

Owned by the Alphas |

The Witch

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I bathed and dressed faster than I ever had, combed through my long dark strands of hair, then met my alphas outside my suite.

Brax chuckled, obviously back to the Brax I knew. "You're going to get us in trouble, Spitfire, but I have a feeling you quite enjoy that concept."

He laughed, and I smirked. I did.

"Let's go. I'm starving, and even eyeball stew sounds more appealing than having to eat with the pack tonight after today's...issues." Derik sighed.

"Why?" I asked, and he cleared his throat.

"It got to the other wolves that Brax and Kai were fighting over you. It doesn't bode well for the strength in our pack if the alphas are fighting at all, let alone over a winter born human," he murmured, and I bit my lip.

I didn't want Derik even more stressed; he was already so wound up all the time.

"I'm sorry," I apologized, and he smiled easily at me.

"Don't be, beautiful. They're just rumors, and we are still strong together. They'll learn that the hard way if they wish to," he said, and kissed me, then strode away, the dinner suit and vest he was wearing making my blood burn in my veins.

I bit my lip for an entirely different reason before Kai grabbed my hand and followed.

All three of them looked insanely good, dressed up for dinner.

Kai was in his dinner slacks and a plain tucked-in shirt, a gemstone necklace hanging on his neck that I hadn't seen before. A braided leather bracelet was on his wrist, the end dangling on mine.

Brax was in slacks, his dinner jacket embroidered with a wolf head like the symbol for the territory, but this one had a gemstone as the eye, the same moss green color that Kai wore around his neck.

I pointed to it and looked up at him. "What does the crystal mean? All three of you have it on," I asked, seeing that Derik had his in a chunky ring on his finger.

"It's a symbol of trust with Cain's mother. She's a seer, a witch of sorts, and her kind has always been at odds with the other creatures of our world. This moss agate is her link to us. It means a balanced friendship or alliance. It's one of the conditions of our visits that we wear it."

"Oh. A lady in the village told me that moss agate is a crystal used to open the heart to love," I said, and Brax snickered.

"That's the other half of it," he admitted.

"Hmm, interesting." I grinned, and Kai squeezed my hand with a sly smirk.

"You're an interesting human," he grinned and led me down the stairs.

"Thought I was your human?" I teased.

He chuckled and nodded. "That too."

He bent down and kissed me. It took all of a second for me to give in to his tongue slipping through my lips. I slid mine along his, and then he was shoving me against the wall.

I didn't know what wall or where in the estate we were, but it didn't matter.

I kissed him back, sighing as he picked me up and pressed me against the wall. I was so sore, so achy, but somehow it never mattered when I was kissing one of them.

"Nikolai! Not now," Derik growled, and Kai pulled back, smirking at me before slowly letting my feet touch the ground again.

"I will be inside you tonight, human," he breathed, and it was the best promise he'd made so far.

I grinned and walked ahead so he couldn't give in to what I knew was resting between us.

I wanted to know the crazy witch person that kept the wolves wearing moss agate to their meetings. I looked over my own clothes and took note of the mossy green color of the dress.

It made me wonder if it was a respect thing or a way of introducing me into the alliance. Or an ownership thing, but I didn't mind being owned by the alphas.

I walked forward and slid my hand into Derik's. He squeezed it and led me down the stairs, toward the front area that I knew well now.

"I never thought to ask, but do you require a handmaiden?" Derik asked, and I frowned at the concept.

It was outdated to say the least. The ladies of the village took care of their own shit, literally. And as far as I was aware, werewolves would be seen as weak for letting someone else handle them.

I appreciated the gesture though and shook my head with a warm smile. "No thank you," I replied, and he frowned at that.

"I mean to help you bathe and dress. Or to fetch you things you need when we cannot be there," he offered again, and I shrugged.

"I've never had one before. And I can dress myself just fine. Thank you though," I said, and Derik smiled.

"Okay, well, I will send an initiate up to spend time with you while we are away in case you need food or something. She will fetch it for you."

"Is that code for sending someone to keep an eye on me?" I guessed, smirking as he led me out the front door and down the steps to the pathway. The same pathway that led to the road out of the city.

