

Chapter One

Ember

“Mom, I don’t want to stay here. Why can’t I go with you and Dad?” My ten-year-old self pleaded with my mother.

“I love you so much, my daughter. You are everything to your father and me. But whatever you do, don’t step foot into the magical kingdom. Mare will keep you safe,” she told me, squeezing me tightly against her. She gave me one last kiss, Mare rubbing her head against my leg. That was the last time I saw her.

The memory always hits me when I walk by the house my mother left me. I wasn’t left alone, but the rogue witches were in no position to take care of a ten-year-old. And without Mare, I probably wouldn’t have survived.

Nightmare chose me when I was eight and she’s been the cat to my witch ever since. Witches don’t pick a cat, but if you are lucky, one will choose you.

I didn’t find out about my parents until a few years after that. Traitors are what they are called. King Gregory had them killed. But I knew what they were being accused of was a lie. They were good people and I refuse to believe the lies the king spoke. Their only mistake was trusting that bastard king.

After learning they weren’t coming back for me, I trained my magic harder. I didn’t go to school. Instead, Mare and I would go to the library and read. My education from the age of ten was self-taught and when I was old enough to work, I got a job.

Now, eight years later, I was ready to get my revenge on the Magical Royal Family. I was too late to kill King Gregory, but I will wipe his bloodline from existence. I wish I had killed the king but he met his match with Queen Ashlyn. And she may have done some good, but she still has his blood running through her veins.

“Em, you are going to be late,” Mare pulled me from my thoughts. I looked down to find her staring up at me. Her gold eyes were bright against her midnight coat.

“Yeah,” I gave her a tight smile before I continued on my way to work.

It won’t be long now. Queen Ashlyn’s coronation is planned for next month. It will be the perfect time to get the layout of the Hybrid palace. I know it won’t be easy to get to her. She’s powerful and has two strong kings as mates. But everyone has a weakness and I will discover hers.

I walked into the rundown motel where I’d been working for the last few years. I walked behind the front desk and Mare jumped up on the counter, getting comfortable in her fuzzy bed.

I work at the front desk and the morning shift person has already left. I work the latter shift and then security works until the morning person comes in. There aren’t usually any new guests, mostly long-term. But I do all the paperwork and the books. Even without a formal education, I’m still a fast learner and I’m good at numbers.

I won’t be here much longer. Three weeks and I’ll be moving into the Hybrid Kingdom. It was the old council building but now it has been built up. It’s neutral for anyone. And it’s close to Queen Ashlyn. And I have a feeling it’s a good way to get to King Nathan, her brother.

The bell above the door chimed and I looked up to see Ben walking into the lobby from the street. Ben was a wolf and he’s been staying here for a few weeks now. He’s the newest guest. He’s older and rugged, with piercing blue eyes.

“Afternoon Ember,” he greeted me. We may be in a human city, but it’s not uncommon to have supernatural guests.

“Good afternoon, Ben. Is there anything I can do for you?” I asked him as he approached the desk. He patted Mare on the head.

“I could use a few more towels when you have a moment,” he answered, smiling.

“I’m sure I can find a few extra,” I teased before heading into the back room. We had a closet full of extras. I grabbed threeuffy white towels and headed back out to find Mare purring like an engine.

“She doesn’t usually like men,” I chuckled, placing the towels on the desk.

“I’m not usually a cat person but yours is sweet,” he said, and Mare cuddled into his hand more aggressively.

He gave her one last pet before thanking me and taking the towels. He exited the lobby through the door leading to the rooms.

“Really, Mare, a wolf?” I questioned her, using our link. She didn’t look up from cleaning her paw.

“He’s warm, like a real,” her voice purred and I laughed. I swear my cat should have been a dog. A horn dog.