

On with the Plan

"Oliver reported that Sunny was captured trying to escape. She's being held in the basement," he informed me as we lay tangled together in the hospital bed.

The mention of her name left a sour taste in my mouth.

After all we've been through together and everything I've done for her, she betrayed me. I still feel like I have to protect her though. I have to keep reminding myself of what she did so I don't do something stupid like demand her release.

"She said I was selfish for not letting her have you. That I took away everything good in her life and owed her," I mumbled as I snuggled against him.

"Your sister is the selfish one," he scooped. "She's literally done nothing but take from you your entire life, and the one time you choose yourself, she hands you over to your enemy." He gave me a squeeze. "You, however, don't have a selfish bone in your body."

"I'm sorry our ceremony was interrupted," I whispered. "I was kind of hoping we would've marked each other by now. Everyone is probably upset the party got ruined."

"They will understand," Caelan offered with a sigh, trying but failing to hide his disappointment. "We can reschedule for the next full moon."

"I don't want to wait," I said quickly.

"What?" he asked, pulling back a bit so he could look me in the eyes.

"I don't want to wait, Caelan. If we do, then Huxley and Sunny get what they wanted. I don't want them to win. We should go on with it," I countered.

"You still want to complete the marking?" he asked, his voice full of excitement.

"Yes," I said firmly. "It's still the full moon. Nothing is stopping us from moving forward. It won't be the formal event your mother dreamed of, but that didn't feel like us anyway. I say we do it tonight. That is... uh, if you still want to. We could wait if you think that's what's best."

I tried not to let my eagerness show. Maybe he needed time to recover. He had been severely injured by the ght and my howl.

"I want to mark you more than anything in this world," he replied happily. "I would do it right now if you asked me to."

"Right now?" I chuckled. "Here in a hospital room with our 'sexy' hospital gowns on?"

"You look amazing in anything," he growled, burying his face in my neck and causing me to giggle.

"Be that as it may, this isn't exactly how I pictured it. I hoped for something a little more romantic," I mumbled, looking around the cold, sterile room with a cringe.

"I know," he admitted with a sigh as heopped back against the pillows. "I'm just being impatient. If I had marked you already, then none of this would've happened."

"Don't do that to yourself, Caelan. I hate that last night happened, but I knew I could count on you to come for me," I replied. "Honestly, I hope our marking will somehow make you immune to me. I don't ever want to put you at risk like that again. Maybe you should put the alpha order back in place."

"I'm not doing that, Shade," he stated without hesitation.

"Why not?" I countered. "I could have killed you last night, Caelan."

"Your howl saved both of our lives. If you hadn't been able to, then who knows what could've happened. Your amplification doesn't necessarily keep you safe if I'm not there. The curse does. I wouldn't remove that protection for anything," he replied.

"You sound like her. She said it was a gift," I remarked softly, a smile on my lips.

"Who?" Caelan asked.

"My mother," I murmured. "I spoke to her in the veil. She said the Wolf Born from Sorrow was never intended as a curse. It's a gift. A gift of protection from the Goddess."

"Your mother? When did you speak to your mother?" he questioned, his brows knit together in confusion.

"While I was unconscious," I replied. "Your soul was wandering the edge of the veil."

I sat up suddenly, turning to look down at him.

"Speaking of which," I jabbed a finger in his chest. "Don't you ever do that again, Caelan Kendrick," I chastised. "If something happens to me, you ght to live. Don't give up and try to follow me. Others need you. I love you, but I want you to survive, no matter what."

He stared at me with a bemused look. "I don't have any idea of what you're talking about, Shade."

"You tried to follow me into the veil. Your spirit left your body behind to nd me, and you stopped healing," I explained. "You don't remember?"

"The veil?" he asked, but I could see the wheels turning in his mind as the memories began to ash before his eyes. "I thought that was a dream. Does that mean I—"

The door ew open, and a frantic Luna Maty and ever-stoic Alpha Leal hurried in.

"Oh my Goddess! I'm so happy that the two of you are all right!" Maty exclaimed as she rushed to our bedside. "I'm sorry that we couldn't get here sooner. There was such chaos after what happened, and between the injured and the mess, I just couldn't—"

"There's no need to apologize, Mom," Caelan interrupted. "We know everything got a little out of hand last night."

"Yes. Thank you for taking care of everything. I'm sorry that I created such chaos," I apologized, sheepishly. "All the hard work you put in on planning the party too. I'm sorry it all got destroyed."

"Don't you dare apologize, young lady. It wasn't your fault," Maty declared. "And either way, it was just food and decorations. All that can be replaced. We can have everything xed and ready to go for the full moon next month."

"Actually," Caelan interjected, oering me a sly smile. "We have something else in mind."

"You do?" she asked in surprise. "Please tell me that you aren't planning on ignoring tradition. The Elders will not be pleased."

"No. We'll honor tradition," he assured her. "Tonight is still the full moon and many of the guests are still here, so let's continue with the party, just twenty-four hours later than originally planned."

"But...the decorations...the dress...the food? I mean, the ballroom is still a mess," Luna Maty said a little frantically. "I don't know how we can manage to pull something together in just a couple of hours."

"Mom, chill," Caelan insisted. "It doesn't have to be perfect. We don't care what it looks like or what we're wearing. We just don't want to wait any longer. I've almost lost Shade too many times. I won't wait another month to ocially make her mine."

Luna Maty sat silently for a moment, tapping her chin thoughtfully.

"Well, I suppose we could rethink the location, and we have some decorations from past events in storage. Something in there could probably work. And the pack would be happy to pitch in if we made the whole thing a potluck."

We jumped as she clapped her hands loudly, a huge smile on her face.

"Yes! I can make this work!" she announced as she hurried toward the door. "You two get some rest. I'll make sure everything is ready for tonight. Come along, Leal! There's work to be done!"

Alpha Leal grinned, shaking his head in amusement before turning to the two of us. "I'm glad you both are safe. Caelan, we'll need to discuss the matter of Dark Moon's disbandment. We're holding their remaining pack members until that's nalized, but that can wait a couple of days."

"Leal!" Maty shouted.

"I better go," he grumbled. "You know how your mother gets when there's things to be done. She's going to be a lot today. Get some sleep. See you both tonight."

He shut the door gently behind him. We heard people rushing by in the hall, all hurrying to fulfill the orders of their luna.

"Come on," Caelan sighed, climbing out of bed and helping me up. "We aren't going to be able to get any rest with this racket going on. Let's go home."

"I thought you'd never ask," I joked as I covered a yawn.

We leaned against each other as we shued out into the hall, ignoring Dr. Eirny's protests as we made our way to the pack house.