much in you that you still don't see."

"And what is it you see in me?" I ask him. His demeanor shifts slightly, his expressions shutting down and going stoic as he seems to think about the question.

"What I see in you is a way forward, Colette." he says. "I see the future of this pack and it all is riding on you."

I scoff and roll my eyes. "Now I know you are lying. What kind of future or way forward can I bring? You are

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mistaken."

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"Not about this," he says, a small smile cracking through his cool demeanor. His compliments confuse me. The words he speaks seem like they have hidden meaning. Yet, I can't find it, instead I'm just left feeling a little more

confused and a lot more drawn to him.

He reaches for my iced coffee and hands it to me with an indecipherable look. "I think you would really benefit

from a visit to the healing waters today." He announces.

"Uh...but I am healing fine. Actually, better than fine. I am healing faster than anyone else I've ever known now that the poison from Leslie is out of my system. The healers say my leg can handle being walked now and I can try running in a couple of days."

"You still think it was her poisoning you, don't you?" he asks, and I scrunch my nose.

"I mean, of course I do. What other reason would it be? I've not thought up a more valid reason, can you?" I ask, and he shrugs.

"I'm sure there are many other logical reasons, but that is beside the point. The healing waters will ease your mind in a way that your wolf can't. The aromati

cs from the herbs and oils, along with the warm water itself, is soul soothing. It will cleanse your mind of bad thoughts that try to creep in."

I think about what he says, remembering the lake and how cold it is, but then I recall the steam from his bath and how he just mentioned warm water and suddenly the whole idea sounds appealing.

*"Do I have to be n*ked?" I ask, arching a brow, and he looks at me like I'm crazy.*

*"I wasn't n*ked the time you barged in on me in the waters." he teases and I lick my tongue.*

"Excuse me, I just wanted to help you." I protest and he just shakes his head in amusement.

"And help you did." he gives a small bow in appreciation and I try to fight the growing grin.

"Fine." I roll my eyes playfully, giving into him, "I will go to the healing waters. Happy?"

"Very much." He nods, a glint in his eyes. "I will have someone pull it together for you."

"Can I take it later tonight? Bathing now feels.... a little useless before a workout. I want to train today and then I

will take one."

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"You are sounding like a Luna with those demands," he bites back a pleased smirk.

"I feel more comfortable...I guess." I shrug and he laughs.

"With me or the pack?" he asks.

"Both, actually..." I admit, and he exhales with a nod.

“Fine. if you feel you are ready to train today, then let’s start now.”

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*My muscles scream out in total agony, my mind mush and my b*dy covered in sweat. Merikh follows behind me and I swear I can feel him trying to hold his I aughter in. Here I thought we would continue our usual training of walking thro ugh the water, but apparently he wants to kill me off before we officially mate. What actually took place was not training no, it was just shy of homicide.*

“What the hell was that?” I ask him with narrowed eyes. Merikh just looks at m e with a barely there smug smirk

before looking away quickly. He is enjoying this all way too much.

“Your next level of training. You were saying you are healing faster, so why no t step up the training a little faster

as well?.”

*“Yeah, remind me to not speak out of turn. Apparently, all I do is put my foot in my damn mouth.” I grumble and he breaks into a laugh that feeds the very co re of me, making my whole b*dy heat.*

My legs feel like jello and my lungs are searing from the workout they were giv en as well. I look over my shoulder and watch him. I am in complete awe of ho w he would ever need a second chance, mate.

The rumor for so long had been that she rejected him because of his scarred f ace. Yet here I am. Watching the

most handsome being I have ever laid eyes on laugh like an angel. He may be one of death, but the fact remains, he is unearthly beautiful and more so when he smiles.

*rikh, why did your mate reject you?” I ask him and he freezes, his entire b*dy r igid and his eyes near dead. The transformation from warm and laughing Alph a to cold and murderous is so fast I nearly get whiplash.*

"I don't want to talk about her," he snaps as he pushes past me.

"Why not? If you have a new mate, shouldn't you be over your last one?" I ask, and he takes two large steps,

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overtaking me as he grips my elbow.

"It is none of your business," he grits out before yanking his arm away and recoiling back from me. "Make sure you go to the healing waters after this. I will be late to the room tonight," then he pushes past me, leaving me behind to gape and wonder what the hell just happened.

When I make it into the pack house, Penny finds me and gives over my shoulder to someone behind me. I glance back to see Percy nod back to her as he takes off.

"Has he been stalking me all day?" I ask, and she grins.

"Oh, for sure. I keep telling him that stalking women is a terrible habit, but what can I do? Creeps are gonna

creep."

"Oh, I can't wait to tell him you said that." I chuckle and she shrugs.

"He will never believe you," she winks, falling in step beside me.

We walk for a moment in comfortable silence as I contemplate asking her the question the Merikh shut down so angrily. Then I realize I have a right to know. It's part of this pack's history and I am supposedly this pack's future. How can I move forward when I haven't seen the past?

"Penny..."

"Yes?"

"If I ask you questions, do you have to answer me?" I ask tentatively.

She looks at me, confused. "I guess it depends on the question and how it's important to you?"

"I want to know about Merikh's ex mate..." I tread lightly with my words, looking around and waiting for a backlash. Instead, she throws her hands up with an exasperated sigh.

"Well, it's about damn time," she says.

"Wait what?"

"I've been dying to tell you, but you had to ask me first. Let me know you are serious about being Alpha's new mate and our Luna."

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"Uh...ok." I say, not bothering to think much about what she says. I have questions and I want answers. "So,

what is her name?"

"Oh, you mean was?" She quirks a brow.

"Was? As in, she is dead?" I ask and she grins, nodding yes.

"Like damn dead. Lauren lost her head, kind of dead. She dead dead." She says in a creepy way too happy about it, upbeat voice.

"Okay, she's dead, but how?" I ask and she looks away for a second.

"You can't freak out until I tell you the entire story. Okay? Promise?"

"Well, that's already not a great start." I admit anxiety squeezing my insides like it's an orange in a juice factory.

"Yeah, well...it's obviously not a fairytale considering her current location." She chuckles.

I look at her weirdly and she grins, then rolls her eyes. "Because she is six feet under. Pushing up daisies. Yeesh, slow on the uptake today, Luna Letty." she mutters.

"It's a little weird how excited her death makes you."

"If Alpha weren't so hurt by it all, everyone would react like this. Lauren deserved her ending."

