

Cried Wolf 71

Chapter 71

I'm feeling more powerful than I've ever felt before. My veins are filled with a fresh wave of energy.

'This power, I murmur, twisting my head to look over my shoulder at Reaper. 'Does this come from you?'

Reaper squawks before responding over our mind-link.

'Yes, now that we're bonded, I can give you as little or as much power as you need.'

'Do you mean that what I'm feeling now isn't the whole extent of your power?'

'You mean our power, and no, not at all. Let's just pray that you'll never have to utilise the full amount.'

'What would happen if we had to utilise it all at once?'

Td very likely die.

I take a breather. 'Well, I'll make a mental note not to absorb it all, I say.

'We'll see, chuckles Reaper.

The portal to Shadow Crest has opened.

'It's time for you to meet your new family, Reaper.' I flash a smirk.

'Yes, I can't wait,' he answers unenthused.

Don't be that way, Reaper. You'll adore them, and there are more familiars among the five other witches with whom you might enjoy their company. May, one of the witches, is my sister!

Excellent, more vexing familiars.'

I can't help but chuckle. 'You poor creature Reaper, you've been alone for thousands of years, and now you'll have to suffer being surrounded by tonnes of love and friends, I pass through the portal, Reaper still on my shoulder, and return to Shadow Crest.

"Nina!" Magnus says. He moves to embrace me but pauses as Reaper flaps his wings, surprising Magnus. 'Wait, is your familiar supposed to have smoke flowing out of its feathers like that?' he inquires. Yiselda exhales and moves closer to check Reaper.

'It can't be? 'Isn't that the mythical Shadow Raven?' 'I thought it was a fairytale.' She's taken aback.

"His name is Reaper. It's usual for him to emit black mist.' I grin.

He caws and flaps his wings again. I can see he's bragging. I try not to laugh.

May dashes over, carrying Sabre on her shoulder. We exchange glances and embraces. Reaper is irritated and caws loudly in May's ear.

"Ugh, you don't have to be rude, bird. Your master is my sister, May pouts.

His name is Reaper. You'll have to forgive him this once. I found him in the dead woods, far from all the other familiars, where he has spent thousands of years being anti-social; I explain.

Oh, I see 'Well, it's great to meet you, Reaper. My name is May, and this is my familiar Sabre, the Fenec fox, Reaper acknowledges her with a low caw.

Magnus and Yiselda turn and face the crowd and us. Yiselda clears her throat.

"It is done. We are now one community and the first wolf-witch community to exist and live peacefully together. My sisters and I look forward to helping maintain this wonderful township of Shadow Crest with you.'

Everyone applauds and cheers. Reaper flies off to a nearby tree while I run up to Magnus and kiss him endearingly. People of the community now add wolf whistles to the cheers.

Ryker and Astrid approach us.

'We are so proud of you, son. Uniting with the witches will set such a wonderful example for the other pack communities,' Ryker says to Magnus.

Congratulations on your initiation into the Midnight Coven, Nina, and for your new little companion, Reaper,' Astrid says to me.

Thank you. Tonight has been eventful. I don't know how I'm supposed to sleep with all this adrenaline and new power?'

'Perhaps shifting and going for a run with Magnus might help burn some of that excess energy away?' she smiles.

'Yes, great idea,' I say. Magnus and I hug them both goodnight, and everyone returns to their homes.

'It's time for me to return to Pandora's box! I'm sure we'll see each other in the days ahead.' She says this as she bids Fern, Ela, Ria, and Lilac farewell.

Their eyes well up with tears. They can still see Yiselda anytime they want, but it won't be the same as living with her in Pandora's Box. Yiselda enters the circle with the star and stones within and vanishes.

'Let us show you your new bedrooms in the packhouse,' I smile as I turn to see my new sisters. They perk up and walk into the packhouse with Magnus and me. We proceed upstairs and show them all the extra rooms down the hall from where Magnus and I sleep.

'Pick any room you like,' They are all identically sized rooms with their bathroom. The only difference is that the room colours are different. So no one is surprised when Lilac chooses the purple room, Fern picks the green, Ela chooses the yellow and Ria the red room. May waves them and us goodnight and retreats to her room.

'We should get some sleep too,' Magnus says.

'I won't be able to sleep. I will need to shift and run all this new energy and power out of my system,' I explain.

'Do you want me to come with you?'

“Only if you aren’t too tired too?”

‘I’ll be fine. Let’s go.’ He smiles. We strip our clothes off in our bedroom, shift into our wolves, and dash downstairs and out the door. After a few minutes of running through the forest, Reaper is flying roughly fifty metres high above me.

‘Enjoying the view of Shadow crest?’ I mind-link Reaper.

“No, where are all the dead trees? Why is everything so bright, colourful and...”

‘Alive?’ I complete his statement with a chuckle.

‘Yeah, that, he says.

‘Welcome to Shadow Crest Reaper, the town of werewolves and now witches. A place where everything flourishes and never dies,

Lucky me; he replies, his usual unenthusiastic tone.

‘I’m curious, where do familiars sleep?’

“They may go wherever they want. I used to sleep in the dead moon tree in Silverfay Forest, but we’re on our second lap around Shadow Crest, and there isn’t a single dead tree in this entire town.

‘Well, let’s go back home now that I’ve burned off some energy, I say.

pounced over Magnus a few times before returning to the packhouse. We run upstairs and shift back to our human forms. I put my nightgown on while Magnus puts on his shorts,

There is a lapping sound coming from our window. Magnus casts a curious glance at me, and I shrug. He looks out the window to see what’s going on. Reaper enters the room, walks by Magnus, and flies onto the rail at the foot of our bed.

I, too, crawl into bed, Magnus is reluctant but jumps in. I put my head on his chest as he draws me into his arms,

Ten minutes have passed. When I open my eyes, Magnus is still completely awake.

‘Is everything all right?’ I enquire

“You don’t believe your pet will stare at me all night like that, do you? He is creeping me out.”

I look down at the foot of our bed, and Reaper is eerily staring Magnus down.

“Reaper, seriously?” I say. He caws and turns around with his back facing us. “That’s better, now everyone sleep, and my mate’s eyes better still be in their sockets in the morning, Reaper or else I’ll make you the brightest, most colourful birdhouse full of rainbows and glitter and force you to sleep in it,” I warn.

“You truly are wicked, Master,” Reaper replies as he caws angrily and nuzzles his beak beneath his wing before falling asleep.

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It started around 7 a.m. with a series of caws. Magnus puts a pillow over his face and his ears. Unlike Magnus, I take my pillow and fling it at Reaper. As the pillow knocks him off the foot of our bed, his Caw switches to a squawk.

'Good morning to you too, Master, he hisses via the mind-link.

'You're a Raven, not a Rooster, Reaper!' I growl.

Magnus chuckles but stops as Reaper shoots him a death glare. I grab Magnus' pillow and toss it at Reaper, missing him by a centimetre.

'And stop staring at Magnus in that manner,' I say.

'Fine, I'm hungry for grubs anyway, he adds before flying out the window.

Troll onto Magnus, and we kiss and snuggle for a few moments before getting ready for the day. We can hear Fern, Ela, Ria, and Lilac giggling as they go down the stairs. When I opened my door, Lilac slides down the railing backwards. 'Skedaddle Dash, Ela exclaims and vanishes. Ria races down the stairs while Fern leaps over the balustrade and skips half the steps. Magnus and I make our way down the stairs and into the dining room.

'Lifto Levititious, says Ela. Magnus and I watch as the sugar dish drifts over towards Ela. She takes a teaspoon of sugar from the bowl and sprinkles it on top of her cereal. Then she flicks her wand, relocating the bowl to its original location on the table.

'Good morning,' I address everyone at the table.

'Good morning, Luna, everyone greets me.

