

TO HEAL A ROGUE

Chapter 106: Be not afraid 1

BONNIE

I lowered her gently to sit against the bedframe, my hands trembling where they gripped her shoulders. I couldn't speak. My throat had closed around everything Selene had said, everything she hadn't said, the weight of it pressing down until I thought I might crack.

Fia touched her own face, her fingers coming away clean. No blood. Whatever had been there, whatever manifestation of divine interference had caused Selene to bleed through her vessel, it had vanished with the goddess.

"How much do you remember?" I finally managed. My voice sounded like I'd swallowed glass.

Fia closed her eyes, her brow furrowing. "I remember taking your hand. I remember trying to see your future," Her eyes opened, wide and frightened. "And then nothing. To be frank, all I remember is blackness. Like someone had blown out a candle inside my head."

I sat back on my heels and looked around as if that would explain much of what happened. The room looked exactly the same. The dresser had the same hairbrush. The window was filled with coming mid-noon light. The bed with its rumpled sheets. But everything had shifted. The air felt different, charged, like the moment before lightning struck.

"She was here." I said it to the room, to Fia, to myself. "Sele... I mean Lady Selene. She was here. In you."

Fia's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh. That was what she meant. Possession requires consent. Preparation. Ritual. You can't just—" She stopped, her eyes finding mine as she read the truth in my expression. "The goddess asked me about this before. She said there would come a moment when she would need to use my body for something. I suppose she took my permission then." Her brow furrowed slightly. "So what did she say?"

The casual way she mentioned having spoken to the goddess sent an unexpected pang of jealousy through me.

I didn't understand why.

I'd told the goddess to her face that I no longer wanted her touch or her hand in my life. Not after I spent years begging for that very thing and when she'd even hinted at the possibility of me helping her, I'd rejected the idea without hesitation.

So why did a part of me care that Fia had spoken to her?

Why did the thought of the two of them having a conversation, one I hadn't been a part of, bother me so much?

I had no right to feel jealous.

And yet I did.

"She said she was breaking the law." I stood up, my legs steadier now. Anger had returned, hot and welcome, burning away the shock. "She said she made a vow to never reach me. Because I'm not supposed to exist."

Fia stared at me. "What does that mean?"

"I wish I knew. She wasn't exactly giving clarity. But she said I was created to give some... victims a chance." I moved to the window, looking out at the gardens below, at the ordinary world continuing in its ordinary way while my reality had just been torn apart and stitched back together wrong. "She also said something about my father. That my father was cursed and that she cursed him. And then she had to abandon me to see if I'd turn out like him. Is that not the most psychotic thing you have heard?"

I could hear myself getting worked up, hear the edge creeping into my voice, and some rational part of me knew I was being too much. The anger was real, but not all of it belonged to what had happened. Some of it was still that irrational, ugly jealousy I couldn't seem to shake, and I hated that I couldn't separate one from the other.

"Your father." Fia was struggling to her feet, using the bedpost for support. "You know who he is?"

"I asked." I laughed, but the sound came out ugly. "Three times. She tried to tell me, but something stopped her. Something that made you..." I faltered, catching myself. "I mean, her. It made her bleed."

Fia went still. "She bled?"

"Through you." I turned away from the window. "It looked like she was in pain too."

The memory tightened something in my chest.

"And then she was gone. Well, not before giving me some poetic speech about how I shouldn't be afraid of my power. About how it's everything I am."

We stood there in silence, the two of us, bound by whatever had just happened. The room felt smaller than it had before. The walls closer.

"She's never done this." Fia's voice was hushed, reverent in a way that made my skin crawl. "In all the records, all the histories. Lady Selene has never possessed a mortal. Never broken the divine compact. The laws that bind the gods are older than the gods themselves."

"She was afraid of being caught." I remembered that part clearly. The way her voice had dropped when she mentioned consequences. The others. "She said there would be consequences if the others found out."

