

## Chapter 11 Flame of Hope

Ryan smirked at Lucy. He found her anger cute. The way her cheeks reddened slightly and how her arms folded in front of her. He let his eyes wander over her and frowned as he looked at her wounds. She was strong. There was no denying that. But she fought dangerously. She fought to the brink. His chest squeezed in pain when he looked at her wounds. He couldn't have her getting hurt again or worse. He would take care of Beryl so that she wouldn't have to. He was going to protect her now. She was his to protect.

He hadn't had a moment alone with her besides when she was unconscious. He wanted to talk with her. They had a lot to talk about. His eyes focused on her lips and inwardly he groaned. They had a lot not to talk about too. She was recovering but her lips were not injured. He wanted to taste them and bury himself in her intoxicating scent. He wanted to show her just how serious he was about taking care of her. He could see she was still trying to restrain herself and ght off the mate pull. There was no need to ght against what nature had intended. They were meant to be. She did everything for her people. She was always thinking about them rst. But he could tell this was something she didn't do for herself. He wanted to ask her what she wanted. What did she really want? To hell with everything and for once just answer what it was that her heart really wanted.

He couldn't express the amount of pain he felt when she talked about Derek. Seeing her own pained and sad expression tore him apart. He didn't want to see that look on her beautiful face ever again. He would take care of her and be who she needed him to be. But he needed her to also choose him. He wanted this to for once be a real choice for her.

"I'd like to talk with you privately." He said meeting with her green pooling emeralds.

Lucy looked back into his amber eyes. He never said anything when she mentioned not solidifying the treaty. Instead, his amber eyes darkened slightly and his eyes began to wander over her body. Going to 'talk' with him privately? Yeah, he wanted to do more than talk privately. And what scared her... was that she didn't trust herself to be alone with him. For once in her life, it was herself she didn't trust in this situation. She did want to get to know him better. She was curious about him and his life. But this would only hurt her more in the long run. It was best to try to close herself off from him, right?

And she was still irritated by the manner in which he spoke to her. Asking her what was more important to her? Taking out the witch or the treaty. She knew that the treaty with the vampires was the most important for the werewolves because Beryl would get taken care of. She wanted to prevent anymore loss of life and maybe she could take her out herself. It was a big maybe and a risk though. If something happened to her... there could be no treaty. But she would not admit that maybe she was thinking hastily. She couldn't stand to give him that satisfaction.

A sweet scent oated in the air from the kitchen. And her nose detected the smell of chocolate chip cookies . She could denitely go for one of those right now.

"I'd rather not." Lucy nally spoke and quickly hoisted herself upwards. She made sure not to wince from the pain and she held out her hand to stop Ryan's advances. "I am perfectly capable of walking by myself. I have a couple wounds but I'm not lame." She stared at him ercely as she challenged him. She could see it in his eyes that he was not about to allow her to walk. She was going to have a ght on her hands if he tried to lift her up. She needed some space away from his intoxicating pheromones. Suddenly she felt herself being lifted up from behind. She glanced up in shock to see Tonya winking down at her.

"Come with me Lucy. Let's go and see if those chefs need any help in the kitchen. You know, being helpful and all. Maybe they need some taste testers."

Lucy smiled up at Tonya in appreciation and nodded her head. Tonya looked up at Ryan and smiled sweetly. "Don't worry. I'll carry her. I am sure you have other things you need to attend to."

Lucy could see Ryan's eyes icker as he stared at Tonya. He was visibly upset with her actions. But when his eyes settled back to Lucy they softened. He took in a deep breath and nodded his head.

"There are a few things I need to take care of. We will have that talk later Lucy. It isn't an option so prepare yourself for it." Ryan's gaze sharpened on her before he turned and walked away.

Tonya walked the opposite direction with Lucy and smiled. "That was a close one."

"Thank you for upsetting your leader for me." Lucy said quietly.

"I could see you needed a break. The mate bond is intense, and I can't imagine how hard it is trying to ght it..." Tonya's eyes drew serious. "He is serious, you know. He has no intention of letting you go."

Lucy frowned. "You can put me down now. He isn't here."

Tonya laughed. "Sorry I wish I could. But he threatened that if I let you walk on your own he would break my legs and stab me with vervain."

Lucy's eyes widened in shock. "He wouldn't."

"Ryan is a good guy, but he is protective over his team and now you. The moment I interfered I placed a target on my back. If I don't extend to you the same attentiveness that he would give you, I'll be punished." Tonya chuckled and shrugged. "He is a frustrated male vampire mate right now and that makes him more dangerous. We are animals in a sense. And just like other wild animals get more ferocious when a female is ready to mate, our males are just as similar nding their mate. However painful it is for you it will be worse for him as a male. Fighting against instinct is hard."

Tonya placed Lucy in a chair at the table. And grabbed them some cookies and milk. She sat across from her and smiled, raising up a cookie. "Well worth it."

"Lucy... I'm sorry about all the pressure that is on your shoulders. I have a hard time thinking that your parents would want you to reject your mate... even for the treaty's sake. Would they?"

Lucy held the warm cookie in her hands. She studied it quietly. "I know they would want my happiness no matter what. They wouldn't force me to be with Derek. In fact, they always told me this was my choice." She let out an airy laugh. "Though let's be honest, what kind of choice is it really? You don't have to do this Lucy but if you don't there won't be a treaty with the vampires. And this could lead to a devastating war down the road." She lifted her eyes up to Tonya and raised her eyebrows. "Some choice, right?"

"I'm sure Ryan has a plan. Maybe hear him out? Ryan also has pure blood lineage. Maybe the two of you could bargain your own child?"

"And pin this burden on my own child knowing what it is doing to me?" Lucy shook her head. "Couldn't do that."