There was a carriage waiting, one of the same fancy-looking ones in black with the wolf head on the side. There was a single horse connected, a huge black horse with a silver mane and tail.

It was beautiful, standing out in the dark night. There were stars sprinkled in the sky with a crescent moon shining bright and big as it always did.

Derik didn't say anything about my comment, which was its own form of confirmation. I didn't mind though; maybe it'd give me something to do that wasn't getting fucked by the alphas every waking moment.

Although, that part was quite fun.

I looked over the front lawn of the estate where it sprawled down to a low brick fence, then to the street. It was empty, like it had been since I arrived.

Brax opened the door of the carriage for me, and I lifted my skirts, climbing in, with the alphas getting in behind me.

I sat on the opposite side to Derik and Brax. Kai sat next to me and hauled me into his lap, nuzzling into my neck, his thumb brushing my jaw as his lips teased my flesh.

I sighed and my lids fluttered closed. Kai's other hand slipped under my skirts, his fingertips brushing along my thigh. The carriage started moving, and I clutched his arm.

"I thought we weren't meant to be doing this outside of the estate so the wolves didn't get even more angry that I'm here?" I sighed.

"You're not," Derik bit out, and Kai chuckled against my neck, his hot breath making my skin rise.

I smiled and pulled back. "Then raincheck, Alpha," I said, and went to move off him.

He gripped me tighter, his claws growing as he held me there. I rolled my eyes at his temper, then kissed his pouting lips. I used that as a distraction, slipping out of his hold. Then I let the kiss go.

He watched me settle back into the seat next to him with intense eyes that saw everything. I smiled, and he huffed.

I ignored it and went to look out the windows, but the window was blacked out. I frowned and turned to Derik, who was not as innocent as he looked in that moment.

"You had the windows blacked out?" I asked, and he nodded once.

"The wolves don't want you knowing their home."

“Why?” I asked, not sure how I felt about wolves feeling threatened by me.

I wanted them to see me as more than a human, not a pushover, but I didn’t want them only seeing a winter born. I’d already lived that life in the village.

“Most of them saw the destruction of the last winter born. You not seeing their home was a part of the conditions proposed in the council meeting by the pack.”

It made sense, and I couldn’t blame them after the things I had heard about Elias, but I was starting to hate the idea of living in the estate every second.

It was huge and beautiful and I was allowed to visit the village, but could I really contain my life to a single building forever?

I was stuck in my mind, thoughts of my life and what it was leading to rushing through it.

Being with the alphas was where I wanted to be for the moment, but what would happen when they got sick of the winter born human making the pack torn? Or they had to find females to mate with? Have children with?

I hated the idea of being the sad lover stuck in the estate while my alphas paraded around with their mates and children. Or would they send me back?

Tears prickled my eyes at the thought of going back to the village after being with them. I was already an outcast, but I would have no place there after being so tainted by the wolves.

I had no idea why I was thinking so in depth now, on the way to dinner with a witch, but I couldn’t help it. My mind was spiraling, thinking of everything, all the possibilities, and emotion prickled in my heart, my throat.

I didn’t want to share my alphas, I didn’t want to go back to the way things were, and I wished there was some way for my stupid human body to give them everything they needed. But there wasn’t.

I sighed and leaned back in the seat, hating that I had human emotions that were overwhelming me. The alphas said nothing and I wondered why, especially Brax, since he always felt how I was feeling.

I opened my eyes and looked at them, but they were just staring with curious eyes.

“What?” I asked through a rough voice.

“Nothing,” Brax said too quickly, and the lie trickled through my blood.

I frowned at him, and he looked away. “What’s going on?” I said, my instincts coming out.

“You’ll find out soon, beautiful,” Derik interjected, and that felt more honest, but there was something I was missing.

I sighed and leaned back in my seat again. As soon as I did, my mind clouded and my thoughts were piercing, stealing my focus again.

But this time, it wasn’t the alphas. I thought about the shadows. The good ones inside me and the ones on the outside that were trying to get in.