"The others." Fia sank back onto the bed, her legs clearly unwilling to support her. "Perhaps a pantheon. Other species serve other gods. Hecate, Thoth, Osun among others. Bonnie, if she risked that much to speak to you, whatever she needed to tell you must be important. Vital. You must be important too. You have to see that."

"I told you all she did tell me. And if you are looking for it too, then we have our answer. She didn't tell me anything." I heard my voice rising, felt the hysteria trying to claw its way up from my chest. "She spoke in riddles. About my father and his pride. About victims of circumstances. About how I wasn't supposed to exist but I needed to exist. And then she tried to say his name and something stopped her. What am I supposed to do with that? All I want is to be able to sleep without someone trying to kill me?! And now I have more questions than answers."

Fia's hands were shaking where they gripped the bedspread. "The vow she mentioned. If she swore to another god, or a higher power, that she would never reach you... the magic of that oath would be absolute. Unbreakable. Even for her."

"But she did." I crossed back to her, dropping to my knees so we were eye level. "She found a loophole. Using your body. And there was a time before this. Using my dreams. My head is still in the space of what she said about my father. I might not have known him. And everything I did get was secondhand. But my mother told me that he was good and I believe her."

Fia held my gaze for a moment.

"Bonnie, you need to see past your anger."

"I am trying."

"I know."

"It's just..."

Chapter 107: Be not afraid 2

BONNIE

I dragged a hand over my face, the frustration burning behind my eyes. "It's hard. I'm trying to process all of this at once. I'm supposed to think about a father I know nothing about. A man I've never met, never seen, don't even have a picture of. I'm supposed to wonder what he did, why he was cursed, why she cursed him, and why his name was forbidden from being spoken or something shit."

My voice faltered.

"And then there are these victims. Who are they? What did I have to do with them? Why was I created for them? Why did I need to exist if I wasn't even supposed to?"

Fia's expression softened.

"Forget all of that for a moment."

I frowned.

"Not forever," she clarified. "Just for now. You have one clue you can actually get an answer to."

My eyes narrowed slightly. "Which is?"

"She tried to tell you his name."

I stared at her.

Fia slowly shook her head. "You keep looking at everything she said as though you need to understand all of it at once. You don't. Start with the one thing you know was important enough that something stopped her from saying it."

Her eyes moved over my face, studying me.

"Ask yourself why."

"Why?" I echoed.

"Why was his name the thing she couldn't say?"

Her voice dropped. "Why would simply speaking it be dangerous enough to make her bleed? Why would she risk breaking her vow just to try?"

She swallowed.

"And why would she risk everything to reach you? What makes you worth that risk?"

The question hit like a slap. I sat back on my heels, the anger draining out of me, leaving something cold and empty behind.

"I don't know." I whispered it. "She said I persevered. That I became something unexpected. And that I needed a push in the right direction." I laughed, but there was no humor in it. "She pushed, all right. She pushed me right off a cliff."

Fia reached out and took my hand. Her fingers were cold, but her grip was firm.

"You said she said not to fear your power." Fia said slowly, working through it.

"Yes. The red. The small miracles. She called them everything I needed. Everything I was. But I've killed people with the red." I said it flatly. "I've disintegrated them. That's not power to embrace. That's power to fear. To cage."

"She said—"

"I know what she said." I pulled my hand free, not unkindly. "But she also said my father was cursed for something he did. Something terrible. And that he let suffering continue for decades. Decades, Fia. What kind of man does that? What kind of blood runs in my veins?"

Fia had no answer for that. We sat in silence, the sunlight slanting across the floor between us, dividing the room into light and shadow.

"She mentioned victims." Fia said finally. "Victims of circumstances. And that you were created to give them a chance. A chance at what? Salvation? Survival?"

"I don't know." I stood up. My reflection in the mirror caught my eye, pale and wild-eyed, and I didn't recognize myself. "I don't know anything anymore. I thought I was just a girl with cursed magic. A girl who got her mother killed by accident. Who killed a Beta and sentinels in a cell. Who doesn't know her place in the world."