"Maybe they will accept the treaty with you two as mates?"

"Derek isn't going through all this trouble to make sure my family is protected to not take me as his chosen mate and bride."

Tonya nodded her head slowly. "That is true... the prince is going through a lot of trouble even sending his elite soldiers out here... He must care then. You wouldn't go through all of this if you didn't." She smiled up at Lucy weakly trying to offer up some silver lining.

Lucy nodded her head. "I think Derek and I really need to have a sit down. We need to have a heart-to-heart conversation of what we want and expect out of this relationship. I think it will be better once we lay everything out on the table." She raised the warm gooey cookie to her mouth and bit into it. "Oh my gosh this is sooooo good."

"I know! You would never know they were cooked mixed with human blood."

Lucy's eyes bulged open, and she stopped chewing. She stared at Tonya in shock and even quit breathing for a moment. Eeeewww. She was eating human blood and was enjoying it. The thought immediately began to turn her stomach at the thought. Sure, she had vampire in her but she never partook of blood. She didn't have to.

Tonya busted out laughing, tears pooling from her eyes. Her loud laughter lled the air as she waved her hand in front of her. "I'm teasing. You should have seen your face! Hahaha. I'm sure you know that we don't do the whole blood thing like before. We have our human village who offer up their blood to us since it is our preferred taste, but I am sure you have seen our village. The people there are happy and they like being under our protection. Of course, some choose not to drink human blood. As you know we have evolved and now even eating a steak rare is sucient for us."

Lucy sighed in relief and grinned. "You really had me there for a second. I always make it a point to visit the village. Everyone loves their life there. I think it is a really nice set up for both of your kinds." The vampires had a human village right next to their kingdom. It was secluded from the rest of the world but still had all the modern conveniences. These were humans who knew about the supernatural world and its existence. They are not forced to live in the village but choose to. They like being under the vampire's protection; it was what the humans chose. No one had their blood forcibly taken but they offered it up willingly. This was the human's choice so who was anyone to interject. It worked out for both species. And was a very civilized way for vampires to get the blood they craved and needed. They didn't have to hunt or chase down humans to drink their blood. They had a village of humans they could get it from.

It wasn't like human raised cattle. The vampires appreciated and cared for the humans. Some vampires even took them as mates. And if a human wanted to change into a vampire, they obliged them. A bite from a vampire to drink blood was different then a bite to claim your mate. And if a human wanted to become a vampire, they would also need to drink vampire blood in addition to being bitten.

The two girls laughed and talked about various things. Tonya talked about when she rst met Zach how she didn't know they were mates. The two of them were always at odds in the beginning and competitive with one another. Especially since they were both aiming for a spot among the princes' elite soldiers. Then one day he stopped competing with her. He even started to go easy on her at times which really aggravated her since she thought he was treating her as if she was weak. It wasn't until a year later when she nally felt the pull that she understood. The relationship immediately fell into place and they both earned a spot among the prince's elite.

Talking with Tonya now was just what Lucy needed. Though hearing about Tonya and Zach did make her wonder about her and Ryan. She wondered what kind of life they could have had together. And she already knew if it wasn't for being promised to Derek, she would accept Ryan as her mate. Not only was there the mate pull but she also was liking him as a person. She liked the things she heard about him and how the people around him respected him. It hurt to want something so bad. She realized even more so now after listening to Tonya how much she really wanted a mate... her mate. How cruel was life being to her that the summer she was to be married she would meet her fated mate? Couldn't he at least be an asshole so it would be easy to reject him? But all of his actions and reactions have been out of concern for her.

Lucy sighed and ended up letting out a big yawn.

"Your body is working overtime trying to heal itself. Would you like to rest some?" Tonya looked at the girls-tired eyes and could see she was worn down.

"A nap sounds wonderful." Lucy smiled and nodded. Tonya carried her up to the bedroom and placed her on the bed.

"Get some rest. I'll be back and check on you periodically. The bathroom is through those doors there and there is a mini fridge against the wall if you need anything. Um... oh yes. If you need me before I come to check on you, you'll need to open the door and call for me. The room is soundproof, so I won't be able to hear you. I'm sure you wolves have soundproof bedrooms too since we all have exceptional hearing."

Lucy felt an anger rise inside her and she couldn't control the bitter tone that came from her mouth. "Does Ryan have many overnighters?"

Tonya began giggling. "I think you just froze the room there. A little jealous, huh?" She winked at Lucy and watched the girl bite her bottom lip as her cheeks reddened. "Don't worry. I won't tell. And that is a normal reaction... But as for your question..." She walked over towards the door and looked back at Lucy. "Never." She gave her a very serious look. "He has never had a visitor or another woman around him like that. I think he is a rm believer in the mate bond and it's sanctity. Not to make this all harder on you but he has been waiting for you. And being a virile young attractive vampire male in his prime..." Her eyes met with Lucy's. "He has shown great restraint. I'll also add this... he has many fans among our kind. There are a lot of females... hell there are even some males who are interested in him. But he has never shown them any interest beyond friendship. Which really makes this whole situation more of a shame... Anyways, get some rest Luce."

Lucy watched as Tonya closed the door. She pulled a blanket around her as her heart sank. Well, she felt like s\*\*t now. In fact, her heart was now hurting more for Ryan than it was for herself. The idea that he was waiting and saving himself for her only to end up being rejected made her stomach nauseous. He sounded like everything she ever wanted in a mate and more. Deep down a part of her was hoping she could be with her mate. Just maybe there was a way it could work out. It was dangerous to think this way. She knew she was only hurting herself more in the long run. But a tiny ame of hope and want ignited inside of her as she drifted off to sleep.

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