'Good morning, everyone. I hope you all had a good night's sleep. 'Magnus asks.

'Yes, Alpha Magnus, we did thank you, Ria adds.

May yawns as she walks into the dining area and takes a seat. Sabre circles the dining room a few times before taking a seat on a window ledge.

Do you have any plans for today?' I ask the witches.

'We were thinking about touring the town centre to meet more people, Fern explains.

'That sounds fantastic,' I say with a smile.

We wave goodbye as they 'Skedaddle Dash' into town.

'We have a lot of paperwork to complete today, Magnus adds as he stands on the front steps.

Reaper is hiding in a neighbouring tree, appearing out of place. I'm sorry for him, having been alone for so long and now living in a bustling, lush town.

'There's something I need to do before we begin the paperwork, I tell Magnus.

"Oh?"

I approach the tree where Reaper is hiding. He observes as I grab for a limb and snap a twig. I extend my right arm. Reaper descends from the sky, lands on my arm, and walks up to my shoulder. 'I have a surprise for you, Reaper,' I say.

'A surprise for me?' he inquires.

Yes, Tanswer as I walk around the packhouse. I raise my hands and form a circle with my thumbs and fingers. Through the circle of my fingers, I stare up to the sky. 'Right here will be perfect,

'Perfect for what, exactly?' Reaper asks.

'Your new house, I say, smiling.

Magnus comes over, curious about what I'm doing. Kneeling, I set the twig on the ground, close my eyes, and place my hands on either side of the twig.

'Revitilo Sprouto,' I say. The ground rumbles and the twig grows into the same majestic tree, complete with two broad bending branches, forming a barren circle in the centre where we can view the moon at night.

Reaper caws, flaps his wings and soars into the tree.

'My tree, he exclaims.

Magnus puts his arm around my shoulder. 'Does this mean I don't have to be concerned about Reaper staring at me all night?'

'Yep, I think he'll feel more at ease now, I smile.

Magnus grabs my hand and leads me upstairs to our office, where we begin going over papers together. By late afternoon, the witches had returned and informed us how much fun they had mending signs, poles, fences, and anything else that needed TLC with their magic.

The townspeople were ecstatic, and we also got complimentary cupcakes from the baker.' Lilac explains.

'That's fantastic, and I'm sure Yiselda would enjoy hearing everything about it.' I smile.

'We were thinking about paying her a visit tomorrow, Ria replies.

'She'd love that!' 'Do you think I could come too?' | ask.

'Of course, you're welcome to join us, Fern adds.

T'm going to see Pandora's Box tomorrow, I exclaim to Magnus.

'Should I come as well?' he wonders, concerned.

'We'll see.' I wink.

We all have dinner and then retire to our rooms. I open the window and gaze out at the moon tree.

'Goodnight, Reaper.' I shout.

"Goodnight, Master, he says, mind-linking.

'You do realise you can just call me Nina or Luna?'

'You could call me Reaper instead of Rooster, he quips. 'Oh, Reaper,' I chuckle. 'Have a wonderful night, okay?'

"Yes, Luna. You have a good sleep as well, and I suppose I hope Magnus has a good sleep too.'

I can't help but smile at his attempt to be friendlier to Magnus. I leave the window ajar just in case and snuggle into bed with Magnus. The night flew by, and before I knew it, it was morning.

"Luna, people are arriving, but I sense they are not arriving in good faith, Reaper says as he flies in and pulls the sheet from us.

"Huh?' I get out of bed, toss my feet to the floor, and stroll over to the window. There are three huge Alphas, each with a dozen other wolves. I can barely make out the wolf emblem in the sunshine, blinding me. The wolf council is here.

'Magnus! 'The Wolf Council has arrived!' Magnus runs to the window and looks out. He rapidly dresses once he realises I'm correct. I put on my pants and a simple tee and slip my wand into my back pocket. Reaper flies out the window in their direction. I find myself seeing through his eyes and hearing what Reaper hears.

Alpha Bennet snarls, Alpha Magnus better have a solid justification for this.'

'It might be rumour and not fact. What wolf community would accept witches as residents?' Alpha Amir says.

'One who has been bewitched, Alpha Theaton chuckles,

Alpha Bennet growls, 'Not funny: 'If this is true, it's quite dangerous, and don't forget they killed Alpha Zenith, who used to be a member of our wolf council:

Alpha Theaton's demeanour shifts from light-hearted to solemn.

Trevert to myself and turn to Magnus, 'They've come to see if we have any witches living here.' They don't appear pleased with the prospect of it being real

I'm confident that everything will be alright, but I'll mind-link my parents to join us.' They might be able to help put the wolf council at ease.'

Inod and proceed downstairs, preparing to face the wolf council.

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When we hear the thunderous thuds, Magnus answers the door, 'What brings us the pleasure of welcoming the Wolf Council?' Magnus chirps.

Alpha Magnus, we've come to talk about some fairly serious worries that have everyone on edge.' Alpha Bennet says.

“Please come in and join us in the dining room for some refreshments, Magnus adds as he opens the door wider. Magnus frowns at the scores of men following them as they enter. ‘Perhaps you could all go to the ceremony hall, where there is more room, and I’ll get you food and refreshments?’ The Alphas signal them to proceed to the ceremonial hall. Magnus was about to close the door when Ryker and Astrid arrived.

I’m pleased you’re here, Mum and Dad, Magnus replies.

‘We want to reassure the wolf council that they have nothing to be concerned about. Ryker explains.

While the kitchen staff brings out beverages and nibbles, we take our seats at the table.

‘So, what’s this troubling news you’ve heard that has prompted you to come here?’ Magnus inquires.

Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton wait for Alpha Bennet to speak.

‘At first, we heard that your Mate and Luna is supposedly half-witch. We ignored the rumours since we knew they were ridiculous, only to then hear that you have initiated a number of witches into your pack? Now we’re all aware that witches haven’t existed for hundreds of years, so please explain why the packs continue to believe these rumours are genuine, he adds, resting his hand flat on the table.

Magnus squeezes my hand to reassure me before responding to the Alphas.

‘Well, you see, you’re hearing all of this because it’s true; Nina’s grandmother was a witch, and the powers passed down through her mother’s generation. The witches of the Midnight Coven learned about it and requested to live peacefully amongst us. We decided that the witches would be welcome to join us

There is a brief pause before the three Alphas bust out laughing.

‘Skedaddle Dash, I hear one of the girls upstairs exclaim. Fern appears in a blink, seated next to us. The Alphas stop laughing and act shocked. Ela, Ria, and Lilac join us at the table, giggling. They ignore the Alphas and continue to converse while the cook serves out a tray of pancakes. Lilac takes half of the stack and places it on her plate, then Ria takes a few, leaving two for Ela to take.

‘Oh, I’d want some as well, you know?’ Fern explains.

Ela smiles and waves her wands over her pancakes, ‘I wouldn’t mind more than two.’ Then, she says, ‘Spawniate.’ Suddenly, her two pancakes have multiplied into a stack of ten. She joyfully claps her hand and sets five on Fern’s plate.

‘Thank you, Ela, Fern says, smiling.

‘Would anyone else like some?’ Ela inquires, now turning to face the rest of us at the table.

As they observe the four witches eating breakfast, the Alphas have gone quiet and pale.

‘Thank you, Ela; we’re good for the time being, I smile. I’d like to introduce you to our rather speechless visitors, Alpha Amir, Alpha Bennet, and Alpha Theaton: The wolf council is made up of them.’

The mention of the wolf council has piqued the witches’ interest. They pause in their munching and smile at the Alphas.

'Hello, my name is Fern, and my name is Ria' 'Lilac, here, she says. "Ela, and we're the Midnight Coven, Ela explains. 'Well, mostly, but Yiselda isn't here, Ela adds.