I turned away from the mirror.

"But it turns out I'm not supposed to exist."

I rubbed at my eyes, suddenly aware of how heavy they felt. I couldn't remember the last time I'd slept properly. Maybe that was part of the problem. Maybe exhaustion was making everything louder, making every thought sharper and every possibility more terrifying than it needed to be.

Or maybe I was finally thinking about the one thing I hadn't allowed myself to.

If I wasn't supposed to exist, then what had my existence cost?

The goddess had said she'd abandoned me to see whether I'd become like my father. To see if I'd break the way he had. Which meant my mother...

My stomach twisted.

Had my mother died because of some divine test? Had the goddess watched everything happen, watched my life unravel, just to find out whether I would become some monster I'd never even met?

And if I had never been born, would my mother still be alive?

The thought was cruel. Unfair. I knew that. But knowing that didn't make it disappear.

"And my father is some kind of monster," I laughed and it sounded closer to a sob. "Apparently cursed by a goddess. And that same goddess broke divine law just to tell me not to be afraid. It's insane. All of it."

Fia stood up more steadily this time. She crossed to me and placed her hands on my shoulders, forcing me to face her.

"Bonnie." Her voice was firm, commanding. The voice of an Alpha's bride, of a woman who had survived her own trials. "Listen to me. Whatever you are, whatever your father was or is, you are not him. You have proven that. You have persevered, as she said. Through suffering I cannot imagine. Through loneliness and fear and violence."

Her eyes held mine, grounding me.

"And if Lady Selene herself broke the law of gods to speak to you, to tell you to embrace your power, then perhaps it's time you stopped running from it. Perhaps it's time you learned what it can truly do."

I looked at her, this woman who had become a friend in such a short time, who had let a goddess use her body just to reach me.

"She said I might not see her again until I do what I'm supposed to do." I swallowed hard. "But I don't know what that is. I don't know where to start."

Fia squeezed my shoulders. "You start by not being alone. You start by letting yourself be helped. By letting your powers in. By letting Lysander in. By letting me in."

She released me and stepped back, a small smile touching her lips despite everything.

"You are more than you believed. More than an accident. More than a curse." She gestured toward the dresser, toward the hairbrush still sitting there, innocent and ordinary. "If you listened to what she said, you would know you have something now. You have the gift of small miracles. A gift you claimed you have never used. You have

whatever else is waiting inside you. And now you have the knowledge that a goddess believes in you enough to risk everything."

I looked at the hairbrush. I thought about the translucent bubble, the weightless suspension, the impossible made possible and perhaps it was stupid. Perhaps it was hopeless, but hope or the lack of it had never once stopped me from trying anything in my life. I reached for the hairbrush without touching it, the way I imagined reaching for warmth, for the pulse of something that had always been mine and never had a name.

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Chapter 108: Be not afraid 3

BONNIE

Nothing happened.

The thing sat exactly as it had on the dresser, the wood grain dull under the light, and for one humiliating second I felt the old shame creep back in. But I refused to let it take over.

I closed my eyes instead. I stopped asking the hair brush to move and started asking myself to believe it could.

A creak came first, low and groaning, like the wood itself was surprised to be asked. Then I felt it, not around me but under my palms though my hands weren't touching anything at all, a pressure blooming outward, thin and trembling and alive. A shape gathered beneath the intended subject and that was when I opened my eyes to catch a translucent bubble, catching the light in ribbons across its curved surface. But it was not the hairbrush that was affected. It was the legs of the dresser that was and I watched in pure shock as my gifts lifted it an inch off the floor.

I gasped when I saw it happen and as if obeying my emotions, the bubble popped like it had never been there, the dresser dropping back down with a thud that rattled the mirror on top of it.

I turned to Fia, expecting to see some disappointment at the fact that all I could do was that minute thing. Instead she was smiling.

"Goddess..."

"I did it," I said, and my voice came out smaller than I meant it to, disbelieving even as I said it.

