

## Chapter 2

\*Calvin\*

I smell Seth as he approaches. Molly must also smell him because she sits up, taking another drink out of the bottle. I lean up on my elbow to see him shaking his head at her before taking a seat on a bench and pulling his tie undone.

"How do you deal with this all the time?" I ask.

Seth shrugs. "I don't know. I was born the prince. It's just how it's been my whole life."

"We aren't like this at home, though," Molly reminds me.

"If the people know the crown has the money, they will strive hard to please us to have a share," he explains.

I frown my brow. "But I'm not the crown."

"No," Seth says, shaking his head. "But your sister IS. Your beloved sister that you found when you magically came back from the dead. Word is spreading about how you lived with us and helped protect us. Every available shewolf is going to come after you."

"So don't say anything stupid," Rob laughs as he and Stella approach. Stella swats his chest. "What? He's kind of a weird guy."

I smile a little. I know I am. I'm awkward. "I never learned to be around people. I don't remember much before we were in the Rogue Land, and we couldn't be around many people. Then Gus saved me, but I wasn't around anyone."

"It will get better with time," Stella reassures me with a smile as she sits on the bench beside Seth, placing her hand on her very swollen stomach. "It's better than when we first met you."

Molly nods and smiles. "It is. Just be kind when shewolves talk to you. Even if they aren't your mate, you can be kind."

I sigh. "I don't want to waste my time."

"You won't be," she says. "Try to find out something about everyone you meet. You can do that."

"I don't want to," I say as Seth laughs loudly.

"No one WANTS to do any of this," he tells me. "It's just part of the show." He takes the bottle from me, taking a large gulp. "How was your makeover with mom?"

"Terrible," I tell them, shaking my head at the memory. "She had them pull out my eyebrows."

"You look very nice," Stella tells me sweetly. "The shewolves will be all over you even before they find out who you are." I must make a face because she laughs at me. "It's not a bad thing. Have some fun before you meet your mate."

"What? But my mate."

She smiles at me, and it's kind and reassuring. "She won't care when she meets you. We've all been there."

"Not all of us," Seth shakes his head, looking at Molly. She waited for him. She'd told me before all about what happened between them. She told me how hurt she was when she found out he had tried to replace her.

I shake my head, not offering anything else to the conversation. I don't like how Molly felt, and I don't want to be the reason that anyone else would feel that way.

Oliver and Michael join us, carrying a few bottles and a plate of desserts. I'm thankful for their arrival because the conversation has turned to when Oliver, Stella, Molly, and Rob were kids and is no longer about me. Honestly, as I sit quietly, I think they forget I'm even here, and it's nice.

They all talk and laugh together, so comfortable and familiar with each other, and I just sit and watch. They all have something to say, never leaving a lull in the conversation. Michael joins me quietly, no one noticing, as he hands me another bottle.

"A chosen mate isn't the worst option," he says quietly, looking toward Oliver. "You can do what you want, but I'm just offering the information for you. You doing alright?"

I nod and take a drink, handing it to him to do the same. "Yeah, it's just... sometimes it can feel like a lot."

He nods, understanding. "Gus was who trained me from the time I got my wolf. I came from a poorer pack. My Alpha took one look at him and shipped me straight to the palace. They were so proud to have a wolf large enough to be in the guard. Gus was kind to me, well, as kind as he could be."

I smile. "Very stoic."

"Like you," he says. "He's a good man and was a great guard, but you... you've got to relax. I can see so much of you in him, but you aren't him. You're not a guard, nor are you a tracker."

I shrug. "I'm not anything."

He pats my back and smiles sadly. "I didn't mean it like that. But you're the queen's brother. She'll never allow you to become a guard and probably not a tracker, either. Whatever you end up doing, it won't require you to be so serious or so on guard all the time," he tells me as he hands the bottle back to me. "Get drunk. Relax a little."

I do as he says, taking another large gulp, and then another. It burns, but I've grown to enjoy it, and as I come to the end of the bottle, I begin to feel a little dizzy. Seth offers his hand to help me stand, and as I do, I fall into him.

"Are you drunk?" he asks, shocked as he puts his arm around me to steady me.

"Good," Michael says as he stands, putting his arm around my other side. "He needs to f\*\*\*\*\*g relax."

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The sudden sunlight pulls me from my sleep, and I grab a pillow and roll away from it.

"Calvin, you're late!" Mrs. Audrey says.

Late? Huh? Goddess, my head is killing me. "What am I late for?" I groan.

"You missed breakfast, and we need a lesson on dining," she tells me. "I should have realized before last night. An oversight on my part. Now, come on."

She pulls the blanket back, and as the air hits me, I realize I'm not wearing anything. She gasps and tosses the blanket back on me. I move the pillow from my face, blinking at her as the sun hits my eyes, and I swear, her cheeks are pink in embarrassment.

I throw my legs over the side of the bed, sitting up as I blink painfully. She makes every effort to look anywhere but at me. "Are you hungover?"

"Is that what this is?" I ask, my voice rough and gravelly. She takes the blanket and throws it over my crotch, looking a bit more relaxed now that I'm not exposed to her. She's seen me shift before, though, and nudity is never really an issue among wolves. Whatever. I feel too terrible to worry about it.

"Is this Seth's doing?" she glares.

I shake my head. "No, it was Molly and Michael," I tell her. "Mostly Michael."

"Really?" she asks me in surprise. "I was not expecting that at all."

"Neither was I," I admit. "He said I needed to relax."

She laughs lightly. "Well, he's not wrong about that, but maybe next time we do it without alcohol. How much did you have?"

I shrug. "I'm not sure. Maybe a bottle."

She blinks at me a few times and shakes her head. "Did you drink before Molly brought you here?"

"No, ma'am," I admit, feeling a little embarrassed. "Gus didn't allow it."

She nods, a look of sympathy on her face. "You'll build up a tolerance eventually. Just keep it to a few drinks."

"I'm supposed to drink a few bottles?"

She shakes her head and smiles sadly. "Most humans can only handle a little, but wolves... we can drink much more. The more you drink, the more your body becomes used to it, and you need more. You'll be given drinks when you visit packs. Just be sure you don't drink too much."

I sigh, rubbing my forehead and closing my eyes.

"Are you alright, Calvin?" she asks me gently, like a mother would. I've heard that tone from Molly and Mrs. Celeste plenty, but not from her.

"It's just been... a lot," I admit to her. "There's so much that I never learned. You're trying hard, but I know I will embarrass you eventually."

"Oh, sweetheart," she says gently, sitting beside me on the bed. "I'm not worried about you embarrassing us. I don't want you to feel overwhelmed when you get there. You spent so long out there, nearly alone. There will be lots of people, and they will all want to talk to you. Everyone will fight for a sliver of your attention."

"I should just stay here and pick a mate," I tell her.

"No, you deserve to find her," she says. "And she deserves for you to find her. You're a wonderful man, and you have a lot to offer. It's just a little different."

"I don't have anything," I admit to her softly. "I've never had a job. I have no money. I don't have a house. I don't even have a pack. What am I supposed to say when I find her? I don't have a home to bring her to. This entire idea was stupid."

"It's not," she tries to reassure me. "You're the queen's brother. You take her to the palace or one of our properties until you decide what to do. Maybe you stay at her pack? You'll know what's right when you find her."

She stands and claps her hands together, her sympathy over my headache long gone. "One lesson today, and then you can rest."