"And yet you still tell me nothing." I remind her.

"Okay, okay," she sighs, peeking around the hall as we get closer to the room. "Lauren grew up here, everyone. sort of...well... she wasn't everyone's favorite pack member, but when they realized they were mates, it didn't matter and it seemed like she changed, truly changed."

"What happened?"

"She was a spy," Penny says, a cloud of anger hovering around her now. She is hiding behind her jokes, but I can feel how much she truly detested the luna before me.

I give her an incredulous look. "A spy? For who? The rogues?"

"Worse..." she grins, waiting for me to guess. I swallow, not wanting to look like an idiot, as I rack my brain for a

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good guess.

"The...wi-"

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+5

“Vampires.” she cuts me off and I say it with her like it was totally my guess to o. Then my eyes nearly bulge from my head.

“WHAT!?” I cry out loud and she slaps her hand over my mouth, shoving me into the room.

“The vampires, damn, why are you so surprised? They are the most backstabby supernatural being there are.”

“Right, obviously,” I try to play along.

It’s not like I didn’t know they existed, except that’s sort of exactly what I thought. Like I know, Merikh has said that there are other supernatural beings out there, but that was early in our relationship. I couldn’t tell if he was

joking or not.

“She wasn’t just giving them information but as Luna, she was able to invite them into pack grounds in the middle of the night. We didn’t just lose twelve warriors to one vampire, we lost our former alpha, Alpha Merikh

and beta Hayes Dad. They found Lauren talking with the vampire in question about where to find Merikh to kill

*him next over his father’s blood let b*dy.”*

My heart feels like it’s in a vice grip and I clutch my chest, hoping to relieve some of the tension there.

“So he killed her.” I whisper, and I find I can’t blame him. I would have done the same thing without a second

thought.

“No.” she shakes her head. “He had a public execution and had her beheaded.”

The blood drains from my face, but not because of how he executed her or that he sentenced her to death and

watched it. But at how much it must have hurt him and his lycan to watch his mate die. To be the one to order it before his whole pack. Acknowledging he was wrong to choose her. His wrong choice led to a devastating loss.

No wonder he doesn't want to announce me to the pack yet. Holy crap, no wonder he chose me. I am too weak to do anything like that and get away with it. He chose the weakest option, with no ties to anyone. Never again will he let something awful like that happen. No wonder he has no desire to find his second chance mate. How could he ever trust someone when the mate bond blinds him?

Chapter 16

Steam rolls off the glistening pool, beautiful purple petals dotting the surface with sprigs of lavender and other various herbs melding together to make the perfect recipe for calm and healing. It smells amazing and the humid air feels even better in my tired lungs. My eyes flutter closed and I inhale the aroma into my lungs, my wolf waking with excitement.

"It feels amazing, doesn't it? The air?" Penny says, releasing a satisfied groan. Then she moves around me with a plush navy robe and a set of slippers. She sets them on a chair near the steps of the water and stands, taking in long pulls of the healing room. "I love the healing waters so much."

"Is everyone allowed to use them?" I ask her, and she shakes her head.

"Yes, but this one is for the alpha family's personal use. We all have one in our own homes, but without all the marble and ornate gold displays. Also, much smaller, like ten person bath, not 200 person pool." She gives me an amused wink.

"I see." I mutter, moving over to the chair and slipping off my shoes.

Penny apparently figured out my clothing size and sorted out a bikini for me. Not that I'm not grateful, but this might be more revealing than the underwear I own. I'm not quite comfortable in my skin, so I wait for her to give me a nod as she walks out the door, shutting it behind her.

I release a nervous sigh and undress down to my suit before taking one last look at the untouched water. It's amazing how much it just looks like it will heal me. So I step in, dipping my toes into it first as heat stings my skin. I pull my foot back with a gasp, shocked by the temperature of it.

"Healing water, my ass," I mutter to myself. "More like boiled Colette soup with how hot that is." I bite my bottom lip, groaning in lead up before I gently step down onto the first step, holding my breath to keep from letting out a squeal.

*The liquid burns my skin, the oils and herbs latching onto my flesh as I step down one more and then another. until I am fully in the pool. I bend my knees, allowing the water up to my n*ck as I exhale in relief, the heat dissipating in seconds as I am wrapped in its healing, warm embrace..*

Every Achey muscle seems to meld with the water, feeling like it is just an extension of me. It almost tickles, the way it swirls around my skin and draws out my pain with something as simple as heat and medicinal herbs.

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I reach up and pull my hair out of its elastic band and tilt my head back, submerging it up to my hairline as a satisfied gasp dances past my lips and I smile. My wolf is happy. Each moment leads to more relaxation and everything fades away. The pain, the ache, even the visions in my head from my dream the night before. It all just...washes away.

For a second I feel the pull to put my head under the water, but my stomach tightens in fear and I decide to give myself a little more time. The last time my head was fully submerged was in my nightmare state. And I'm not sure I am ready to cross that bridge yet...at least not at this precise moment.

*Instead, I move to the stairs and sit, resting my head on one of the upper steps as a sort of anchor, then I allow my b*dy to float up. My b*dy is weightless, my mind free as my eyes fall closed and my wolf prances around in my mind.*

Since being here, since losing Grady, she has done nothing but hide, only doing what she must to keep me aware of her presence. It felt like we were no longer in sync—

well, for years really, but now, she has allowed me back in. Her presence growing stronger by the second. And my heart and soul feel at ease.

I hum in the large room, my voice echoing back to me. I've never had an affinity for music, but it feels natural to sing when

you are at peace and right now is the most at peace I have ever been. My mind wanders many places, from the dream to my terrible past and back to the present where I am.

Then suddenly, I am suffocating. I sit up, my hand on my throat as I choke on the air, looking around frantically, watching as the room fades away and I am back in the swamp. I can feel where I am, my hands and legs wet and warm grounding me in knowing I am still physically in the healing waters. But mentally, visually, I am lost and scared. I drop lower into the water, begging it to pull me back and it helps, just a little.

There are no green orbs, no other person other than me, and a voice. Her voice. Then she appears and I watch as my mom takes a seat and rests her head back, closing her eyes and she sings.

"A longing for the tales,

one of legends told,

I'll sing to you, my love, in the ways of the old,

For when a mate cries out in the dark,

The other must always heed,

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the one singular cry in their time of need.