"You did." Fia crossed the room and took my hands in hers, turning them over like she could read the proof of it in my palms. "Because you believed in yourself. Because you took charge of the blessing you were given."

I looked down at my own hands like they belonged to a stranger. A good stranger. One I was only beginning to meet.

"There's something else," Fia said, and the smile faded into something more careful. "I don't think I can stop what's happening in your dreams. Whatever's reaching you there, whatever's carving into you while you sleep. That isn't mine to fix."

I knew where she was leading with this. It was quick to catch. "It's mine."

I sat with that a moment, turning it over the way I'd turned over the dresser in my mind before it finally listened to me. Every night I closed my eyes and let something else decide what happened to me in the dark. I had let Wenzel's men decide what happened to my mother and me because of fear in my powers. I had spent my whole life being the thing something else acted upon.

"You're right," I said finally.

I looked past her to the bed, to the sheets I hadn't slept a full night in since the wounds had started appearing on skin that had no business bleeding from a dream. Tired settled into my bones all at once, heavy and complete.

"I'm tired," I told her. "And I want to sleep." My eyes went to the pillow, to the shape of my own dread waiting there for me. "I refuse not let that bastard kill me with insomnia. It is a pathetic way to go."

"What does that—"

I didn't let her finish.

"I will take charge of my own dreams. Right now. I'll call him to me."

Fia's expression changed immediately. "Bonnie, no."

I looked at her.

"You don't know what you're dealing with. You don't know if whatever has been attacking you can be summoned, or if it will use the opportunity to hurt you again."

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

"Wait. We can find someone who knows more about this. Someone who understands dream magic, or divine interference, or—"

"How long?" I asked.

Fia stopped.

"How long am I supposed to wait?" I continued. "Another night? Another week? Another attack where I wake up bleeding and hope I survive it?"

"I'm saying you don't have to do this now."

"And I'm saying I can't keep being afraid of going to sleep."

"That doesn't mean you walk willingly into a trap."

I stared at her.

"You were the one who told me to believe in myself."

Fia's mouth parted, but nothing came out.

"You were the one who told me I had to stop running from what I am. You told me to take charge of the blessing I was given." I stepped toward the bed. "So why are you suddenly asking me to have no faith in it?"

She went silent.

The words seemed to catch somewhere in her throat.

I softened slightly.

"I'm scared too, Fia. I'm not pretending I'm not. But if this is my power, then I need to learn how to use it. If that thing is coming for me through my dreams, then I need to stop waiting for it to decide when the fight happens."

Fia watched me for a long moment.

Then she sighed.

"I hate this."

"I know."

"And I still think it's a terrible idea."

"I know that too."

She looked like she wanted to argue again, but whatever she saw in my face stopped her.

I walked to the bed and sat down.

The mattress dipped beneath my weight. I pulled the blankets back and lowered myself onto the pillow, staring at the ceiling for a moment.

"Find a way to wake me if it goes bad."

Fia frowned. "Bonnie—"

"I mean it. If you see anything wrong, wake me."

"I'll try."

"But to be frank, I don't think you'll need to."

There was a strange certainty settling inside me now. Not the reckless kind. Not the kind that made me think I couldn't be hurt.

Something quieter.

I had spent too long treating my own mind like a place I had no authority over.

That was going to change.

I closed my eyes.

My heart was beating too quickly, so I took one slow breath, then another, forcing my body to loosen against the mattress.

The room faded around me.

I reached inward, searching for that strange sensation beneath my skin, the same presence that had answered when I'd lifted the dresser.

This time, I wasn't reaching for the power.

I was reaching beyond it.

I imagined the darkness behind my closed eyes stretching outward, becoming something vast enough to carry my thoughts beyond the room, beyond the walls, beyond the waking world.

My breathing slowed.

I pictured the place where I had seen him before.

I pictured the darkness and the presence.

The thing that had hunted me every time I closed my eyes.

Then I pushed my mind toward it.