"But there haven't been any witches in hundreds of years. So, how did you end up here, and how do you exist?' Alpha Bennet inquires irritably.

That's because your grandparents' generation nearly wiped us out. Fortunately, a few of us, like Yiselda, survived. We learned that

the new luna of Shadow Crest was half-witch and Telt we would be safe here. None of you would be here right now if Yiselda hadn't survived the witch hunt. So it is because of her that the world is safe.' Fern explains.

"Huh! Sate! How can the world be considered safe when you dang witches exist?'

The witches stand up abruptly, now displeased with Alpha Bennet.

'Well, we dang witches have never caused any issues with the werewolf population. It's because you were afraid of our magic, despite the fact that we used it decades ago to heal your species and help your towns develop and prosper. The alphas grew irritated. Everyone came to us for help instead of them, and they began telling everyone that we were using spells against them. Everything was a lie. If you fully understood the ways of witches, you would understand how pleased it makes us helping others of any species. We never murdered any of your kind unless it was in self-defence or when we had no other option. 'We were always tranquil, and we still are, Ela recalls, fighting back the tears.

'Let's all take a deep breath and relax as we absorb all of this information, I say.

'Relax? While there are witches present?' Alpha Theaton scoffs.

Magnus smacks his fist against the table, drawing everyone's attention to himself.

'You forget my Mate, and the Luna of this pack is a witch. Even if you are the Wolf council, you will show respect while in my land and will not speak ill of the Luna or other witches. 'Whether you like it or not, Fern, Lilac, Ria, and Ela are now members of this pack, and they will be treated respectfully as equals.

Magnus receives a proud nod from Ryker.

'Alpha Magnus, my son, is correct. Our pack welcomed them all with open arms. They are now part of our family. Ryker explains.

'Ever since your Mate Astrid murdered our fellow councillor, Alpha Zenith, we've all suspected that this pack will be a problem in the future:' 'Speaking of the apple falling far from the tree, we hear Alpha Magnus is also to blame for his grandson's death, Moss?' Alpha Bennet fires back.

Astrid's hands are trembling. With the past being brought up, I can sense she is in anguish. I reach out and take her hand in mine. She offers me a grateful expression.

Alpha Zenith kidnapped Astrid and planned to force her to mate with his son' Moss followed in his footsteps and kidnapped Nina, intending to force her to be his Mate. Their killings were justified, and they had no one to blame except themselves.' Ryker explains.

Alpha Bennet taps his fingers on the table repeatedly in thought. Finally, he takes a step forwards and rubs his chin.

Now that we've established the rumours are true, Alpha Amir, Alpha Theaton, and I have a lot to talk about concerning this problem, says Alpha Amir.

But there isn't a problem, Magnus asserts firmly.

Perhaps it isn't a problem in your eyes and pack because they are in your pack.' As a result, they may be utilised against other packs.' Alpha Bennet mutters.

Did you not hear a word we said?' Ela snarls. 'We simply told you we were peaceful.' 'We weren't the ones going about annihilating werewolves,

But you did claim you killed a few moments ago, he counters.

'Because they were about to kill us even though we had done nothing wrong!' You don't understand, do you? You have no idea how important it is for witches to live. Without witches, you would all perish, humans included!' Ela declares.

The alphas of the wolf council burst out laughing. 'Well, for the previous hundred years or so, we've seemed to do just well without you. Alpha Theaton exclaims.

That's because we've been in hiding to ensure your survival, including the human species, by keeping all your greatest nightmares locked up with spells in Pandora's Box, you morons, Fern exclaims,

They stop laughing, their demeanour shifts, and they lock their gaze on Fern.

'I believe it would be in your best advantage to tell us more about this Pandora's Box, Alpha Amir suggests.

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'Ironically, I think it's in your best interests to know about what we're doing to save this world from being destroyed, and maybe, by some miracle, you'll come to some type of mutual respect for us witches. Fern explains.

'It has been entrusted upon Yiselda for the previous two hundred years to take over Pandora's Box and stay there. It was known as the Midnight Covenstead for generations until the Vampire King went insane and summoned Shadow Reapers and Grimghouls and released them into the world. Many werewolves were killed, and their domains were seized. It was only a matter of time before they infiltrated human settlements, and as you know, humans must never learn about the supernatural side of our world.

Many witches banded together and used their power. We were able to imprison the Vampire King and his minions inside the Midnight Covenstead, where spells were put to keep them locked up for good. Centuries had passed, and the witches and wolves had coexisted peacefully until the Alphas were dissatisfied with the love and adoration we got from their pack members. They lied to their pack members, claiming they were cursed and that all witches must be slain, so we can't control them with spells. As a result, they set out to find us. It was the largest witch hunt in history.

Yiselda was the only survivor of the Midnight Coven after the witch hunt. She remained there, keeping the charms and spells in place, knowing it was now her responsibility to keep the world safe. Years later, in a human village, she stumbled upon us at an orphanage and sensed right away that we weren't humans. We were too little at the time and didn't know till she brought us in. Since then, she has served as our mother, teacher, and protector. She remains at Pandora's Box to this day in order to protect us all.' Fern explains.

Do you think we're going to believe that?' A Vampire King, Shadow Reapers, or Grimghouls have never existed. Everyone is aware of the past. Witches used their magic against us for selfish reasons, which is why you were wiped out, Alpha Bennet sneers.

That is completely false!' Fern yells.

Alpha Bennet stands, 'We will take our leave to discuss this, and we will return tomorrow with our decision,'

'What decision? There isn't anything to decide.' Magnus growls.

'The decision on whether or not to allow the witches to stay and stay alive, Alpha Bennet smirks, turns, and goes out the door, followed by Alpha Amir and Alpha Theaton before they all leave. Alpha Amir comes to a halt and turns. 'In the meantime, we'll leave a dozen of our warriors here to keep an eye on the pack until we return tomorrow, he smiles.

'They can't be serious?' Fern is concerned.

"You and your sisters are part of this pack. We won't allow them to harm you, any of you.' Magnus says.

Reaper flies towards the Alphas, swooping them and then flying back up.

'What in the world was that?' Alpha Bennet says, his head tilted.

I'm not sure. All I saw was black mist, says Alpha Theaton.

Witchcraft, perhaps?' Alpha Amir says, returning his gaze to the packhouse.

Reaper caws and charges at them once more. This time, they come across a big black raven. They run from our territory. escaping Reaper

Reaper flies inside the house and lands on my shoulder,

'Reaper chasing after them off isn't going to help our situation,'

He mind-links 'It doesn't matter what we do, they are going to take this further,'

'Do you actually believe that?' I ask, concerned.

I know, and they'd already decided they didn't like witches before they stepped foot in this packhouse.'

'When they return tomorrow, it will not be with good news,

"We should probably see Yiselda,' Fern says. They all nod and walk outside. Ela redraws a star within a circle on the ground while Ria places the stones at each point,

'Just step into the circle and say "Pandora's Box" in your mind, and it will teleport you there with us,' Lilac explains.

As soon as they all step in and teleport,

I enter the circle 'Pandora's Box, I think in my head. I open my eyes. I notice a large and lovely house surrounded by a dense forest. The home has a red tint, and any framework and lattice around it is a dark brown. The chimney is emitting smoke, and a window shutter swings open.

Ria yells, 'Come on, Luna, the entrance door is this way

I accompany them inside the Covenstead. I'm dizzy from spinning around since there's so much going on. On the bookshelf, books and knick-knacks are rearranging themselves. A broom is sweeping the floor on its own. There are cats, frogs, spiders, and even a chicken roaming the area. We follow the sound of bubbling water into the kitchen. I expected to see a kitchen island instead of a large black cauldron. Steam and bubbles float to the surface, and I cringe when I discover the bubbling fluid is green.

I'm so delighted you came to visit Fern, Ela, Ria, Lilac, and Luna,' Yiselda smiles.