So come to me, my love,

come complete your soul,

Your mate is calling you home

Your mate is calling you home.”

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My heart aches at the sadness in her tone, the way the words break her heart, and I watch as tears stream down her face. I reach out, remembering this is a ll in my mind. Her eyes turn to me, distant at first before they zero in and they l ook hollow, dead inside as a branch tears through her chest, blood spewing fo rth.

*My knees go weak and I fall, my head plunging into the wetness and my b*dy jolts. The image of my dying mother bleeds from my min d like a memory fading, the thought gone even as I try to conjure it back. And I find myself in the darkness before I find my footing and stand.*

I open my eyes, blinking at the steam, my consciousness back in the now. Th e words of her song resound in my mind. That was no dream, but a memory, one the waters pulled from me. How? I don't know how, but I know it

to be the truth. I can feel it.

The past has always been hidden from me, shrouded in despair and darkness . No matter how hard I tried, I could remember nothing from before being in th e pack. But now...now I have a voice, an image I thought was made up or tho ught was just a nightmare. And now I have a song.

Her song. My mom's song.

And I know where I got my singing voice. I smile to myself. Because she sure as shit wasn't phenomenal. That fear I held, the one of the water, is replaced with a reverence. This is where I found her again, where my soul felt comfortable enough to open up and allow little bi ts of me to seep out.

I close my eyes, a smile on my lips as I head to the steps again, and sit. I nev er want to leave this room. It feels. sacred now. Like a connection between wh at was lost and what I now have. A bridge from my past to my future.

The words to her song tumble out of me, echoing through the room as it makes me feel closer to her. I sing it on repeat, familiarizing myself with the tune she used and the words I heard, refusing to forget them as I sing to commit them to memory.

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10088% 18:15

My voice echoes off the walls, bouncing back to me, and the water around me moves with the vibrations as if it's dancing to my words. Then I feel a shift. My eyes snap open, squealing out in shock as leaning back as I stare up at the looming shape of Merikh who now stalks toward me in the water.

“W— where did you come from?” I ask, clutching my chest. He looks pained as he moves closer, like he was injured. and is seeking healing, but from me.

“Don’t stop singing.” He says, his voice a husky whisper as he continues to stalk me down like prey.

*I furrow my brow, confused, but I repeat the words, slowly and softly. Merikh reaches under the water, finding my hand as he pulls me up and drags my b*d y flush to his. He holds me, looking down at me with lust filled eyes.*

I finish the verse, unsure if I should continue again. So Instead, I hum the tune and he leans down, pressing his forehead to mine. Merikh inhales deeply, consuming my scent as he groans in satisfaction.

“I am sorry for being a jackass.” He mutters. “Forgive me,”

*His apology catches me off guard, and I pull back, looking up into his sincere face. He looks distraught, like someone died and worry leaches into me. I slide my hand up his n*ck, cupping his cheek.*

“I shouldn’t have asked about her...” I breathe.

He shudders as the sparks seem to whizz through us, weak still, but growing stronger. I force him to look at me, but his eyes fall

to my lips before coming back to my eyes. I stare at his green, watching the desire and unbridled lust that stir there. It nearly bowls me over to see it, to think he could want me and my b*dy burns in places I've never felt before.

"I want to k*ss you, Colette." He admits, the tip of his nose teasing mine and then nudging my cheek.

"What's stopping you?" I ask, feeling bold as my heart nearly pops out of my chest. He freezes, eyes boring into me, searching for any resistance on my end, resistance he won't find because I want this. I want his lips against mine and his undivided attention. So after a mere second Merikh closes the distance, his lips pressing against mine in the most perfect way as he tangles his hand in my hair, and pulls me close.

Chapter 17

"Merikh POV

My b*dy vibrates with her touch, my lycan damn near purring as her soft lips move against mine. It's like the celebration dinner all over again, my b*dy giving in where I know I should pull back, but I can't. Not this time. She has entrapped me under her spell, and I am forever wrapped up in everything Colette.

Her hands are warm from the water as they glide up my heaving chest, wrapping around my n*ck. My b*dy shivers under her touch and I k*ss her deeper, unable to breathe the air around me, only her.

My hand tangles in her wet hair as I tilt her chin up, giving me better access to explore her mouth. My other hand slides down her wet back, my thumb looping into the back of her bikini bottoms. The rest of my palm rests over

the fabric.

I crave grabbing a handful of her ass, dragging her b*dy up me and spreading her little legs around my waist. But Colette isn't someone you fling around, not like that. Not yet. She's a delicate flower, a water lily that needs time and so long as this is what we do with that time...I can manage. For a short while.

*She moans as she tries to tug me closer, her b*dy rolling against mine with a delicious vibration that only serves the purpose of making everything harder. Like pulling away from her and, well...me, clearly.*

“Colette,” I murmur against her lips.

She hums in acknowledgement and then she moves her head to my cheek, kissing my face before moving to my ear. Her breathing is like a feather over my ears and it makes me shiver as a hungry moan slips between my lips. and I turn, taking her lips again.

*I walk her back, trying to find something to press her against. I can't have her, not the way I crave, but I sure as shit can't stop this moment. Right now, it's the only thing keeping me breathing. The second I pull away, the water descends and I am drowning in reality and I'm so f**king sick of reality. I want to revel in this, just a little longer.*

*A knock sounds at the door and ignore it. f**k them. I don't care who it is or what they want. Right now I'm servicing my queen. The knock grows louder and Colette must finally hear it as she tears away, covering her lips. and looking away. She is hiding again from me, her shell quickly coming back up and it nearly guts me to see it. She is so stunning when she's carefree.*

1/5

Chapter 17

“What?” I growl at the door. Who ever it is could have easily used the mindlink,

“Alpha, I have come from the council with the official decision on your appeal to-

0

“Yes, I will be with you in a moment.” I grit out, taking a step away from Colette who looks at me, lips parted and red. Her hair is a mess with her innocent eyes wide in shock, watching me. I tilt my head, drinking in the view.

“Exquisite,” I breathe. I reach out, cupping her cheek, dragging the pad of my thumb over her lips. “I will see your

tonight,”

“I thought you said you would be working late,” she murmurs in a daze.

“I moved things around.” I smile. “You should get dressed and rest. The healing waters can only do so much, but you will still be sore tomorrow.”

