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I am not led through the castle, but around the back of the huge granite castle; we follow a paved path that is lined with hedges before it opens on to a cobble driveway further ahead. In the distance, I can see guards standing along the walls, lining some stables.

The sound of sobbing and wailing comes from within, which makes my stomach flutter, wondering what they are doing to the women that are held hostage here. Yet upon entering the stables, I find the women standing naked.

A woman with a stern face wearing a black tunic and white apron is scrubbing their flesh and turning it pink, I am shoved forward toward another woman. This woman is younger, her hands surprisingly gentle as she grabs my arms, steadying me.

Her gaze is soft as I peer back at the woman's moss-green eyes. Her hair is a dark auburn, her features soft and angelic, and she appears to be a little older than me.

"How do you expect to put on a show for the King's, smelling like you rolled with pigs!" The mean lady scolds the woman as she scrubs at her with a pumice stone, I glance at her wondering if I should offer to swap places with her as the woman being scrubbed cringes and hisses. The few other girls are lined up behind her naked, having clearly survived the woman whose face reminded me of rat vicious scrubbing.

They are shaking in fear as they try to cover up their nudity with their hands from the leering gazes of the few vamps that stood off talking to one side, sending disgusting glances their way. They weren't even trying to be subtle about it.

One man is even openly looking at the younger girl, who might be only a year or two older than me. His blood-red eyes watching her as a predator would watch its prey. His tongue flicking over the sharp fangs protruding from his pale lips.

Shaking my head, I turn to face the woman who is tugging at my clothes and becoming frustrated when she can't remove the ties. "What's this made of?" she mumbles to herself.

However, one thing that becomes clear is that the woman pulling on my clothes is also human, whereas the stern-faced woman appeared to be something else. I can tell she is a shifter of sorts because her snake-like eyes zeroed in on the woman's skin, scrubbing harder at some mark that mars her flesh.

I know the woman trying to undress me isn't a Lycan. No female Lycans exist anymore. My grandmother told me a witch cursed them. She used to tell me of the times when there were some still in existence. How it was that they had become extinct. Lycan men are brutal, possessive beasts, and as the Lycan female numbers dropped, were forced to share. All because of a spell a witch had bestowed on the Lycans when her sister was killed.

The story goes that the witch's sister was half Lycan, a werewolf, until her mate turned her into a full Lycan. She was mated to a King, or so granny said. And consumed with anger, he had accidentally killed her. Her coven helped her place a curse on Lycans. Grandma said the curse was to force Lycans into extinction.

The witch cursed them, that their existence would be snuffed out when the last female Lycan died, and that they would lose their ability to create new Lycans. And they did, but not only that, they lost far more than just the ability to create new Lycans, or their ability to father girls, they lost their humanity.

It served them right, my grandmother had said, for they didn't deserve the blessing of the moon goddess, only the death of the grim reaper.

Stupidly, the men didn't believe her. Ego wanted to prove that they could father a girl, prove that her curse to be a sham and an empty threat. It wasn't until they realized they couldn't father a girl, that they truly understood the gravity and implications of going against a high priestess witch.

In revenge, they killed her coven. And ever since, female numbers declined until eventually none were left and no girls have since been born. Greed for them became murderous, savage. Wars were fought over those. And eventually, they were hunted to extinction.

So now Lycan can only produce werewolves, mating human women, and or crossbreed new species, but still they can not father a girl. And once the Kings and the four Kingdoms fall, no more Lycans would exist, and I couldn't wait for that day. Only now, I may never see it once I am forced to take part in the maze.

The human woman yanks on my sleeves when a loud feminine shriek rings out. My head turns to see the vile Vamp trying to pull the girl away from the other women.

"Neil! Leave the girl!" the stern woman snaps at him.

"Just want a taste, Lina," he growls and whines in the same breath, like a toddler chucking a tantrum. "Mm, she smells. He buried his face in her neck while she stood frozen with her eyes wide like saucers. "Virginal," he purrs.

"Pathetic," I mutter, not realizing I spoke out loud. His head lifts.

"What did you say?" he snarls, shoving her away. The human woman trying to untie my top grips my arms tightly, I turn my head seeing her frightened eyes looking at me in some warning.

Yet death is not something I have ever feared, so this man would not be the one to instill it in me.

"I said you're pathetic. It's amazing how predators feel so strong hurting the weak." I spit at him, shocked at the venom in my voice and how steady and clear my own words sound.

He laughs, "And what are you, little girl predator or prey?"

"Both!" I answer.

The woman tugs at my leather top, twisting the laces to undo it. I pull away from her, and she gives me a questioning look as I start to undo my clothes myself. I didn't want them ruined. Not only that, but I only just made these with a Hyde I found.

"Really? Because you look like prey to me, pathetic, weak!" He snarls, shoving the young woman back towards the other women.

"Yes, it depends on what I am hunting." I tell him, unperturbed by his advancing undead figure.

Pushing the servant woman's hands away, I undo the laces at the front, sliding my arms out of the long sleeves, before removing the boy legs I had also made, and I nearly slap her when she tossed them aside.

Hearing a gasp, I turn to see the vampire man had stopped, his eyes looking over my naked body, a look of surprise on his face. Even the rat-faced woman had stopped her scrubbing, her eyes taking in the marking that lace my skin, glowing beneath the dim lighting.

"Well, aren't you full of surprises?" Malachi's voice startles me. I glance over my shoulder at him.