'You too, Luna, Yiselda smirks as the witches crowd around and share one giant hug. I take a step forwards and join the group hug. 'Let me put the kettle on, and we'll have some tea while you girls tell me how well you're settling into Shadow Crest,' she says. Yiselda turns and wields her wand, saying, 'Lifto Levitatus, Aqua Bedew, Inferno Flamo.

We watch as a black iron kettle glides over to the tap, fills with water, and then floats over to the fire, hovering over it.

She waves her wand again, this time at a teacup and saucer, saying, 'Lifto Levitatus. The cup and saucer drift to the dining table and land. She says, 'Spawniate. The cup and saucer multiply to become a set of six on the table.

"Lifto Levitatus,' she says as she calls the pot of water over to the table. The kettle floats and tips over, dumping boiling water into our teacups. I place a tea bag on the saucer after dipping it in my teacup until I'm satisfied with the strength.

Yiselda has come to join us at the table. 'How has it been so far?' she inquires.

'We had a lot of fun, went into town, met many people, and even got free cupcakes from the baker when we helped replace the quirky broken fence and sign, Lilac says.

They were very thankful, Ria says with a smile.

I'm delighted to hear everything is going well, Yiselda says.

"Well, until today, when the wolf council came to visit us, Fern explains.

Yiselda almost spills her tea as she stares at me.

"Unfortunately, they don't appreciate the fact that we've let witches into our pack. They believe witches used to cast spells against them, which is why their predecessors fought against witches,

Yiselda sighs, placing her teacup on the saucer.

'It's a shame their parents and grandparents have lied to them about us. They don't plan on causing any harm to the girls, do they? She asks me.

"Well, they left not in the greatest mood to discuss the matter. The wolf council said they would return tomorrow with their verdict Magnus insisted us witches are not a problem and that the girls had already been initiated and welcomed. Alpha Bennet claimed we could turn against them using the witches to our advantage. I'm hoping they come to their senses and understand witches just want to help,' I say

We even told them they needed us because of Pandora's Box, but they didn't seem to believe me when I told them why,' Fern says

If something happens to any of you, or if you believe you are in danger, please return here immediately, okay?'

'Yes, Yiselda, they all say at the same time

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The chicken walks into the kitchen and pecks at random crumbs on the floor.

'This place is incredible. 'Do you think I could get a tour?' I ask of Yiselda.

'Of course, as a Midnight Coven member, this is also your home now, she says proudly. She leads us down a lengthy corridor. I'm perplexed because the Covenstead appeared to be enormous from the outside, but this hall seems to be at least twice the length. As we proceed down the corridor, I notice that there are no doors, only old picture paintings of witches who were members of the midnight coven until they died or were killed. I come to a halt in front of one to observe its beauty more thoroughly. I take a step back. As the artwork moves, I leap back and scream. The witch in the portrait briefly bends her head and smiles before returning to her previous stance.

'Luna, what is it?' Lilac replies, concerned, as she places a hand on my shoulder. I point to the portrait.

'She moved, she said.

Oh, yeah, they all do that.' She shrugs.

'You could have given me a heads up?' I grumble.

'Luna, we're in Pandora's Box, silly. 'You should expect anything here, from your brightest dreams to your worst nightmares,' she giggles.

I roll my eyes and proceed to follow the others. When we reach the end of the corridor, there is no door, only a mirror. I glance at the reflection of all of us, confused.

Are there no doors?' 'This is simply a mirror, I say.

Yiselda and the other smile and walk through the mirror. It ripples like water as they walk through it. I reach my hand out and quickly poke it with my finger-the mirror ripples. In astonishment, I then put my entire hand through. Someone on the other side takes my hand and pulls me through.

“Hurry up, slowpoke,” Ria laughs.

Yiselda leads us along an irregularly shaped corridor with three doors, one in front of me, one on the left, and one on the right.

The sleeping quarters are via this door on the left.’

I follow her through the door and into a corridor with ten doors.

‘These are all bedrooms, she says as she opens the closest door.

The bed is a big mattress that floats above the floor, with silk bedding dangling from the sides. Furniture moves around the room as though it has its own mind. Candles float above the bed, softly lighting the space.

‘All right, then, I answer, knowing this is out of the ordinary but not knowing what to say. A mahogany French wardrobe comes to a halt and faces me. I’m not sure if I should say hello. Magnus will think I’m insane if I start talking to furniture. Instead, I walked out of the room cautiously.

The others join me, and we make our way back to the corridor with the three doors.

‘This middle door leads to the library, and another door in the library leads to the enchanted garden, adds Yiselda.

We walk into the library. There’s a beautiful globe of the world. I spin it carefully and appreciate it. There are a few little tables where we can read. As I approach certain books, I notice that they are quite old. ‘Book of spells, Book of potions, Book of magic, Book of wards, I read various titles,

At the back of the library, there are two double doors. Fern opens them, and my mouth drops open in awe at the beauty. Like fairies, there are small balls of light floating around. I chuckle as I see the cutest garden gnome statues, some with their belly hanging out. I’ve never seen such lush trees and a colourful abundance of flowers. Toadstools, some of which were taller than me. I come to a halt as I notice something beyond the bushes. It’s quite big and white.

‘Is that a horse?’ | ask.

Everyone laughs as Fern responds, ‘No, Luna, it’s a unicorn.’

Through this time until the horse steps forwards, a horn illuminating a white light on its head,

‘Wait! ‘It’s a unicorn!’ I say this while pointing at it. ‘I thought you were joking?’

‘No, I was serious,’ Fern says, laughing.

‘This place is incredible. I can’t believe you’ve got a unicorn here!

I stroke and pat the unicorn softly. ‘She is lovely,’ I say, Yiselda remarks. ‘Her name is Star.’

‘Hello, my name is Nina,’ I say with a smile. Star gently rubs her head on my face.

I look over at the garden gnomes and kneel in front of the one with the red cap and green shirt with its belly hanging out. My face is millimetres away from his.

'I swear he had his hands on his hips, and now he's waving his hand?'

The gnome suddenly leans forwards, snatches a kiss off my lips, and smiles. I flush and then growl.

'You, you tiny gnome! You can't simply steal a kiss like that! I'm mates with Alpha Magnus,' I growl. Snickering, the chubby gnome turns and rushes into the bushes.

The witches are trying hard not to laugh.

'It's time to see the rest of Pandora's Box,' says Yiselda.

We walk out of the library and into the hallway with the three doors.

Now, the door on your right is one you should never enter on your own. The Vampire King and his minions are held under spell and ward in the dungeon.'

When the door opens, there is nothing but darkness. There doesn't appear to be a floor.

Yiselda says, 'Materialise, and a book emerges in her hand. She sets it at the foot of the door on the ground. 'Sprouto Spawniate, she says, casting.

The book expands five times in size, then multiplies and stacks up, forming a book staircase.

'Wow, that was cool, I say. Yiselda beams.

Everyone takes their wands and flicks the tip, sparking a heatless flame that illuminates the dark stairs. They make their way up the steps. I grab my wand, flip it for light, and proceed up the stairs. Inside is a black wooden door with a white circle containing sigils.

'These sigils you see are wards designed to prevent the Vampire King from fleeing. You never, ever, ever wipe them away.' Yiselda states sternly. I nod.

We enter the dungeon once she opens the entrance. It's gloomy and dark. I can hear a variety of threatening noises. Shrills, moans, growls, and hisses. Many cell doors have little green and grey hands reaching out to me. I'm struck by how long their

claws are. When I get closer and see countless little goblin creatures with razor-sharp fangs snapping and gnarling, I gasp and cover my mouth. They try to reach deeper through the bars with their long dirty claws to grab me. They're various shades of green and grey, with black eyes, and I know I'm looking at some of the most frightening creatures I've ever seen.