"Come to me, you fucking bastard."

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Chapter 109: Memory 1

LYCAON

The air outside tasted like copper and ozone, the way it always did after a soul kiss sealed. I dragged the back of my hand across my mouth, wiping away the residual warmth of Johann's lips, and laughed into the light. The sound came out rough, unused. My throat still wasn't accustomed to this witch's vocal cords.

Eddie thought she had been so clever.

I could still see her face and that smug little smile as she pressed her mouth to mine, thinking she was binding the great Lycaon to her service. Thinking she was winning. The poor stupid girl had no idea she was kissing borrowed flesh. Sure the soul bond didn't latch onto the body and it always latched onto the soul. But the body I was in currently held two souls and the soul that was currently affected was not mine but the useless hedge witch I'd now claimed as my meatsuit.

If the bond had actually caught me, the real me, the universe would have torn me apart the moment I swapped blood with Edelina and Johann. I had been working against the Lycans since before they had a name for what they were. Since before the curse. Since before everything.

I leaned against a stone balustrade and looked up at the sky. They looked different from this body's eyes. Softer. I hated it.

The afternoon wind carried the smell of pine and distant rain. I closed my eyes and let the memory come, because it always came when I was alone like this, when the silence got too heavy. The past didn't stay buried. It waited. It whispered.

The village had been sleeping when I returned. I remembered the crunch of frost under my boots, how my breath plumed white in the moonlight. I carried the heads by their

horns, three of them, dragging through the snow behind me like sacks of grain. Dragon heads. Aureon's children. The sun god's precious little monsters.

I dropped them at my mother's feet.

And mother had looked down at the severed heads with wide and unblinking eyes. Her hand went to her throat. She wore white, she always wore white, and in the torchlight she looked like a ghost already mourning.

"Lycaon," she whispered.

My father stepped forward, his face going gray in the darkness. "What have you done?"

"I did what needed doing." I straightened my shoulders. The blood on my hands had started to freeze. "You should have heard what they were saying about her. About us. They practically called her a whore. They called us her people mongrels. They mocked mother's power."

"So you started a war?" My mother's voice cracked. She looked up at me with those ancient eyes, eyes that had seen civilizations rise and crumble. "You fool. You arrogant, foolish child. Do you know what you've done?"

"I defended your honor."

"Honor?" She laughed then, but it wasn't happy. It sounded like breaking glass. "There is no honor in this. Only ash. Only fire. Aureon will come, Lycaon. He will come and he will not stop until every werewolf, every kin of mine, is reduced to charcoal and memory."

My father put his hand on her shoulder. He was a mortal man, or had been once, before she made him something else. His face was lined with worry. "What happens now?"

Selene closed her eyes. When she opened them, they were hard as flint. "He moves above this. He apologizes. He takes his punishment." She looked at me with something that might have been pity or might have been hate. "I will liaise with the gods. I will soften the blow. Perhaps if he grovels, if he means it, Aureon will be merciful."

I laughed.

The sound startled them. It started in my chest and rolled out of me like thunder, like something broken and sharp. I couldn't stop. I bent forward, gripping my knees, laughing until my eyes watered and my sides ached.

"Soften the blow?" I gasped out. "Grovel? Mother, have you lost your mind?"

"Watch your tongue."

"Have you forgotten what they said about you?" I straightened up, wiping my eyes. My voice dropped to a growl. "Have you forgotten what the sun god let his people whisper? That you were a slut who spread her legs for a human? That what did you know about herding people as a goddess? That you were a—"

"Enough."

"No." I stepped toward her. My father moved to intercept but she held up a hand. "No, it is not enough. This is not about starting a war. This is about finishing one. This is about showing them that we are not prey. That we are not to be fucked with. That you, mother, are not some back-alley small goddess to be mocked by dragon kin and sun worshippers."

She stared at me for a long moment. The wind picked up, blowing her white hair across her face. When she spoke, her voice was barely audible.