She looks a little confused, tilting her head slightly and I notice a hue of blue in her brown eyes I’ve never seen before. For a moment, I think she will say something, but she doesn’t. Instead, she closes her mouth, her lips pressing into a smile.

“Okay. I’ll see you in a bit.” She bites her lip as I turn toward the stairs.

I stop for a moment before I turn back and drag her close, dropping a k*ss on her forehead. As much as I want to deny the pull to her, I can’t. Be it the second chance bond or just who she is, I am falling hard even with my

reservations.

“I’ll see you soon,” I sigh, releasing her and rushing out of the water.

I move to the chair, grabbing my towel and changing my clothing, while Colette looks away, her innocence still intact, as I grin to myself, hoping she took a peek all the while knowing she didn’t.

When I push out the door, I find the messenger from the council waiting for me. His unnatural looking silver hair flows down past his shoulders, dusting over his deep blue double-breasted vest. At least they sent a messenger! get along with.

“Ezrah.” I nod and he grins, walking next to me as we make our way to my office.

“Good to see you again, Alpha,” he bows his head in respect and I sigh.

“I take it my appeal was once again rejected?” I ask.

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Chapter 17

“Lost by one.” He responds a small smirk on his lips. I look at him, shocked. For years, I have repealed the ruling that landed our kind ostracized by the council that protects their members and allows them access to the other supernatural beings in our world.

“One?” I ask, narrowing my eyes. “Who changed their mind?”

“I am not allowed to share those details, Alpha. You know the rules.” he shrugs.

“Yeah,” I grumble, running my hands through my hair. “Yeah, I know the damn rules.”

“If you had a Luna, it might change things,” he says, looking at me and I know he sees the redness of my lips

from my

time with Colette.

“Why would that make a difference?” I ask, keeping my little luna a secret from him for now. She is my secret weapon, one I am not ready to let the council know I have yet.

“They want proof that your kind has...” He pauses, looking for the right word.

“A weakness.” I scoff. “I believe that is the word you are looking for.”

“A weakness?” He rears his head, sliding his hands into his matching blue pants. “Interesting way to put it alpha. I was going to say anchor. Someone to keep you grounded. To reach you when you are otherwise...unreachable. If you understand my meaning.”

*“I have seen how some of the council members treat their other halves.” I frown. “There is no grounding there. Just pure ownership and S*xual drive.”*

“Ah, but their kind has not been kicked from the council, nor are they notorious for acting out before thinking. Your kind, however...” he falls off, knowing I know where he is going.

And I admit, he may have a point there, but I refuse to acknowledge that. I turn, pushing my office door open and motioning him to enter. He obliges me, and I see Hayes sitting in the corner with a grin on his face. I shoot him a scowl,

knowing he let Ezra in and sent him to find me. Without a mindlink warning. The asshole interrupted my moment with Colette and he will pay, when he least expects it.

"Is there a message you would like to relay to the council?" Ezra asks. He pulls an envelope from the breast pocket, placing it on the desk, and I see the same seal I always do.

"I see Caspian is still the head of the council." I frown. The dickhead who keeps fighting me, even though our

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Chapter 17

terms have been fulfilled and time served. He has it out for us, not that the feeling isn't mutual.

"He is." He watches me with a glimmer of amusement. "You know the rules. He has some time left to be the

leader."

"Because he stole my kind's term, I should be at that seat." I growl low in my chest. "Not some fish stick asshole."

"If your kind had followed the laws, things would be very different, Alpha. But as it stands, your great grandfather was not one for the rules and the council fears the term has not yet been long enough for a lesson to have been learned."

"That's bullshit." I hiss, hammer my fist on my desk. "They all are hoping enough time passes to make us forget. They've abandoned us."

"I am merely a messenger," He frowns. Then he lays a separate note next to the one containing the refusal to let us back into the council.

"What is this?" I ask, furrowing my brow as I grab it and tear it open..

"That I do not know. I only deliver the news. This was in my pile to deliver."

"Yet you knew what was in the first letter." Hayes reminds him and Ezra shrugs.

"I was given the details to share verbally, the other note I know nothing about other than the destination. But now I must go before my portal closes," he says, checking the clock above my head.

"Thank you." I sigh. Even if he brings bad news, Ezra is easily the more respectful of the messengers.

"Always a pleasure, Alpha Merikh." he gives a head bow and sees himself out.

Hayes pops up, rushing over the desk like a hungry dog looking for a treat.

"Open the damn thing. I want to see what it says."

"Leave." I say, smirking. His face falls.

"What?"

"No warning about Ezra being here and you sent him to find me." I remind him, and he scoffs.

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Chapter 17

"I always do that with him."

"But it rarely interrupts... things," I growl, my lycan coming forward to show him our displeasure. Shock gives way to amusement, and he laughs.

"Damn, so you put some moves on her in the healing waters? Very unoriginal, but it's a start," he teases and I scowl, sitting in my chair and pointing to the door. "Oh, come on! It was an honest mistake. I didn't mean to interrupt anything."

"Next time you do that, I will have you punished." I scowl at him.

"I swear on the heavens, never again...for a while." he grins and I roll my eyes, opening the letter glancing down at the printed font on paper with only three lines.

-
Keep your Luna close. She is the stuff of dreams...or nightmares. Can't wait to meet her at the council meeting.-

"What the fuck?" I mumble, my blood running cold as I read it again and again. Hayes takes it from my hand. His eyes snap up to mine.

*So the wolves...the stupid f**king dream weavers..."

"Someone from the council knows more than they should." I mutter and he growls in anger.

"We have a f**king traitor." He hisses, running his hand

Chapter 18

*Colette POV

I watch Merikh as he works in his office, his head down and a frown on his lips. He has been like this since the night we k*ssed in the healing waters. And that was just over two weeks ago.

He snaps at everyone, especially Hayes, the two of them bickering back and forth under their breath as I try to tune them out and not listen. That would be an easy feat, a maid pretending not to hear what they hear, but I'm not a maid like Merikh likes to remind me almost every day. I'm his Luna. So I listen.

"No luck finding the mole yet?" I ask, arching a brow. His eyes snap up, the speck of surprise melting away into an amused smile.

"And here I thought you were so enthralled in your books that you weren't listening."

"You enthrall me," I mutter, chewing the inside of my cheek shyly. He pushes away from his desk, then stands, all the while pinning me with his eyes as he stalks me down like prey. I remain still, like a deer in the forest, unsure of what to do after spotting the wolf.