Grimghouls, Ela describes them. They're horrible little things. They have shark-like razor-sharp teeth and can rip anyone to shreds in seconds. 'They have a hunger for flesh, she explains. The concept makes me shudder. We proceed deeper into the dungeon When I gaze into the cells, I notice that the darkness moves.

"How come it appears that something is in there, yet no one is in there?' | ask.

Shadow Reapers, Ela calls them. They are shadow entities, they hide in the shadows, so you don't notice them. They suck themselves down your throat and take control of your thoughts and body. They make you see things that aren't there. They hallucinogens that cause you to perform crazy things, typically leading to your death or the killing of others.

re

I back up a few steps,

'Yeah, no thanks, I say, frowning.

Chapter 76

A strange but warm sense overcomes me. I look to the darkness ahead, noticing crimson eyes staring right at me like a flickering flame. My body wants to be closer, and my mind feels like it's going a hundred miles per hour. My wand glows brightly enough to see two hands grasping the bars as I approach, his eyes still fixed on me.

Strangely, I hear numerous whispers in my mind at once. 'This way, come closer. It's okay, so beautiful,' the voices say.

Without realising it, my hand stretches out to touch his. He grips my wrist as our fingers connect, and I feel a slight burn on my wrist. Yiselda grabs my arm and pulls me back.

'Be careful, dear, that is the Vampire King, Alec,' she warns. Then, raising her wand, his cell lights up. I glimpse his black hair and light brown eyes before he flourishes his cloak over his face and retreats.

I examine my wrist and notice a peculiar little mark. A strange sensation runs through my body. I shake it off and turn to face Alec.

He lowers his cloak slightly enough to peer at me. He is very handsome. He looks at Yiselda.

Could you at least dim that darn light, Yiselda?' he sneers.

'Dimulous,' she says, and her wand dims low.

Alec lowers his cloak and floats forward. 'You're so beautiful. How I would love to taste your blood,' he says with a smile revealing his fangs.

'Well, lucky for me, King Alec, you're imprisoned behind these bars. I also don't plan to be on your menu. Sorry, you won't get to take a bite,' I grin.

He gives me a curious look for a few moments.

I don't intend to stay in here indefinitely, Luna, his demeanour softening.

'How did you figure out my name?' I ask, stroking the blemish on my wrist. It has a peculiar warmth about it.

I am Alec! Vampire King, I can figure out a lot by being in your presence, and I may have overheard one of the other witches call you that,' he admits.

I try not to laugh at his honesty. He smiles sweetly at me and looks over my shoulder.

'Yiselda, we have a new guest. How about you let me out so I can give Luna here a proper warm welcome,' he says sincerely.

Yiselda laughs, 'Yeah, right, I'm going to let you out so you can flee and wreak havoc across the world until everyone bows to you and declares you ruler of the world,' she scoffs.

'Why not? It sounds like lots of fun to me,' he says.

'Except it's not pleasant for everyone who dies as a result,' she says.

'Those nasty humans deserve to die for what they did to me all those years ago, King Alec says, his face full of rage. 'My Juniper, my darling, sweet Juniper, he murmurs as he withdraws into the shadows. As I hear him sob, I frown and feel sorry for him. I have no idea who Juniper is or what happened to her, but I can sense what he's going through. My heart hurts and feels as if it were a shattered glass that can't be repaired. My inner self seems gloomy and empty all of a sudden. I place my hand on my chest.

"Luna, are you alright?" Yiselda asks. I nod my head.

I'm fine, just a little overwhelmed with Pandora's Box and its contents,' I joke,

"Well, now that the formalities are over and done with and the tour is complete, we shall return downstairs,' Yiselda says, turning away. I go to follow her.

Wait! Reaching out between the bars, King Alec touches my arm with his fingers. He can't grasp me because I'm too far away. From where his fingers brushed against me, I feel a warm sense of sparks. I examine my arm, and it feels as if Magnus himself has touched me. When I look up, I notice King Alec's warm smile.

"Until we meet again, just don't make me wait too long, my Queen, he whispers, so only I hear.

I take a few steps backwards with a worried expression on my face. Fern grabs my hand and drags me behind her as she skips toward the exit. I keep returning my eyes to King Alec, and his focus does not leave me until we reach the opposite end of the dungeon and depart.

Yiselda closes the door with the ward spell. As we travel down the stairwell of books, we return to the kitchen by entering the little corridor and walking through the other door, which happens to be the large mirror.

Yiselda, using her magic, pours us another cup of tea as they converse and laugh. But I'm not sure what it's about since I can't stop thinking about King Alec. I shake my head and think about Magnus instead. I want to be in his arms, and I need to get rid of these strange feelings.

'It's been wonderful seeing you, Yiselda, but it's time for us to return to Shadow Crest. Will you be accompanying us when the wolf council returns tomorrow?' I ask.

'It's probably better if I'm there, just in case.' She answers.

I follow Fern, Ria, Ela and Lilac past the chicken, cats, frogs, floating objects and the broom sweeping the entrance again and out the door. There is a permanently drawn circle with a star and stones inside. We all step in one by one. I think of home and Magnus as I step in. When I open my eyes, we appear near the bonfire. Reaper caws from his moon tree as I run inside the packhouse, up the stairs and into the office, where I wrap my arms around Magnus and kiss him.

'Welcome back,' he says, 'How was it?'

'You should have seen the place. It was more than I imagined it to be. There were strangely shaped hallways, a broom sweeping by itself. They even had a unicorn in the enchanted garden!'

'A unicorn?'

"Yep, her name is Star,' I smile.

'So, what about those Grim things and nightmarish creatures Yiselda mentioned?'

I take my wrist in my hands and begin caressing the mark on it.

'The Grimghouls were terrifying small creatures with razor-sharp teeth. On the other hand, the Shadow Reapers were difficult to spot since they resembled shadows, shaped like people. They can fuse with your body, causing you to have hallucinations and harm others,

'They sound awful?' Magnus says.

'They were, then there was Alec, the Vampire King.' I say, pulling my wrist into my chest.

Magnus takes my hand, extends my arm, and peers at my wrists.

"How long have you had this tattoo? It looks like an Ankh? 'A sword with a circle around the grip, like a symbol?' he asks.

I examine my wrist once more, the redness and discomfort have subsided, and I can now see what Magnus sees. It resembles an Ankh in appearance.

I'm not sure. Alec grabbed me and

"He did what?' Magnus growls, abruptly standing up. 'He did this to you?'

I don't know. It happened so quickly. When he grabbed me, I felt a slight burn on my wrist. Then I felt strange and left as soon as I could

"I'll take you to the pack doctor,'

'Magnus, it's fine. It doesn't hurt anymore, and I feel fine now that I'm here with you,' I assure him.

He relaxes a little,

'Fine, but if you feel strange again or any pain, you let me know, okay?' he says,

Inod, and he places a kiss on my forehead.

'Good girl,' he smiles.

Chapter 77

Reaper caws and taps his beak on the window. 'Next time, you need to take me with you, Luna. You can't just leave your familiar behind. It's dangerous.' Reaper mind-links.

'The other witches didn't take their familiars with them. So, I don't see what the big deal is?'

'It's a big deal, now let me inside.. please,'

Topen the window, and he flies onto my shoulder. He calms the moment he lands on my shoulder. His beak is pressed against my nose as I turn my face, and his eyes stare into mine.

"Reaper, what the heck?" I say.

*There is something different about you. Did something happen at Pandora's Box?'

'No Reaper, nothing happened,' I frown.

'I thought I sensed something odd whilst you were in Pandora's Box. I was worried something had happened to you?'

'Reaper, nothing happened. Let's take a walk outside.' Ela's toad leaps down the front steps as I open the front door, 'I need some fresh air. The witches are conversing beneath Reaper's moon tree. Ria's snake is dangling from a branch above them.