"You do not understand," she said. "You are a demigod. You could survive what comes next. But the others? The innocents? Even the ones who followed you because they believed in your rage?" She shook her head slowly. "They will burn. They will scream. And you will hear them, Lycaon. You will hear every single one."

I opened my mouth to answer, to tell her I would protect them, that I would protect everyone, but the sky opened first.

It wasn't gradual. One moment there were stars, and the next there was light, blinding white light that turned the snow to mirrors and the shadows to nothing. The village woke up screaming. Doors slammed and children cried.

Mother fell to her knees immediately.

"He is here," she whispered. "Aureon is here."

The air smelled like burning hair. I turned toward the light and saw him descending, a figure made of gold and wrath, trailing fire like a wedding train. He landed in the center of the square and the cobblestones melted where his feet touched them.

Aureon looked at the dragon heads. Then he looked at me.

His voice was not loud, but it filled everything. It vibrated in my teeth. "My children cry out for vengeance."

"Aureon," Mother said. She crawled forward, her white dress soaking up the mud and ash. "Please. He is young. He is foolish. He did not understand—"

"He understood perfectly." Aureon's eyes found me. They were like staring into the sun itself, like looking at something that would blind you and not caring. "He relished what he did."

As if on cue, mother and brother bowed to the thing.

But I didn't kneel. Even when my mother grabbed at my leg, her nails digging in. Still, I didn't bend. I stood there with dragon blood still crusted under my fingernails and I looked the sun god in his burning face.

"Yes," I said.

"Where was your supremacy when I beheaded them?" I took a step forward. My mother's hand fell away. "Where was your glory when I dragged their skulls through the snow? You let your people mock us. You let them call her names. And now you come here expecting what? Fear?"

Aureon smiled. It was worse than his anger.

"Selene will answer the same question you just asked me," he said. "You are about to see what happens to those who harm my blood and my followers."

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Chapter 110: Memory 2

LYCAON

The sky tore open.

Not metaphorically. Not poetically. The actual fabric of the night ripped apart, and through the wound came fire. Hundreds of wings. Hundreds of shadows blotting out the stars. Dragons, more than I had killed, more than I had imagined existed, pouring down like a second night, and they were screaming.

The first wave of fire hit the eastern quarter. I heard the screams he had promised without saying much. I heard timber crack, stone explode and flesh sizzle. My father grabbed my brother Lune by the collar and dragged him toward the temple. My mother stayed on her knees, her face in her hands, her shoulders shaking.

Aureon stood in the center of the inferno and watched his children work.

"Stop this!" Selene screamed. "Aureon, please! They are innocent!"

"Are they?" He turned to her. The fire didn't touch him. It bent around him like water around stone. "What is a god without followers, Selene? What is a pantheon without worship? You built this little civilization. You bred your wolves and taught them to howl at the moon instead of my sun." He gestured at the burning houses. "In my eyes, this is pruning. Gardening if you will. After all, you let the weeds grow too tall."

I ran.

Not away. Toward. I grabbed a spear from the guard station, something crude and iron, and I threw myself at the nearest dragon. The point caught it in the throat. Black blood showered down and the beast crashed into the bakery, crushing the wall, crushing whatever family had been hiding inside.

The war started then. Not with a declaration. With me standing on a dragon's corpse while the world burned around me.

After that, days turned into weeks and more as we fought. The werewolves rallied, my acolytes, the ones who had followed me because they were tired of being called dogs. We fought in the streets. We fought in the fields. We learned that dragon fire could melt plenty but not quick enough with iron, that their underbellies were soft, that if you got close enough to smell their breath you were already dead.

It went on for longer than either side expected, longer than either species could actually sustain. I remembered watching our numbers dwindle alongside theirs.

It was also then that mother disappeared. Many thought she had fled. I too half thought she had abandoned us to save herself. And I nearly hated her for it. But we had been wrong.

She returned. She had merely gone to rally the other gods, dragging them into a war none of them had wanted any part of, purely to force some resolution before both species bled themselves entirely into extinction.