"I enthrall you, hmm?" He stops at the foot of my comfy chair.

"It's a fun word, isn't it?" I smile up at him innocently and I see him fighting back the playfulness he so rarely lets

loose.

“Tell me, what is it about me enralls you, my little Luna?” he leans forward, his hands coming on either side of my ears, pressing into the back of the chair as his nose dances dangerously close to mine..

It’s already getting harder to breathe in his presence. Just being near him brings me a calm, and a storm rolled into one. The safety net of his aura and the danger of my attraction to him.

I’m falling hard and I have not the damnedest clue how to tell him I am ready for the next step without sounding like a wanton woman. I find myself unable to speak as he closes the distance and brushes his nose over mine.

*My mouth runs dry and my eyes flutter closed, begging him to k*ss me again like he did when we were in the healing water. Two weeks of pining for that touch, that passion, only to suffocate in this S*xual tension that could easily snuff out the sun.*

1/5

Emergency calls only MO

Chapter 18

“I like you, Merikh.” I rasp out and he tilts his head, surprised.

“You...like me?” he asks.

“I do.” I admit.

“You mean you feel safe with me,” He says as I watch him with a critical eye.

“No, I mean, I have feelings for you.” I reiterate, and he seems skeptical.

“It’s been three weeks.” He states, and I roll my eyes.

“And for two of those three weeks you have slept next to me, held me when I had a nightmare and have stuck by my side...” I pause. “I don’t want to leave your side.”

He freezes, blinking at me. “You are sure...?”

“Yes,” I chuckle, reaching up, only hesitating for a split second before I cup his cheek. “I’ve lived more in these past three weeks than I ever did in my first twenty-one years.”

*“We will announce you to the pack tomorrow.” He murmurs, a smile on his plump lips as he gently brushes them over mine. I gasp, my mouth tumbling open in hopes of a k*ss.*

“Tomorrow,” I mutter, lost in the warmth of his breath as it teases over my skin

*“And then I will mark you, and make you mine, officially.” He closes the distance, his mouth covering mine in a gentle k*ss, much different from the one before. This one is restrained, much more controlled, and I want more from him. The office door flies open and Hayes rushes in.*

“Merikh,” he says, out of breath, his eyes looking from me and then back to Merikh in alarm.

“What is it?” Merikh growls, standing.

Silence falls over them. Hayes is doing a whole lot of talking with his eyes and I realize he is resorting to the mindlink. Gone are the whisperings, replaced with a way to hide things from me. I’m not a fan of being left on the outs, but I trust Merikh. If he feels it’s something I should know, he would tell me.

I can feel the anger rolling off him as his skin goosebumps and he cracks his neck, trying to remain in control. Something terrible must have happened for him to lose control like this. I glance at Hayes, who wears a serious

2/5

Emergency calls only

Chapter 18

look on his face as he stares down his older brother before he drops his chin.

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“What is wrong?” I ask, standing and reaching out to touch Merikh’s arm. His muscles flex as he works his fist open and closed and then slowly looks down at me.

*"Nothing you need to worry about," he mutters, dropping a k*ss on the top of my head. "Why don't you come dinner with Penny and Percy?" He says, stepping away from me, going cold.*

go grab

His change in demeanor has my stomach in knots, as I think of all the possibilities. The only thing I can think of is they figured out who the mole is, and it was someone he trusted and he is feeling betrayed.

"I would rather eat with you..." I admit, watching him nervously. His anger seems to melt a little as he offers me

a soft smile.

"Maybe a walk then, since I haven't taken you to training and your leg still needs the exercise."

"Okay," I say, but in truth, I would rather remain by his side.

"I've mind linked Penny. She will meet you on the trail. Percy will be your shadow," Hayes whispers as I walk past him, and I nod.

"Thank you, Hayes."

I look over my shoulder once more as I walk out the door, catching Merikh watching me as I leave. He smiles softly when he realizes he has been caught, and it sends a thrill through me. I have no idea how three weeks can make it seem like I have known him all my life, but now that I am here, now that I know him, it feels like maybe this is where I was always meant to be.

hor

The walk through the packhouse is eerily quiet, no one enters the halls or even watches me as I slide out the side door. Not that it is common to be stopped or acknowledged but it's strange doing these things without Merikh or

my gamma gang.

Thankfully it doesn't take me long to make it to the trail once I leave the packhouse. The walk through the old town makes me smile, knowing that this is all mine, truly

mine, as of tomorrow. There is no taking it back or kicking me out once Merikh accepts me.

It also means there is no escape for me, but why would I want to escape when he makes life feel like wanted? What Merikh sees in me I will never understand. I'm just glad he sees more than anyone else ever has.

Emergency calls only.

Chapter 18

10088%

18:16

My excitement swells and I find myself walking faster to get to Penny. I can't wait to tell her the news. She is going to freak out and want to help me pick out a dress and thank the heavens for that, because I have no fashion sense. Penny, however, loves a cute top and some adorable functional shoes.

I look around, expecting to have come across her by now, but I see nothing. I spin, looking behind me and in the shadows where I expect Percy to be, but again I see nothing. A strange feeling falls over me, and my skin prickles

with awareness.

Something is wrong

*I can feel the way it creeps up my skin, setting off alarm bells in my head and I whimper, unsure of what the hell to do. Percy is supposed to be with me somewhere hidden, and Penny can't be too far off. f**k, I wish I had that mind link up and running right now.*

"Percy?" I call out, spinning as I wring my hands together. Where the hell is everyone? My wolf whines, making her presence known while we wait for a response. Percy doesn't make a peep, and I can feel the dread creeping

in on me.

“Percy!” I hiss into the shadows of the trees, but if he is there, he doesn’t answer me. “It’s fine, it’s probably just because I’m not used to being alone anymore... I try to reassure myself.

Then I see it, a figure moving toward me and I breathe a little easier. Until I realize it’s not the redheaded man who is supposed to be protecting me. Nor is it his twin sister with a spunky personality. I wait for a mere second obvious I am on my own. to see if Percy will step in to stop them, but as the figure grows closer, it becomes ver

“Shit!” I squeal as I turn and sprint up the trail and through the trees, leaping over roots and sidestepping rocks, like I do in my training sessions.