I take a deep breath and take in the tranquil surroundings. My wrist tingles, but I ignore it on purpose.

'I'm heading to the lake for a swim.' 'Would you all like to come along with me?' I ask.

'Next time, Luna, Ria says with a smile.

'All right,' I remark as I walk towards the lake.

I remove my clothes and dive into the lake. Reaper perches on a nearby tree. Closing my eyes, I float on my back. Flashbacks of King Alec grabbing hold of my wrist, the subtle burn on my wrist imprinted into an ankh. His crimson eyes changed into a light brown. His gaze, the way he looked at me.

I should have been afraid to be in his presence, but I wasn't. If anything, I don't think I wanted to leave, but why do I feel comfortable around him?

I finished my swim, dried off and returned to the packhouse. Reaper flew high in the air and followed me.

The witches are no longer under the moon tree, but the packhouse emits various scents. Fern's cat purrs as he brushes against my leg. I walk into the home and head downstairs to the basement, following the different aromas.

Herbs are hung on the walls, and jars are stacked on the shelves. I'm not sure what's in them, but I have a feeling I don't want to find out. Ria, Fern, Lilac, May, and Ela add ingredients to a massive bubbling cauldron.

May waggles her tongue at me, then mutters, 'I wish I could have gone to Pandora's Box as well!

'Next time,' I say with a smile to May.

Can you make a promise?' she asks.

Ela assures her, 'We all promise.

'How did you get all of this?' I ask them.

Fern grins, 'Oh, we just used the materialise spell.

Can you explain how that spell works?' Isn't that the magic Yiselda used to summon a book?'

That's right, and it's that simple. All you have to do is imagine the item you want. I'll demonstrate. Let's pretend I'm hungry for a cherry pie. So, I wave my wand and say, "materialise," picturing a cherry pie.

Suddenly In her palm, the pie appears. She holds a pie that smells like cooked cherries, 'Ouch, she exclaims as she tosses it on

the table.

She laughs, 'I probably should have thought of a cold cherry pie.' We're all laughing. 'Now you try, she says.

'Alright.' I think of a rose so perfect. It has no blemishes or broken petals. 'Materialise,' I say and open my eyes to see I'm holding the rose I envisioned.

'Ooh, pretty,' Lilac says.

So, what exactly are you guys doing here?'

'We're conjuring up potions!' Ria beams.

'Can I help?' I ask excitedly. Reaper caws. 'I think Reaper wants to help too?'

'Sure!' Ela says.

'What potion are you currently making?'

Ela walks me over to a table and points to an open book.

"Hey, that's my book. Magnus, let me keep it from the library.' I frown.

'Oh, sorry, we saw it on the shelf in the living room and thought no one would mind if we borrowed it?'

'I suppose it's okay, Ela. Just be gentle with it.'

"Yay!' she squeals and hugs me.

I look to the open page and read it out.

'Elixir of healing:

Over bubbling water, add

Five drops of mermaid tears

Unicorn hair

The bark of the Willow

Thyme

Incantation:

With these wounds that thee feel,
remove the pain and make thee heal
if unwell, don't let it dwell,
use this spell to make thee well.'

"We just need to add the Thyme, Luna. Could you please bring a sprig to the cauldron?" Ela asks.

Sure, I say as I walk over to the wall where the various herbal sprigs are tied up in bundles. The smells are pleasant, and I can't help but smile. Then, taking a sprig of thyme, I pass it to Reaper, who flies over the cauldron and drops it into the bubbling water.

Fern starts stirring it with a wooden ladle,
Let's recite the chant together, says Ferns.

With these wounds that thee feel,
remove the pain and make thee heal
If unwell, don't let it dwell,
use this spell to make thee well.' We all say,

The cauldron releases a plume of green smoke.

Fern grins as she says, 'It's done, now to bottle it. May and I assist in filling the vials with the healing potion and cork-sealing the vials. Ela then prepares the labels, Ria writes on them, and Lilac and I stick them on the vials and carefully position them on a shelf.

Perhaps we might concoct an elixir of love, fertility, or strength tomorrow?' Ela says.

'I was thinking the elixir of resistance?' Fern replies.

'With your snoring, Fern, I thought maybe the elixir of sleep?' Lilac says.

We all laugh as poor Fern frowns.

Chapter 78

I'm wrapped in Magnus's arms when I wake up. 'Please tell me today isn't today?' he murmurs.

'All right, Magnus, today isn't today,' I grin.

'Er, it's really today, isn't it?'

'The day the wolf council's three-boofhead alphas return to tell us whether they support or oppose the witches staying here and what they plan to do if they oppose it?'

'Yeah

that day.

Look, I'm sure they've come to their senses and realised that allowing witches into our pack is a wonderful thing now that they've had some time to think about it.'

I guess I'll spend the day with your father to see if our warriors are prepared as a precautionary measure,' he says.

'Sure, I'll spend the day in the basement with the other witches until the wolf council arrives.'

Immediately after breakfast, the witches head downstairs.

*Can I come to watch you all make potions?' Josie asks.

'Sure,' I smile. May and Josie walk with me down to the basement.

'So, have we figured out what potion we are making today?' I smile.

Everyone shakes their heads.

'We couldn't agree on one,' Fern says.

I walk over to my book of potions and flick through the pages.

Resistance to heat, Resistance to the cold, breathe underwater, Swiftiness, Deadly nightshade, Wolfsbane, Elixir of Truth, Elixir of Fire, fertility, Ooh elixir of the dead sounds interesting?' I say.

Fern, Ria, Ela and Lilac all gasp.

*Luna, you can't choose the elixir of the dead. It's far too dangerous,' Fern warns.

Fern is correct. 'Drinking the potion allows you to see ghosts, and poltergeists can injure you if you encounter one, Ela explains.

"Oh, well, how about we practice some new spells then?' I say, placing the book of potions down. Suddenly an idea hits me. "We

should all go the town library to the forbidden room,' I say, pulling the key up from around my neck.

"What's in the forbidden room?' Lilac asks.

'Spell books and lots of them and other interesting items that must be hundreds of years old.'

Everyone looks at each other with a nod and smiles.

'Let's go,' Ria says

We arrive at the library I lead them to the back room with the locked door and use my key to open it. Then, pulling my wand out! flick the tip, and it lights up. Fern and Ela flick their wands up, too, 'Illuminate,' I say, lighting up the whole room.

Woah!' They all say 'Luna, do you even know what this room is?' Fern asks.

"Yeah, it's the forbidden room. It's been locked for hundreds of years, so no one could access any of the books as magic was never allowed.'

Luna, this room isn't just to lock books away. This table isn't just a table. It's an altar. This room is a secret witches' study and an ancient one

Ooh, really?'

'I believe Fern is correct, take a look at all of this, and these volumes are centuries-old' Ela replies as she rolls one of the scrolls out onto the altar, 'Even these scrolls appear ancient.' 'This is a gateway spell to access the Realm of Shadows, she exclaims. It's the home of vampires. It's also where Alec, the Vampire King, has his fortress.'

'These aren't ordinary spells, Luna. As she reads the titles on the other scrolls, Lilac exclaims, "No witch, wizard, or mage even knows how to cast half of what's in this room."

There is a burlap sack in the corner of the handle of an old broom made from a branch, the bristles made from sticks. I take the burlap sack over my shoulder and place a couple of books and as many scrolls as possible carefully inside the bag.

"We should take as much as we can back home,' I say.

'Luna, there are a lot of spells in here that are quite harmful. Maybe we should leave them? They are locked in here for a reason,' Ela says

'Ela is right,' Reaper mind-links.

I take the scroll Ela had rolled out on the altar, tie the red ribbon back around it, and place it in my bag.

'It's fine. I'm just going to take some of it and read it. I won't need to actually cast any of them,' I reassure them all.

