

CH 3

She tossed and turned a lot that month before her 18th birthday was to come. It felt like it was long and drawn out, and time moved agonisingly slowly for her, and all her friends were going on about celebrating her 18th birthday. Making it a big event, a big bonre down by the lake with everyone they knew there.

One of them had even told her they'd gotten Alpha Franco's permission to hold the bonre party for her 18th. Told them that seeing that her dad, Dereck, wasn't there to throw it for her, a birthday party was a very good idea. He'd smiled and told them he'd even send over drinks for them to make sure Ryder had a good time.

Ryder had stared at her friend Kenny when he'd told her about the approval, and her having a good time? She could only guess that was Alpha Franco's way of saying she should lose her virginity that night. It was to start at 7pm and could go all night long. Kenny was super excited and he and three of her other friends were planning it, because she didn't want to be involved. Wondered if Alpha Franco was giving her one last option: to have s*x with someone she wanted to, before sending her the pack brothel. Nothing would surprise her where he was concerned anymore.

Ryder, however, didn't want to celebrate it at all. What was the point? And she told them she wasn't interested in a big party to celebrate her coming of age. Tried to shut it down even two days later when they were going on about it. They didn't understand why she wouldn't plan something with them or didn't want it at all. She'd tried to play it off as that it was just going to hurt too much without her dad there.

That she honestly just wanted a quiet night in, to spend in the house she'd grown up in with her dad, going through the photo albums he had in there, of her life growing up with him. She'd never understood why he'd wanted so many pictures of them.

But there were 17 photo albums, one from each year of her life, each one clearly labelled on the front with her name and age. He'd told her he was just documenting all her milestones, that one day she would nd a reason to get them out, show them to someone, and they'd see she'd grown up well.

That she was a cute baby, who'd turned into a lovely girl and a beautiful young woman. There were pictures in those albums of every part of her life. He'd never missed a single thing. There were even photos of Thorn and their dad's wolf, Marro. Of her and him, they were always smiling and laughing in the pictures. She'd had a happy life. Been loved by her dad and raised right, she thought.

Ryder had always believed that she'd be able to show them to her Mate when she got one, or his family maybe, and that was what it was for, not so much anymore. She was Mate-less, all her dad's efforts and time spent putting the albums together; it was all for nothing.

She'd still not told her friends about being Mate-less. How could she? They would all look at her with pity in their eyes, and she didn't want to see that. Ryder also kept that hideous option of going and working in the pack's brothel to herself. It was not something she wanted them to know.

Though she wondered how many of them would try and convince her to do that, just to stay here, or would they all tell her to go off to the Kingdom and serve. A catch twenty-two. We love you and want you to stay here, so become a w***e. Or we love and don't want that for you, so please leave.

Neither of the options were good, and she didn't want them to have to think about it and feel horrible for choosing whatever option they thought would be the best one, in their opinion.

Ryder also knew that Alpha Franco had not told anyone about their conversation, it had been just her and him in that oce that morning. She also knew he'd not even mentioned it to his unit, because they all smiled at her like they normally did when seeing her, moving about the pack. Whereas Alpha Franco looked at her with a new look. With what she thought to be a questioning uncertainty.

She got the distinct impression he didn't want her mentioning this to anyone, but why would she? She didn't want anyone knowing she was being made to choose whether to be a member of the pack's brothel; she could well imagine the looks she'd be getting. There would be those that would come up to her and tell her to do it, just so they could get their sticky ngers on her and she knew it. So, no, she'd kept it to herself as much as her own Alpha had.

She had simply thrown herself into training for that month, taken on extra training even. Trained in the morning and in the afternoon, she didn't sit down and discuss what she wanted to do at university, like most of her friends did, didn't look for extracurricular activities to get better grades, to get into the courses she wanted to study. She had just trained and when one of her friends asked why she wasn't starting to sort out university prospects, she'd stated simply.

"I'm going to be an Elite Warrior. I don't need to study anything for that. Just do more training, maybe go off to another pack to get more training is all. A warrior pack or maybe see myself get approval to go off and train within an Elite warrior training pack."

It was her only way of telling them she was going to leave at some point, and she was going to leave, and she knew it. So there was no point in even looking at studies for herself. Though she'd wanted to be a warrior here and rank up, they all had other jobs within the pack. She'd wanted to be a teacher herself, but that was out the window now.

She had to train, and she knew it, because she needed to be able to ght and ght very well before she went off to the Kingdom, because she was not going to be a member of the pack's brothel. No way in hell was she going to do that. So, her mind was made up already. She was going to war in the Kingdom, where she would do battle for their King.

There was no choice, not really, she would never sell her body to others. So she would be leaving this pack that had once been her home, where all the people she knew lived. Where all her friends were, she wasn't even going to tell them that she'd never be coming back. Because she knew her closest friends well, and they would all call her insane and try to talk her out of it.

Tell her she was only young, to just serve four years, if she had a need to go and do that and then come home back to the pack. But they didn't know that even if she did that, and came back here to the pack. It would just see her pushed to the brothel by their own Alpha.

Alpha Franco was not the man she'd thought he was. Not the man or Alpha in all likelihood that they all thought he was.

That brothel was not a place for her, and she knew that she'd likely end up with some of her male friends bedding her, telling her what to do to them, how they wanted it, and she'd have to do everything they said, paid to do so, and likely be punished for not doing it if she refused. It was not the life she wanted, it also, she knew, wasn't the life her own father would want for her either.

The kingdom she knew was ravaged by wars, and although she also believed it was not a place for one so young as she was, which is also something her friends would tell her, in an attempt to stop her from going there. But she could counter that. Many of the packs around them in the human world all sent their heirs, along with their units, off to the kingdom to serve before they could take over.

To train and learn how to manage a large-scale battle, Ryder had thought about that very thing herself over the past few weeks. Even her future Alpha, Lauchlan, and his unit were off in the kingdom serving right now. So, maybe it wasn't as bad as it sounded. There were likely going to be lots of young wolves like herself there, all training together. She'd likely have years of training before going into actual battle.

So she was trying to keep her mindset upbeat during that month leading up to her 18th, thinking that going to the kingdom wasn't going to be so bad. She also knew that those that went and served, usually came back as well. So, there was that to consider.

How bad could it really be, if all the heirs came back from serving in the Kingdom? She didn't think it would be so hard, and was trying to convince herself that perhaps it was actually all just rumours; the savageness of the kingdom. There were many wolfen packs in the Wolfen Realm as well, so how bad could it be?