It takes longer than I’d like to admit, but I make it to the clearing at the top of the hill. Twenty more feet. I just need to make it twenty feet further for Merikh to see me on the ledge from his office. That is all it will take for him to know I need help. I lurch forward, falling onto my stomach as weight topples me down.

I try to crawl away, screaming out for Percy or Penny again, hoping they are close enough to hear me. But again, no one comes to aid me. The person on my back wrestles with me as I throw an elbow back and pain radiates up my arm.

At least I hit the asshole in the face. They groan in pain, falling off me with curse words and I twist, popping up as fast as I can, ready to put up a good damn fight. Then I pause, squinting my eyes to make sure I’m not imagining things.

18:16

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Chapter 18

“Grady?” I ask, shocked, eyes wide now as I glance around for anyone who might come after him. If Percy or Penny show up now he is dead man.

“Cole,” he breathes, stumbling forward and cupping my face, a massive smile on his lips like he has never been so happy “I found you,”

“What the hell are you doing here?” I hiss, ushering him as far from the ledge as I can get him..

"I came for you," he mutters, looking confused as I pull his hand away from my face.

I frown at him, trying to grapple with the fact he is here that he is confessing he came for me. He clings to my fingers in desperation and I let him as I scan him for injury.

"I came to save you from the alpha of death. Colette, I came to claim you as mine."

n

SEND GIFT

Chapter 19

"Merikh POV

I pace my office, back and forth, waiting for Percy to update me on what the hell is happening.

"You could just go watch for yourself." Hayes says, unamused. He is angry with me. It's not like he has a reason to be. It's not his mate about to have a meetup with her ex and probably try to run off.

"Why the hell would I want to watch her betray me?"

"You are making assumptions." He shoots back, wandering to the massive bay window overlooking the lake and the cliff that is above it. I roll my eyes, looking at him.

"The last time I didn't make assumptions, I was blindsided and our father ended up murdered."

*"She isn't the bitch that set you up. Colette doesn't have a calculating bone in her b*dy and you know that," Hayes groans, throwing his head back before he glares over at me.*

"How would I know that?" I grit out to him. "How do I know she didn't lure him here?"

"Wow." he scoffs with the shake of his head before turning to face me fully. "Is that what it's come to? You are so

*I over?" hopelessly in love with that poor girl that you are convincing yourself s
he will screw*

*"f**k off," I grumble. He is wrong, trust is earned. When it's given freely, that's
when people screw you over, or worse, when it gets people killed.*

-Grady found her-

*Percy says in the back of my mind and I glare at my younger brother, who still
shakes his head. He finally lifts his hands like he gives up and he retreats to th
e couch where he plops down with a heavy sigh.*

"If Colette finds out, she may never forgive you," He grumbles.

*"You and I both know there is a lot she won't forgive me for, won't change her
fate or mine." I move
toward the window, my heart pumping as I wait for more information from Perc
y. "She is mine whether she hates me or*

not."

-

*She hit him in the face- Percy says and I can hear his amusement, like he is p
roud of our little Luna, and I smirk to myself.*

1/6 SHTË

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Chapter 19

*I like the sound of her hitting her ex mate who felt she was worth letting
go. Not that I can hate him too much. How can I when he is the reason I know
she is truly mine? No, Grady's screw up made my plan so much easier to get
her into my pack. But that doesn't mean I have to like the idiot.*

-Stay close but not too close-

-

*Alpha...I hear Percy's conflict through the mindlink and my anger grows. I kno
w he and Penny take their role seriously. But until tomorrow, until she is
officially their Luna and announced to the pack, their loyalty is expected to re
main with me and the pack.*

-
That is your Luna, Percy. Your job is to make sure she is safe. If she tries to leave with him, you will stop her. Do you understand?—

-Yes, Alpha—he shoots back.

I see Hayes' pointed scowl, but I ignore it. He's never found his mate, so he doesn't get to dictate how I treat mine or determine if I can trust her.

"You are putting him in a tough spot. Why not send me?" He asks. "Why the hell would you—"

"Because I need you here to control me!" I roar at him, my eyes burning him up with anger.

Is he so dense he doesn't see that I will kill f**king Grady? The second I leave this office, that fucker is dead and it will hurt Colette. It will f**king hurt her and as much as I know all of this- this test of loyalty will hurt her I know killing Grady would make me forever lose her. There would be no coming back from that. She is my second chance mate. There is no one else for me, but that doesn't mean I have to trust her.

"What?" His eyes grow wide and he sits forward on the couch, alert. Then he grows soft and he frowns. "You are a f**king confusing man, brother."

"Yeah, well, I feel the same damn way." I grumble. "I didn't create this opportunity, Hayes, but I will not pass up the chance to determine her loyalty before I take her as my Luna. It's as if the moon goddess herself needed me to see the truth, so I can plan how to live with her if she isn't loyal."

"You are making a mistake." Hayes grits out, standing and slapping a hand on my shoulder. "You should learn to

trust—"

"Trust?" I chuckle dryly. "Trust? What exactly should I trust? The mate bond that already fucked me once? That the traitor among us will just happily reveal themselves? No, Hayes, the only thing I trust is blood and my senior

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Chapter 19.

ranking wolves. Everyone else can fuck right off at this point.”

10088%

18:16

“There he is,” He says, his voice dripping in disappointment. “The cool Alpha of Death everyone talks about. Been a while since I’ve seen him. Can’t say I missed him.”

-Luna is telling him to leave, Alpha—
Percy says, breaking through the mind link.

My lycan vibrates with pride and happiness as I freeze, unsure of what to do. What my lycan wants to do is go to her, chase her down and hold her tight. Not in a million years did I think she would...I mean, I had hoped, but even I know hope is usually a useless emotion that sets people up for a harder fall.

-Stay with her, I am coming—I decide, finally feeling like I can breathe for the first time. Just knowing she is choosing me is enough to keep my murderous tendencies at bay. For now.

Hayes watches me in shock as I rush out the office door, everything passing me in a blur as I make my way out the pack house and toward the trail Percy said they were. She’s not Lauren, I remind myself, and my Lycan tries to fight me for control. She is not Lauren, and she has told us she wants to choose us, even before knowing she is my second chance mate.

I inch up in the tree line, listening to the hushed whispers of Colette and the fuckface Grady who seems to think he can sneak into my territory unnoticed. The wind works in my favor, blowing their words toward me as I press my back into the tree as close as I can get without detection and try to eavesdrop on their conversation. I want to hear those sweet words when she tells him to fuck off.