I take the gleaming athame with the black handle and silver inscriptions, and they grimace at each other. The knife has a blue gem at the bottom, and the blade is silver at first, then purple, and finally black at the tip. There is a black leather sheath near it. I place it in the sheath and tuck it into my belt.

Reaper flies over my shoulder and snatches a book from one of the bookcases. Then he flies back over to me, drops it in my hands, and lands on my shoulder again.

If you're going to start collecting magical weapons, you need to learn about them at the very least to keep yourself safe.' Mind links Reaper, I fix my gaze on the book I'm holding.

I read aloud, 'A Witches, Wizards, and Mage's Guide to Weapons, then nod at Reaper and stuff it into my burlap bag.

I grab the Quill sitting in a vat of black ink, go to the bear corner of the room, and draw a circle with a star inside. No stones. I think with my hands on my hips and look at the old stone wall with small crumbling parts. I collect five crumpled rocks and place them at the tip of each star point.

*There, now we have a permanent port to get here,' I smile. 'Let's go back home. Yiselda and the wolf council will be arriving

soon.

1 step into the circle, thinking of home and appear by the bonfire near the packhouse. Then, the others appear behind me, and we return to the packhouse.

instead of joining the girls upstairs, I go to my room, sit on my bed, and open the burlap bag.

While I start reading the book on weaponry, Reaper sits on the window ledge and looks out.

My mind wanders back to Alec, and for some reason, I want to see him again. 'Don't be so ridiculous, Nina,' I say. Reaper turns to stare at me

"Did you know that talking to oneself is a classic sign of insanity?" Reaper mind-links.

'Yeah, yeah,'" say, waving my hand towards him. I probably am insane?'

"Why would you think that?" he asks

"When I'm not thinking of Magnus, I'm thinking of the Vampire King. There has to be something wrong with me?" I reasoned.

Reaper stares at me silently as if analysing me, and the silent looking starts to creep me out, so I return my focus to the book of weaponry

There are odd-shaped stalls with various gem forms atop them, wands with multiple patterns and jewels, Chakrams, charms, and jewellery Finally, I've progressed to knives and athames. I scroll through the pages and find the identical athame I had discovered in the forbidden room. Magnus has come home before I get an opportunity to read it

"Nina?" he exclaims. I put the book down, puuit back in my bag, and dash downstairs. Reaper follows. I leap into Magnus' arms

and kiss him on the lips. Electrifying sparks fly through my body every time he touches me, and I can't get enough of him. He cradles my face in his hands. He says.

I love you.

'I love you, too,' I say with a smile.

Chapter 79

'Let's see what the wolf council has to say. I'm sure they'll be here in a minute.'

A knock comes at the door. We proceed to answer it, expecting to be confronted by the Wolf Council.

'Yiselda.' I draw her in for a hug.

'Did I make it to the meeting on time?' she inquires.

'You have,' I say. 'The wolf council hasn't come yet, but they'll be here soon, Magnus says.

'The ladies are in the basement. I'll bring them up for the meeting,' I say as I dash downstairs.

'Yiselda has arrived, and the wolf council is on its way, I notify the witches. They nod and walk upstairs to the dining room, where they hug Yiselda and take their seats.

Reaper warns me that the wolf council is approaching just as Ryker, Astrid, and Leon enter and join us at the table. We all appear nervous.

My mind manifests into Reapers, allowing me to see through his eyes and hear anything he hears. He is perched in the moon tree, looking off towards the distance, where we see the wolf Council approach.

'They're here,' I say to everyone at the table.

"How do you know? No one has knocked?" Magnus says.

"Reaper is showing me through his eyes. They are less than a minute away," I say.

Within the minute, loud thumps at the door are heard. Magnus greets them and escorts them into the dining room. They sit with serious, stern looks on their faces.

'Alpha, Bennet, Theaton and Amir,' I would like you to meet Yiselda, he introduces.

They merely nod without saying anything.

'It's a pleasure to meet you, Alphas of the Wolf Council, Yiselda replies politely.

"Are you the one who guards Pandora's Box?" Alpha Bennet casts a sly smile.

'That's me, Yiselda confirms.

'So, what your coven said about it is true?' he asks.

She answers, 'Yes, my coven sisters have no reason to lie.'

'So, you're telling me that a vampire king and other dangerous monsters exist?'

*Correct,

The Alphas exchange glances as if they are mind-linking.

"Show us" Alpha Bennet says.

I'm sorry, but I cannot just let anyone into Pandora's Box. It's a dangerous place. If any spells or wards were to be damaged or removed, the world would be at peril for all of us,' Yiselda explains.

'You let the Luna of Shadow Crest in to see it yesterday,' Alpha Bennet states,

I wondered how they would know that but remembered they left some of their warriors here to watch us.

Yes, but that's because she's a Midnight Coven member, and it's her responsibility, along with the rest of my sisters, to know all there is to know about Pandora's Box in case anything happens to me, Yiselda explains.

'How can we be certain that these monsters and the Vampire King exist?' Alpha Amir asks.

'I suppose you'll never know for sure, you'll just have to take our word for it, she replies,

The Alphas laugh bitterly. 'We concluded that without proof of this Pandora's Box and what you are purportedly safeguarding us and the rest of the world from, gives us no option but to banish and exile you witches, and refusal to leave would result in your deaths, Alpha Bennet sneers. We all let out a gasp.

Are you serious, Alpha Bennet?' Magnus shouts.

'I'm very serious, Alphas Magnus, and because your little mate and her sister are half-witches. This new law also includes them,' he states

Ryker gets out of his chair and steps toward the Alphas.

'You must reconsider. An Alpha needs his Luna. Without them, they are weakened, and you already know that. The witches have caused no harm, and we insist they stay.'

'Sure, they can stay, but we will return with other Alphas and warm the witches that stay upon a fire,' he smiles.

You can't be seriously thinking about burning them at the stake? They are just young women who want to help us,' I yell at the Alphas.

Alpha Bennet glares at me, 'Mark my word, Luna, if you do not leave, we will make sure you are the first we burn at the stake.' He warns.

Everyone stands up. I pull my wand out along with the other witches while everyone else exposes their morphed canine teeth, ready to shift into their wolves.

'I suggest you all sit down, put down your wands, and control your wolves,' Alpha Theaton shouts. 'We have our legion of warriors on standby if you attack us. They are to destroy this entire pack and wipe you out if you fight.'

'Are you saying we are not allowed to defend ourselves?' Magnus yells back.

The Alpha's laughed, 'Seems like you are doomed if you do, doomed if you don't. There won't be a problem as long as the witches go. Alpha Bennet says. "You refuse to take us to Pandora's Box therefore, you have twenty-four hours to rid your territory of any witches. Any we find will be killed, and you will be charged for treason resulting in your entire pack being wiped out as punishment.'

They depart abruptly, and we are all stunned, silent, and worried.

"What are we going to do? I don't want to leave you, Magnus,' I say.

'At least until the wolf council changes their minds, we can return to the Covenstead?' We don't want to see any harm happen to your pack due to our presence, Ela says, now upset.

But I can't leave Magnus, he is my mate, and I can't leave my pack. They rely on me to help run this pack with Magnus,'

Magnus comforts me by wrapping his arms around me and holding me firmly.

*This leaves us with two choices,' Magnus says and looks at Yiselda. 'We have to either take them to Pandora's Box and show them, or we fight them to the death? They will bring many packs with them

and overtake us. So the only option without anyone being harmed is to show them the Vampire King and his minions,' Magnus says.

Yiselda shakes her head rapidly, 'Magnus, one slip up at Pandora's Box, then it's not just your pack in danger but the whole world. it's a risk i cannot take,'

"It's a risk we must take, Yiselda,' he growls,

Yiselda and Magnus stare as if reading each other even though they cannot.

