

**SEVENTEEN**

DRAVEN

"Why do I have a bad feeling about all of this?" Vaddir turned from the bookshelf to study my face. It wasn't like him to question my decisions, and repeatedly must I add. I hated being questioned and any other man wouldn't dare to, especially given the situation. But Vaddir isn't just any man, he's my best friend and confidant. Along with my younger brother Duron, he'd fought with me on many occasions. We'd conquered enemies together, acquired lands and wealth, and he'd put his life on the line for me many times. We were born to be best friends, and he's one of the few people that gets me, second only to Duron, my younger brother.

Vaddir and I are age mates sharing the same birth date, but there's a two year gap between us and Duron, although it is hard to tell. Born of the same parents, Duron and I share similar qualities unlike Donovan, the youngest. I hate to admit it, but we take after our father, the late King Cadeyrn-Ruaidhri whereas Donovan takes after our mother. Lucky him. What I'd give to not be likened to that tyrant, but no matter how much I denied it to myself, he'd been my father. I had his blood flowing through me, and many people say we have a lot in common even though I don't see it.

If I have children, I'd never make them do the things my dad made I and Duron do. As for finding a mate, I have come to the conclusion that I don't have one. The moon goddess was punishing me and my brothers for the sins of our father, for everything he did to my mother. And maybe I don't want a mate.

For many years, I searched the ends of the earth to find my better half, because without her, I'd never be king. Without her, I couldn't claim all that I labored for, but I'm convinced now that I don't have one, and I'm



being punished for the mistakes of my father. I wish I'd made him suffer for everything he did to mother. I hate myself for not saving her sooner. She died at her mate's hands, and if I'd just been a minute early, then I could have saved her.

People believed the late King loved me, but what manner of man puts his teenage son at the war front? What type of man made an under 18 fuck the helps while he gave lessons and whipped me if I showed the littlest pity for the maiden's? They wanted it. I know they did, but that didn't make it right.

'Women are objects only for your sexual pleasure,' he'd tell me, 'You can have as many as you want, you can have from my stash even. I don't mind sharing,' he'd laugh cynically. That laugh still rings in my head till now, it drives me crazy. He'd wanted to make me like him, but his actions had the adverse effects. I fought it, my body fought it. I'd been crazy for sex in my early days, but as I grew, the women started to irritate me.

A part of me didn't want a mate. What if I made of her what King Cadeyrn made of my mom? I know I'd never be able to love her, I'd never be able to love any woman, but it became frustrating when the kinsmen wouldn't bend the rules no matter how much I tried. I have done everything within my power to abolish that law, but my father did a pretty bad job, and no one would even sign the petition. Hence, my decision.

"What are your fears?" I asked, snapping the book in front of me shut. Not like I was paying any attention to it, but since I barely slept, my nights were filled with routine reading. Vadirr yawned. He was tired. He'd traveled with me for many days and not had any sleep himself, so it was understandable.



"What if you eventually find your mate?" He asked, leaning against the wall. Duron raked his hands through his hair, pacing the lengths of my office but not saying anything.

"I don't deserve one," I say flatly. And it's true. "The moon goddess knows this, but it's not something the council and kinsmen understand, so I'm going to give them a mate since that is what they want,"

"Everyone deserves a mate," Duron chipped in. Unlike me, Duron believed in love. He still has hopes that he'd find his mate one day, and he'd treat her the way father should have treated mother. He's the only one who comes close to understanding what it feels like to be me, but even he would never fully understand. Father took it easy on him many times, because he'd been the last child for many years before Donovan came.

"It's simple," I never have to explain myself to anyone, but I needed to put these two at ease "The girl pretends to be my mate. I make an announcement and introduce her to everyone as my mate. A feast is held to welcome her into the family. She's a nobody, no one knows her, she has no family, no friends, no one is looking for her, no one will suspect anything. She can pull this off,"

"You think so?" Duron quirked a brow "You frighten the shit out of that one. I mean, you frighten the shit out of everyone, but hers is even worse. People will suspect if your mate is that weary of you,"

I frowned "She's a weak omega. She should be frightened," My voice lowered.

"If you want this to work, you are going to have to loosen up. There has to be a difference. Everyone changes when they find their mates, you know. Either for good or bad, everyone changes. But if you want this act believable, it has to be for the better. People have to see—" Duron



swallowed and looked away, and I guessed his words before they came out. "People have to see that you are nothing like father," he finished.

My beast growled, but Duron shook his head. Even though I know he had a point, his words unnerved me, it angered my beast.

"I don't have to convince them otherwise. They want a mate, and a mate they shall get. If this gets out, I'll kill you two. I don't care how far we have come or if you are my brother and best friend. I'll slash your throats and feed you to my beast," I warned.

I trust this two with my life, and I don't doubt that whatever we discuss remains between us. If I didn't trust them, I'll never let them in on my plans, but they were loyal to a fault, and ratting me out is like ratting themselves out, because whatever happens to me affects them.

"It won't get out," they chorused, looking at me disbelievingly.

"Good,"

"But do you really think she can be trusted?" Vadirr reasoned. "I mean she tried to kill you. What if she makes another attempt?"

"You forget that I can't be easily killed, Vadirr. She'd be dead before the thought crossed her a second time," I snapped. I have a lot of enemies, too many than I could count, and a lowly omega is the last person I should be weary of. I've killed men ten times more powerful with my bare hands.

She was scared of me no doubt. I saw it in her eyes, in the way her hands shook and the way her heart slammed heavily in her chest. As a Lycan, my hearing is better than that of a werewolf, and I'm aware of the slightest movement around me because of my impeccable eyesight. I knew someone was in the woods even before the knife hit me. I'd have



sent anyone who tried to kill me to meet their ancestors on the spot, but my beast restrained me from doing that to her, mostly because she looked too innocent to be a killer. She didn't even look like she knew what she was doing or that she knew who I was. That last part bruised my ego. How can any living werewolf not know the Prince Draven?

Something about her surely seems off. I'd felt a presence around her, or should I say in her earlier on. An external force, something she was trying to hide.

I crossed the room and headed for the door, the two people closest to me following behind, and we nodded our goodbyes as we made our way to our various quarters. Smythe caught up with me in seconds, following closely behind. He was a loyal guard, always at my beck and call since I was a child. I'd told him to retire many times, but this job gives his joy, he'd told me.

"Your mate has been escorted to your chambers and is in your room as commanded," he informed me. I nodded my head but said nothing. "Congratulations Prince, the moon goddess finally answered our prayers. I wondered why you spared her life despite what she did, but it all makes sense now," he finished. Smythe hardly ever made small talks around me, but I understand the news of finding my mate will bring him joy, as well as many others. I spared him a glance but didn't say any words.