Aureon hadn't wanted to stop, not truly. But even he understood the mathematics of an unwinnable, endless slaughter eventually. He offered terms.

"Kneel. Apologize. Admit you were wrong. Admit your people are nothing but beasts who overstepped. Do this, and the fire stops. Do this, and your little mongrels can crawl back to their dens and lick their wounds."

A white flag, waved only if I knelt. Only if I bent my knee before him and his people, admitted openly, publicly, that I'd been wrong to do what I'd done.

My mother had thought that simple enough. A small price, weighed against the alternative.

I looked at the destruction. The village was gone. The forest was charcoal. We had lost two-thirds of our number, and the survivors were shifting uncontrollably, their bodies breaking under the stress of too many transformations in too few days.

And I had this little thing called self respect. Even if my mother did not. I refused.

"I would never," I told her, and I meant every word of it. "It would be a humiliation I will not accept. Not for him. Not for anyone."

That was when she cursed me.

I remembered every word of it, remembered the exact moment her voice dropped, cold enough that the temperature of the entire ruined village seemed to fall alongside it.

"You have humiliated me," she said.

"Mother—"

"Tonight," she cut in, her voice flat as a knife, "I intend to curse you. And your acolytes, since all of you want a new religion so badly." Her eyes found mine. They were empty. They were full. "Have it, then."

She raised one hand. The sky darkened again, but this time it was her darkness. Her cold, as the moon turned over.

"I curse you, Lycaon," she said, "first of my womb, and my greatest pain."

The words hit me like physical blows. I felt them sink into my skin, into my marrow, into the place where my soul lived.

"You will suffer," she continued, and each word was a nail. "You will never reproduce. Your body will forget its true shape. You will shift wrong, painfully, forever. And those who followed you? They will die slow deaths. They will become the opposite of what I made them to be. Beautiful creatures reduced to monsters. And you will watch. You will watch every moment of their degradation until you do what you should have done today."

She stepped closer. Her breath was winter wind.

"Bend the knee," she whispered. "Apologize to Aureon and his people. Break the curse."

"No," I said.

She closed her eyes. "Then suffer."

The curse settled over me like a blanket made of thorns.

And I hated her. I hated her so much I could taste it, copper and acid on my tongue.

But I also understood something she didn't. Something she was too old, too divine, too certain of her own righteousness to see.

She had given me exactly what I needed.

I opened my eyes.

Mother had thought I would break. She had thought her curse was a punishment, a leash, a way to force my obedience through suffering. She had underestimated my pride. She had underestimated how much I hated Aureon, how much I hated her for making me choose between my dignity and people's lives.

For centuries I had played this game. I had watched generations of Lycans scramble after false cures, chasing legends I planted myself.

I spread these lies like seeds in fertile soil, and they grew into forests of obsession.

Edelina had been the most entertaining. She really believed that crown would save her. That placing her son on a werewolf throne would somehow undo centuries of divine punishment. It was almost embarrassing, how easily she'd swallowed it.

I didn't care, truthfully, what happened to the Lycans anymore. Not really.

This had never been about saving them. It was simply a game now, a question of who could hold out longest against a mother who refused to admit she'd been wrong to punish me so absolutely.

My mind drifted, unbidden, toward the girl. The one who'd been dream walking beside me, uninvited, stumbling into corners of my own memory she had no business seeing.

If she was truly mine, my daughter, born from whatever loophole my mother had eventually carved into her own curse out of some misplaced hope, I intended to find out exactly why the gods had allowed such a thing to happen in the first place. Why they'd permitted me to procreate at all, after everything.

I'd lied to Edelina, of course, when she'd asked whether I held any connection to the healer currently causing such a stir in the werewolf court. It amused me, the idea of toying with the girl properly now, seeing what she was actually made of.

That was when I heard it. A voice, soft and furious, cutting directly through my thoughts like it had every right to be there.

Come to me, you fucking bastard.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter