

Traditions

I awoke to nd myself wrapped in heavy arms with a large leg draped over mine.

Caelan.

I turned to face him. I needed to look upon the man I'd come to love so deeply. The one who intended to mark me and wear my mark as well.

I brushed my ngers through his hair, wondering how it would all feel when we were nally one. When no one could take me away from him ever again. The bond between us was already so strong. How intense would it become once it was complete?

"Mmm, that feels nice," Caelan purred as he pulled me closer, his voice still rough with sleep.

"Sorry if I woke you," I apologized softly.

"You don't have to apologize if you wake me up like this," he murmured, burying his face in my neck and planting a soft kiss against my skin.

"I'll keep that in mind," I giggled.

We grew quiet for a few moments, just basking in each other's presence.

"Are you sure you're still ready to do this tomorrow?" he asked quietly. "You've got a lot going on. I mean, between everything about your father and the unknowns about your sister, if you wanted to wait, I would understand."

I sighed, resting my forehead against his.

"I'm worried that we haven't been able to con rm if anything those Dark Moon wolves said was true, but I still want to go ahead," I replied. "Plus, as long as I'm unmarked, Alpha Huxley is still a threat. Once we've completed the marking ceremony, he won't be able to force a mating with me."

He nodded, and I leaned forward, pressing my lips to his.

"But more than that, I want to be your mate. I want everyone to know I'm yours and you are mine. I don't ever want to worry that someone is going to take you away from me again," I declared, causing him to smile before he kissed me again.

"I can't wait to nally mark you," he groaned, his hands roaming over my curves. "Tomorrow night can't come fast enough."

"Feeling a little impatient?" I teased.

"You have no idea," he said, grinding himself against me for emphasis.

I could feel how hard he was, and I couldn't ght the blush burning my cheeks.

"Aww, there's my second favorite color," he chuckled, only causing the color to deepen.

I playfully slapped his bare chest, shaking my head at his antics. I didn't mind his teasing one bit though.

"Um, speaking of tomorrow. Your mom thinks we should sleep separately tonight," I said with a sigh. "It's supposed to make everything more special, I guess."

"I know," he replied, sullenly. "She said something to me as well. They don't want us seeing each other at all tomorrow until it's time for the party. Says it's part of the tradition." He grabbed my ass, squeezing it gently. "I suddenly hate these traditions."

"You don't mean that."

"I do," he countered, pulling me impossibly closer. "Anything that makes it so I can't sleep with you wrapped up in my arms is a bad thing."

"It's only for one night. I think we'll survive."

"You might," he whined, causing me to laugh. "I won't be able to get any sleep tonight. I'm going to spend the whole time pacing the oors and counting down the hours until I can hold you again."

"You don't want to be exhausted for our party tomorrow. Wolves from all over will be coming to see the alpha's mate," I replied. "I'm going to be counting on you to be sharp."

"I couldn't give a damn when it comes to the guests, my love," he grumbled, peppering me with kisses again. "But I can promise I'll be very energetic for you."

His hands started traveling across my body again, one cupping my breast as the other teased between my thighs, slipping between them as I opened for him.

"I thought you didn't want to fool around until after the marking ceremony," I panted as his ngers brushed against my clit.

"I know what I said...", he groaned, continuing to assault my neck with his lips. "But...you're just so tempting."

"Caelan," I gasped breathlessly as his touch danced across my core.

He sucked on the spot where his mark would rest, and I writhed beneath him. I moaned as he pushed a nger inside me, his thumb rubbing slow circles around my sensitive clit.

"I love seeing you like this," he grunted. "Lost in your pleasure. Making sounds that only I'll ever get to hear. It's the sexiest thing I've ever seen."

I cried out as he added a second, moving down my body and trailing hot kisses in his wake.

His breath blew over my heated core, his mouth sealing over me as his tongue lapped at my swollen clit.

"Oh Goddess!" I panted, gripping the pillow behind me with one hand while the other grabbed a stful of his hair.

My hips bucked against his mouth in a frenzy, driving me closer and closer toward my peak. But just as I was about to crest the nal threshold, there was a loud knock at the door.

"You two stop whatever you're doing in there!" Ta y shouted from the hall. "I can smell the pheromones out here! No more of that until tomorrow night! We've got too much to do!"

"Go away, Ta y!" Caelan growled.

"No can do, Alpha," she replied. "Luna's orders. You two need to get your asses out of bed and down to breakfast. We've got a to-do list a mile long to make sure we're ready for tomorrow."

"She's right," I sighed petulantly.

I started to rise, but Caelan pushed me back down, nipping at my inner thigh.

"No, you don't," he grunted. "She can wait. I'm not done with you yet."

I started to protest, but as soon as his mouth was on me again, I forgot all the reasons why we needed to get out of bed. He sucked hard on my clit, ngers curling inside me as my orgasm suddenly rushed through me.

"Caelan!" I gasped, my body shaking as he gently lapped at my dripping core, drawing out every last ounce of pleasure possible.

He nally let me up as the aftershocks stopped, a cocky grin on his face as he headed for the shower. I took a few minutes to make myself somewhat presentable before heading out to nd Ta y waiting in the hall.

"Really, Shade?" she remarked dryly though I could see the hint of a smile threatening to break through her serious facade. "Weren't you two supposed to wait?"

"Doesn't mean we can't do other things," I quipped with a satis ed sigh.

She shook her head as we walked across to my room.

"Well, once this is all over, you and Caelan can spend as much time as you want locked behind closed doors," she teased.

"One more reason to hurry this up then," I remarked as I headed into the bathroom.

Ta y hadn't been lying when she said we had a lot to do. Last-minute con rmations from various packs were still arriving as we hustled around the ballroom.

The tables had been set with fresh linens, and dark-colored silk panels were draped across the walls, representing the night sky. Silver accents were sprinkled throughout the space to represent the moon and stars, a homage to the Moon Goddess who, in her in nite wisdom, had paired Caelan and me.

Flowers covered every surface, cascading over the edges of the vases and onto the tabletops. Small potted trees had also been placed around the room, their branches blooming with white blossoms.

"What do you think?" Luna Maty asked.

"It's beautiful," I replied.

And it was. She had done a great job planning, but try as I might, I just couldn't help but feel it didn't really look like Caelan and me. The whole thing was rather formal, which wasn't us.

She just wants it to be special. This is the alpha's marking ceremony. It's a big deal for the pack. I can get through the glitz and glamour as long as I know Caelan will be mine at the end. All I care about is him.

Once the decorations were arranged to Luna Maty's satisfaction, we headed into town for a nal tting on my gown.

Ta y and Luna Maty both got a bit misty-eyed as I stepped out of the dressing room in my strapless dress.

"It's perfect," Luna Maty sni ed, wiping away a happy tear.

"Caelan is going to be speechless when he sees you," Ta y added, reaching down to u out the skirts.

The light-blue tulle clung tightly to my waist and hips before aring out into a full skirt with a little train. I'd asked for a blush-pink underlay and a touch of white lace along the bottom as a little surprise for Caelan.

It t like a glove, and I admired it from all sides as I turned in the mirror. *I can't wait to see his face tomorrow night. His two favorite colors combined. Too bad I won't be wearing it for long.*