“I don’t like this,” Percy protests from above me in the tree.

“I didn’t ask,” I mutter,

“This is breaking her trust,” he warns me, but I don’t care.

"You go around the other side." I say, glaring at him before he nods and slinks off silently through the forest

shadows.

"What do you mean?" Grady's voice whispers, sounding confused.

"Merikh will kill you." Colette sounds scared,

"I'm not afraid of him,"

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Chapter 19

"You should be," she snaps. "He will end you so quickly. I have seen how quickly he changes, Grady. You don't stand a chance against him."

Damn right he doesn't. Hell, the moment she sends him on his way, I will scoop this dickwad up and stow him away in my dungeon. Colette is not leaving me, ever.

"I'm not leaving without you, Cole." He says with conviction. "You said you love me. How can I leave you?"

Silence falls over them and my chest aches, my lycan angrily railing against my sanity, trying to break free and make an example of them. When did she tell him she loved him? Tonight? Before I got here? Does she still love him after everything?

"I am telling you to leave." She says once more. "Please? I can't lose you again."

"So what? you will just stay here and mate with him?"

"I made a promise!" She hisses and Grady scoffs, laughing.

"A promise? I don't see a mark keeping you here. Maybe I should just mark you now, before he can?" Grady says, sounding angry. I lurch forward, ready to tear his teeth from his skull, but I stop when I see her putting her hands

"Please...stop." Colette sounds tired, worn down. Grady tugs her close to his chest by her hand and my vision

turns red.

*"I want you, Colette." Grady whispers, then he grips the back of her n*ck and presses his lips to hers.*

*I stare, stunned for half a second, before dragging my eyes away. All semblance of pride or happiness obliterates and I'm left feeling hollow and really f**king angry. Any second longer and I will kill them both.*

I hear nothing, only the ringing in my ears as her betrayal reopens a part of my injured soul I thought I had sealed with hatred. Betrayed twice by the women the moon goddess stupidly destined to love me.

-Do not let her leave this pack, Percy. Do you understand me?—

-Yes, Alpha- he shoots back obediently.

-Hayes, I want this fucker picked up on the border as he tries to leave-

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Chapter 19

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Have a little faith brother Hayes tries to calm me, but I shut down the link before he can continue.

My chest feels like it might rupture and my head spins. The amount of emotions I have felt in the last half hour is enough to give me an aneurysm as I walk.

Where? I have no idea; the scenery seems to meld into one. I hate that I was right. Even if I had expected it, even if I had hoped I was being a fool...I wasn't.

I was right. Time seems to fade away and I sit on a boulder, staring at the moon as it rises over the lake.

"Merikh?" Her once sweet voice now grates on my ears and I look over my shoulder to see her red faced and shocked to find me.

"How was your walk?" I force out the words, refusing to let my emotions take over me.

Maybe she sent him packing, and maybe she was coming to confess she ran into him. That pesky feeling of hope tries to creep up, but squash it back down. I won't dare to hope, not with my heart. Never again. Instead, she can prove herself to me.

"It was...uneventful," she says with a smile that doesn't reach her eyes. I take in her dirty clothes and arch a brow.

"Uneventful, huh?" I ask, and she swallows, then nods quickly. "So the dirt just jumped onto your clothing?"

"Oh," she looks down, surprise written all over her face, then she grins. "I fell. Tripped on a root."

"Mmm," I nod.

"Actually..." she says, sighing heavily.

*"Yes?" My eyes snap to hers, unable to kill the f**king hopefulness in my tone.*

"Penny wasn't out here...and I called for Percy, but he never responded...and ..."

"And what?" I ask her. "Did something happen?"

"No!" she rushes out fast, looking over her shoulder. Does she really think she isn't suspicious as fuck? "Nothing happened, just a walk alone. In the woods."

"You weren't alone, Colette." I say, my lips pressing into a firm line. "You never are."

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Chapter 19

"So...you know?" She asks, her face blazing red, and I tilt my head, watching her closely do my best to look confused as I furrow my brows.

"Know what?" I ask her, and she clears her throat, rubbing her hands on her pants.

"It's nothing." she smiles.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'm sure."

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And just like that, what little hope I stupidly let creep in bursts into flames, letting loose a wildfire that suffocates all thoughts of ever loving anyone again.

chapter 20

**Colette POV*

I cradle my hand, the skin still stinging where I slapped Grady and told him to leave. He has put me in an impossible situation, one that has the potential to ruin everything I thought I was building here with Merikh. Grady thinking he could just waltz in here and convince me to run away with him is all the proof I need to know he is not the one for me. All I ever wanted was to be someone's first choice.

And with Merikh, I am. Hell; he could choose anyone in the entire pack and he wanted me. Zero hesitation. One little lie and Grady was rejecting me without hesitation. He did it with tears, but even if he hadn't rejected me, I knew I would never be first. As a friend, that's okay, I can understand that, but as a mate? No.

And for him to show up here, after everything, after weeks of him being with Leslie. He had a lot of nerve to sneak into my pack and try to convince me to run away with him. Especially since it is only after learning that the baby is likely not his that he came for me. If it weren't for that fact, he wouldn't be here. He is here because Leslie is tired of him and let him loose.

*So, of course, when the asshole k*ssed me, I had no choice but to gather my brains and smack the shit out of him. But now that I see Merikh, the way he is watching me, like he knows something is wrong...I can't tell him. As mad as I am with Grady. No matter how hard I want to hit him again*

n. Merikh warned me the day he chose me. He warned me he would kill Grady, and I believe wholeheartedly that he will.

So as much as it hurts, I have to keep this impromptu meeting a secret, until I know Grady is gone safely from pack grounds. Until I feel he is far enough away that I can calm Merikh down and explain what happened and how I sent him with a firm no. I need Merikh to know, and believe I choose him the way he chose me. No hesitation. No one who could change that.

“You should head to find some dinner,” Merikh says, his face stoic and unreadable. “It’s already late.”

“I thought we would eat together-”

“You thought wrong.” He snaps and I rear back, surprised by his demeanor.

“Oh...It’s just that...Earlier you said we would-,”

“I’m sorry,” He exhales, cutting me off. “There is a lot to attend to for tomorrow, and I still have to figure out who the other traitor is.”

1/5

Chapter 20

My eyebrows shoot up.