Yiselda lets out a sigh of defeat,' I will allow one and only one of the Alphas into Pandora's Box. Alpha Bennet seems to hold the most authority, so it must be him we show. As a precaution, all the witches will accompany us, just in case he tries to do anything

stupid while we are there'

'Done, Leon, chase them down and inform them.' Magnus orders.

Wait, I have a quicker way,' I grab a pen and piece of paper. I write, Alpha Bennet, Yiselda has agreed to take you and, as a precaution, only you into Pandora's Box tomorrow. Please cease any attack plans until you can see that the witches truly protect all of us, including you' | sign my name and status and whistle for Reaper. He flies towards me. I roll the note up, and he grabs it in

his beak.

"Give this note to Alpha Bennet immediately,' I mind-link him. He nods and flies out the window. My mind transmits to Reapers again as he soars above the Wolf council. They halt in amazement at the black mist emanating from Reaper's feathers as he soars lower and circles them. Alpha Bennet discovers the rolled-up parchment and snatches it from Reaper's claws, unrolling it. Reaper flies into a nearby tree and keeps an eye on them.

Alpha Bennet reads the message aloud for the other Alphas to hear.

Alpha Bennet, Yiselda has agreed to take you and only you as a precaution into Pandora's Box tomorrow. Please cease any attack plans until you can see that the witches truly protect all of us, including you.'

Nina, Luna of Shadow Crest,'

He scrunches the parchment up and smiles at Reaper, 'Tell her I look forward to it.'

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As she stands, Yiselda adds, 'I shall return tomorrow to lead Alpha Bennet to Pandora's Box'

'We'll accompany you, Yiselda, and return to Shadow Crest later, Fern adds.

'Very well, she says with a smile.

I need to see Alec, not just because I can't stop thinking about him, but also because I'm curious about this mark. I'd want to ask him why I keep thinking of him in a sensual light, but I can't acknowledge that I find him appealing. It just wouldn't be proper.

'May you should come with us this time?' I say.

'Yes, yes, she exclaims as she dashes over to join us.

T'll be back soon, I kiss Magnus, 'don't keep me waiting too long,' he smiles.

'I won't,' I respond as I kiss him once more.

We port through the circle, following the witches and appear outside Pandora's Box. Upon entering, May squeals in delight at the broom sweeping the floor.

'Does it ever stop sweeping?' I ask out of curiosity.

Yiselda laughs, 'No, dear, it doesn't,'.

"Hmm, very good,' I say, intrigued and enter the kitchen through the left door.

Yiselda, using her powers, makes everyone a hot cup of tea.

'I'm going to go to the enchanted garden for a while,' I smile.

"Okay, give Star a pat for me,' Yiselda yells out as I leave the kitchen and walk down the hallway. I pass through the mirror, stop at the right door, and open it.

"Reaper, you stay here and keep a lookout. I'll be back, okay?"

'Where are you going?' He mind-links.

"I'll tell you later, I promise.' He flies off my shoulder and hops onto the ground.

Just be quick, okay?"

Inod, 'Thanks, Reaper,' I smile.

Materialise,' I say, imagining a book. I place it on the ground in the darkness in front of me. 'Sprouto Spawniate,' I say. The books multiply and grow in size and form a staircase. I flick my wand for light and close the door behind me as I walk up the stairs of books until I reach the large black door with the sigils drawn in place. I slowly open the door, careful not to smudge the markings.

The Grimghouls hiss, showing their teeth as I walk by. The dark silhouettes of the Shadow Reapers moan as if they are in agony. I can only just make them out,

'I knew you couldn't stay away from me long,' Alec says in his husky voice, sending a hot shiver down my spine.

"How did you know?" I say, stepping close enough to his face with the dim light of my wand.

He smiles endearingly at me, 'That's a secret I'd like to keep for a while longer, but I'm delighted you're here. It's not often I get visitors. It's mostly Yiselda who visits each day to give me my daily sustenance. Sometimes but rarely, one of the other witches brings it to me, but they don't even acknowledge me,'

'Daily sustenance? You mean blood?' I say, a little anxious,

You're a werewolf, so it's not like you don't go hunting and slaughtering rabbits and other rodents for sustenance in wolf form.

*That's very true,' I smirk.

A few moments pass, and I realise we have been gazing at each other silently. I blink and shake my head-the mark on my wrist warms up, spreading warm sparks through me.

I'm now as close as I can be to the bars and hold my wrist out towards Alec, 'You have done something to me. Please tell me what this mark is and what these strange feelings are. You have to tell me,' I demand.

He gently takes my arm, caresses his thumb over the mark and leans against the bars.

'This isn't just a mark, my love. This is my new destiny,' he says and places a kiss upon the mark. My body instantly feels on fire. The same way Magnus makes me feel. I pull my arm back and stare at him with a worried look.

'I don't understand,' I say.

'Once I am out of here, you will understand,' he says.

I just noticed I had subconsciously stepped close to the bars again, in reach of Alec. Our faces are inches apart.

'You don't seem to be afraid of me, Luna?' he whispers.

'Should I be?' I whisper back. It feels like a magnet is pulling us together, wanting us to be closer. I feel mesmerised staring into his light brown eyes. It feels like I have known him all my life.

His hand cups my left cheek.

"Yes, you should be,'

'Why?' | ask. Alec's head leans in closer, and his lips almost touch mine until Magnus comes to mind, and I jump back.

"Because you want me,' he says.

"No, I'm with Magnus. I love Magnus. I don't understand why I feel the same sensations around you that I feel with Magnus. Like we are destined mates?"

'That's because you are my destined love. Just like the Moon goddess, Selene chose you and Magnus to be together. The Vampire God Kanchelsis has chosen us to be blood flames,'

"Blood flames?' I say, confused.

'When a werewolf finds their soulmates, their destined life partner. They are known as mates. It works the same way with vampires, except mates are called Blood flames,' he gently explains.

*Are you saying that two different gods have made me a mate not only with Magnus but y-you?' I say, trembling.

'Technically, yes,' he says with a grimace. 'And just a note, I don't like sharing,' he says, pouting like a child.

*Your lying? How do you know this?' I'm in denial and refuse to believe this, any of this.

"You saw it, but you didn't realise it at the time. A Vampire's eyes turn blood red when they glimpse their Blood flame. It nearly appears like we have a fire in our eyes. We'll stay that way until our vampiric mark is placed on your wrist. It signals to other vampires that you are blood-flamed or, in other words, taken. It's also why fated partners are called Blood Flames, because of our flaming, blood eyes when we first see you, He explains.

Subconsciously, I touch the mark on my neck. It tingles. 'Just like a wolf marks your neck to let other wolves know you are taken,' he frowns, "Then I touch the mark on my wrist, and it has the same tingly feeling. I gasp, and tears begin to glide down my cheeks. I shake my head and run towards the black door on the opposite side.

Please, wait, my darling, don't leave me just yet, he pleads, his voice sorrowful. I open the door, lock it behind me, and double check that the sigils are still there. Reaper is waiting for me as I open the next door. As I close the door behind me, he leaps onto my shoulder

He mind-links, 'Your crying?'

I need to go to the enchanted garden,' I sob, open the middle door, and walk through the extensive spacious library until I find the double doors and enter the garden

I sit in a grove of bushes, sobbing into my hands. Gnomes move closer every time I glance up to wipe my tears, yet they freeze like statues every time I gaze at them. I ignore them and cry until I feel a swarm of tiny hands on my legs and back. All of the gnomes appear to be frozen around me, yet they placed their hands on my legs and back to console me.

'Luna, you must tell me what has happened?' Reaper pleads.

I nod and hold my wrist, showing him the mark.

'You're a vampire's blood flame!' Reaper caws in shock and almost falls off my shoulder in horror.