



Chapter 8: Aolis

It's been three days. Three days since I gave Lily my ultimatum. Maybe I shouldn't have been so rash. It's not like me. But the pain of knowing she was with someone else had been too much. She was always meant to be mine. Even her Moon Goddess made her mine. Women throw themselves at me all the time. But the only woman I want, doesn't seem to want me.

I'm walking through the forest around Araphyra, lost in my thoughts, listening to the magical sounds around me. Well, I don't consider them magical, but almost everyone else does. Fairy wings gently whistling in the breeze, dryads chattering to the trees, gnomes and dwarves beneath my feet, digging around in their homes, searching for treasures in the deepest parts of the earth, and in the distance, there is the sound of leprechauns playing their harps and pipes.

The sounds of the forest soothe me, calming my frustrated soul, helping to easing my aching heart. I didn't have a destination in mind, but as I walk, I find myself on a well-worn path. I follow the pathway until I get to the small cottage, set deep inside the forest. It's not the only cottage here in the forest, but it is one that I've frequented many times in my youth.

I knock on the door, knowing she's inside.

"Come in, Aolis." I open the door and walk in. She's in the kitchen, putting on a pot of tea.

"How did you know?" I ask her, wondering how she knew I'd be here when I hadn't planned to come.

"I can feel the change in temperature and air pressure as well as the next person." She says, eyeing me intently. "Have a seat. The tea will be ready soon."

I sit at her table, a table I've spent many days of my life sitting at. She grabs a couple of mugs when the pot whistles and pours the hot water over the loose-leaf tea in her teapot. She brings the teapot and the mugs to the table and sits opposite me.

"Want to talk about it?" She asks me kindly, waiting for the tea to steep.

I look up into the gentle eyes of the woman that gave birth to me. Her long brown hair has streaks of blonde in it, her blue eyes are bright and clear. While she is considerably older than I am, she looks young enough to be my sister. She was the elf woman my father chose to be my mother, although I've never called her mother. My father never intended to marry her, or anyone. He lost his fated mate centuries ago, long before he found Anastasia and realized he was given a second chance mate. However, my father needed an heir and Faunalyn was chosen for her kind and gentle ways. She was willing to be the mother of the next king and also willing to live a life where she was not able to act as my mother. In return, he has looked after her, making sure she wants for nothing. That was the deal she made with my father. 4

As I grew older, I wanted to know the woman who had given birth to me, and she and I became friends. She has always been there for me. She has tirelessly listened to my stories of Lily throughout the years. She never judges, she only listens and offers me guidance when asked.

I look at the mug in front of me as she pours the tea. I rub my thumb over the outside, feeling it warm from the heat of the tea before looking up at Faunalyn.

"Why doesn't she want me?"

It's the question that is eating at me. The one thing I don't understand. I've been patient. I've been kind. I've been a good mate to her, saving myself even though I knew she wouldn't be able to feel the mate bond



until she was 18. But nothing I did was enough.

"Who says she doesn't want you? Did she reject you?"

"No. But she was with someone else. She kissed him." Faunalyn raises her eyebrow.

"She kissed him?" She asks, the disbelief clear in her voice.

"Well, she was on a date. She said he kissed her, but..." I trail off. The memory of the pain returns. It was like a knife in my heart. I knew instantly what it was. If I hadn't been at the council, I wouldn't have been able to get to the packhouse so quickly. But I was hurt, angry and I wanted to force her to look into my eyes and tell me what she had done.

But she didn't do it, or at least, she didn't initiate it. I could see on her face that she meant it. She said she'd never disrespect me like that, but doesn't she realize that she disrespects me every time she goes out with someone else? Someone that isn't me. I'm her mate. At least, I'm her mate for a few more days. 3

"You don't believe her?" Faunalyn pulls me out of my thoughts.

"I believe her, but it's been a year. What does she need to think about? Why does she need to keep going out with these Alphas? Why can't she just accept me as her mate?"

Faunalyn looks thoughtful, taking a sip of her tea. "Drink. It's my magic tea, you'll feel better." She says, watching me until I take a sip. I'm not sure what she does to her tea, but it does help to heal all sort of wounds. The kind you can see and the kind you can't.

"Do you think that she wants a mate in her own species? Do you think that's why she's dating Alphas?"



The thought had crossed my mind. "I don't know. I wouldn't have thought so, even a year ago. But now, I just don't know."

I take another sip of the tea. "I gave her a week to make up her mind."

"How many more days before the week is up?"

"Four."

"And you were hoping that she'd come running the very next day." She says. It's not a question. 1

"Of course, I did. I didn't want it to come to this. I didn't want to give her an ultimatum, but I need to make decisions in my life too. I can't keep waiting for her to figure out if she wants me or not."

She reaches over and takes my hand. "I didn't say you were wrong, Aolis."

"It feels wrong. But, it's time I step up and take over for father. He wants to step down. He wants to spend time with Anastasia."

She pulls her hand back and takes her mug, finishing her tea. "What will you do if she doesn't come to you by your deadline?"

I look up at the woman that gave me life. "I've decided to take Lorelai as my queen if Lily doesn't come and claim me as her mate."

"Duchess Lorelai of Eventide?"

"Yes. She leads her people well. She is well versed in the ways of our people and she has been raised to be a leader. She would make a good queen."

"But would she make a good queen for you, Aolis?"



"It doesn't matter. If Lily doesn't want to be my queen, then I'll take the person who best meets the criteria and will be good for our people."

I catch the sadness in Faunalyn's eyes before she stands, taking our mugs to the kitchen sink. I follow her, putting my hands on her shoulders. "What is it?" I ask her.

She turns, looking up at me, cupping my cheek in her hand. "I wanted more for you. More than the life that I was given. I would never change being your birth mother. But I wish I'd had the love of a mate, someone who would cherish me. That is the life I want for you, Aolis."

I take her hand, kissing her palm. "I want that life for me as well, Faunalyn. But we don't always get what we want."

She reaches out and hugs me. I wrap my arms around her, hugging her tightly.

"Don't rush the time. Give her the full week before you make any decisions that can't be undone." She looks up at me. "Will you promise me that, Aolis?"

I kiss the top of her head. "I swear I will give her the full amount of time, Faunalyn."

She walks me to her door. "Thank you, as always, for being here for me. For listening when I need someone." I say.

"I'm always here for you. Whenever you need me."

I hug her again before heading back to the castle.