“The other traitor? There is more than one?” I ask and he scoffs, shaking his head.

*“Seems I am up to my n*ck in them lately.” He mutters. “I will see you tomorrow for the official introduction to*

the pack.”

“Oh, I see.” I sigh, not even trying to veil my disappointment, but he seems to be lost in his thoughts again. “Then I’ll just...go.”

I

Merikh doesn’t fight me on it and my chest aches as I wander away from him, hating how he doesn’t even look at me once. I should go back and tell him. Shit, I know I should have told him right out the gate about Grady... But that fear

of losing Grady because of a jealous mate makes me feel sick. I will tell Merikh. Just not right now, but when the time is right and I know Grady is safe from his reach.

I can't even remember how I made it back to my room, my mind moving a million miles a minute and my emotions completely wrecked. Here I thought all this time I loved Grady, that I had felt that earth shattering, death defying love.

Yet when that bond broke, when I left with Merikh and felt what it was like to be treated like more than a maid. More than someone who could never have anything. Did I know what love was? Was it just me feeling a pull to him because of the mate bond? The more I think back, the more I realize, maybe I didn't know what actual love

was?

"You are back," Penny says, sounding relieved as she peeks around the bedroom door. I give her a strange look as she pushes into the room, closing the door behind her.

"Uh...yeah..."

"It's just that Percy mind linked me...he said that you may have...had a rough walk."

My stomach drops and I can feel my face grow pale. There is no looking her in the eyes. Is that what Merikh meant by not being alone? Does he know too? All the terrible ways he could kill Grady come flooding into my mind and bile rises in my throat. Holy shit, did I get Grady killed?

"D— did Percy...say anything else?" I ask, finally lifting my eyes to meet hers. Penny watches me for a moment. before nodding her head.

"Are you okay?" She whispers as tears dot my eyes.

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Chapter 20

“Why the hell did he come here?” I ask her softly as tears fall from my eyes. A frustrated groan tumbles from my lips as I move to the bed to sit. Everything feels wrong.

“Well, what did he want?” Penny asks, leaning on the dresser across from me.

“He wanted me to run away with him,” I scoff, wiping at my eyes annoyed. “He thought he was coming to save me from the big bad alpha of death.”

“Do you need saving?” Penny asks.

At first I think she is joking, but the longer I watch her, the more I realize she is serious. Does she think I am here because Merikh is forcing me? That I would truly run just because an opportunity arises?

“No, and I sure as shit don’t want it.” I say honestly.

“And did you tell him that?”

“Yes! I told him to leave, and then we argued and he got mad at me and he...” I pause, remembering the moment his lips hit mine. Cracked and weirdly wet. The lips I once had longed for felt wrong, gross against my skin.

“He what?” Penny’s voice rises as she stands up straight, ready to go on the attack, murder written all over her face. “Did he hurt you? Why didn’t Percy jump in?”

*“He k*ssed me,” I whimper, pushing my hands into my hair, afraid to look at her. What if she hates me after this?*

“Oh, oh shit...” she murmurs.

Penny, I was stunned. I didn’t know what to do and for a second I just stood there. Then I realized what was happening, and I slapped him.” I rush out, the memory still too fresh.

*“Wait, you slapped him?” Penny asks, sounding surprised. “You didn’t k*ss him back?”*

*“Of course I didn’t k*ss him back,” I snap at her, a little offended.*

“Well, that is good.” She says, with a relieved chuckle as she plops down next to me.

“I don’t know what to do, Penny.” I groan, covering my face with my hands. How does someone go from no one wanting you to two men?

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Chapter 20

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“What do you mean? You aren’t planning to leave, are you?” Her voice trembles slightly and I frown at her.

“Seriously? Do you really think I would leave?” I ask. She shrugs.

“You are my Luna, and I’d consider you a friend but I’ve only known you three weeks...” She reminds me with a half frown. Penny has a point, but it doesn’t change things. Three weeks may seem like nothing, but it feels like so much more.

“I care about Merikh,” I mutter, my cheeks pink. “I like him, and I asked him to mark me...”

“Then what are you going on about not knowing what to do?” Penny’s brows knit together in confusion.

“When do I tell Merikh?”

*“Tell him? About your ex-mate k*ssing you?” She laughs sardonically.*

“Yes,” I say, furrowing my brows.

“Oof. That I don’t know.” She blows out a huff of air, looking as perplexed as I feel. “If it were me, I wouldn’t...”

“I need to be honest with him, and I want to tell him, but...he told me before he would kill Grady...I can’t imagine what he’d do to him now...” I admit and she winces, looking away.

“Won’t be pretty,” she sighs heavily. “But the truth is important, so I would say sooner rather than later.”

“You don’t think Merikh would actually kill Grady, do you? If I told him?”

“Hell yeah he would. Like, without a second thought.” She says.

“So I will tell him tomorrow then.” I say with conviction, more trying to convince myself. “I can’t be responsible for Grady’s death. There is no world in which I could ever forgive myself for that.”

“Well, I am going to get back to planning your big day tomorrow.” Penny says standing abruptly and rushing to the door. My mouth falls open at how fast her demeanor changes. I just poured my heart out to her, confessed something I didn’t think I could tell anyone, and she is...just running off? Just like that?

My gut is telling me something is off, that I need to make sure this stays a secret even though I know she is my gamma and is loyal to me. I feel the need to ensure she says nothing to Merikh or even Hayes.

Chapter 20

“Promise you won’t tell anyone what I told you.” I say. I watch her face turn serious and her eyes meet mine. But she bows, accepting my command.

“Yes, Luna Letty.” She looks uncomfortable, but she slaps on a smile and shoots me a wink, making me feel a little more at ease as she spins and walks out the door..

After a few moments of standing in silence, I make my way to the bathroom, recognizing how badly I need to clean myself up after my encounter. The water pounds into the empty shower as it heats, and I stare, wishing it was at a bath rather than a shower. But I can’t imagine shaving while sitting in a tub is all that easy. And I don’t want to miss a single spot.

Tomorrow won't just be the day I become Luna, it will be the first day of the rest of my life. Tomorrow I will become Merikh's full mate. My cheeks heat at the thought of tomorrow night and how the marking will go. Gone are the problems of today, replaced by a pure white blossom of hope in my chest. Hope for a fruitful future, one full of love and a mate who wants me. One where tomorrow I give every part of me to someone who wants every piece of me.

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