I used to hate the idea of being winter born, being the cursed one, but now I was happy about it. It had brought me closer to the alphas.

But it did make me question why they had kept me. Because Kai couldn’t stay away? Because of the letter from my father? Or was it because I had a winter born power within me that they could use?

If it helped the pack and, in turn, the village, then of course I didn’t mind, but if they wanted the power just to wield even more of it over the villagers then that was going to piss me off.

They already got the best of everything we had.

We farmed produce, wheat, and animals; the Forest gave them materials, wood from the trees, rock and stone from the caves; and then the Water village provided water, fish, and some herbs for medicines.

The villages traded between each other, but all the best of every village went to the wolves.

It was how it had always been, and I didn’t mind most of the time, they protected us after all, but sometimes I wondered why we had to be so separate?

Would the wolves live without humans providing everything for them?

I doubted it, and it made me wonder about the power balance, but then again, if they were trying to use whatever power the shadows had in me, at least they were going for the good shadows.

That had to mean they were good and had good intentions?

And my shadows connected with Brax and trusted him, so that was good too. I thought so anyway. Unless my brother was to be trusted. He believed they were not good, using me for whatever nefarious plan he believed the wolves had concocted.

I had no idea who to trust, but I did know that my shadows had been loyal so far, and that they gave me a much safer feeling than the red-eyed shadows did. I trusted that.

I pressed my fingers to my throbbing head, a dull ache starting throughout my skull, but my head was still a mess.

Every thought I'd had since meeting the wolves processed in those moments in the carriage, the silence pierced by my heavy breathing as I tried to sort through the swirling of thoughts.

I clenched my eyes shut and leaned forward, concentrating on my breathing, when there was a tug on my shadows inside me. It was strange, like I hadn't done it.

I frowned as it tugged again and my shadows filled my body with warmth and trust. I wasn't sure what I was trusting, but I did. I relaxed, and my thoughts came through clearer.

I remembered the bad shadows and how horrible they made me feel and how it made me not trust them. The ultimatum they had given me, the timeline. I was still scared for it; I didn't know how to beat shadows or how to use mine.

Not well enough anyway. I'm pretty sure playing hide-and-seek wasn't going to work with the bad shadows. Those red eyes would find me. They were always there, hovering.

Well, at least that's what I assumed, since they always seemed to know when I was vulnerable, ready to whisper creepy shit in my ear.

I shivered and pursed my lips as all my thoughts stopped abruptly at the same time the carriage did.

I blew out a breath as the alphas climbed out. They held the door open, and it was strange getting out. They were all tense. Not the usual ready-to-fight tense, but an anxiety that flowed off them.

I frowned at the reaction, looking over each of them as Brax helped me out of the carriage. I stepped down, a splash dirtying my legs, shoes, and bottom of my skirts. I looked down at the swampy texture of the ground.

Derik walked forward, looking over the swamp, mist covering the expansive area. It smelled so bad. Like rot and, well, swamp.

But there wasn't a warning in my blood, so I stepped forward with Brax holding me, helping me wade through the ankle-deep mush.

It was so dark I could barely see, but that didn't seem to be a problem for the wolves.

We stepped forward. The only sound breaking the night was the sloshing of our footsteps.

"So creepy," I breathed, and Kai snickered.

Derik turned to me. "Don't say that to her. She loves this godforsaken place," he muttered in disgust.

"To each their own, I guess." I grimaced, trying to find a house or something to indicate where she actually lived, but I couldn't see anything. Until I saw two glowing eyes peering up out of the water.

I sucked in a breath as it moved through the water, shuffling closer to Brax. He looked at me, then to where I was staring, wide-eyed. He hissed at it, and it came further out of the water.

It was a fucking alligator. A huge one. I froze and Brax growled at it in warning. It paused and looked like it was taunting him.

"I'll turn you into a fucking belt with boots to match if you get any closer, Ruby," Brax swore at the creature.

Its eyes narrowed before the alligator thwacked its tail on the water, splashing them both, before spinning away and disappearing. Derik shook his head as Kai laughed, breaking the tension with his deep husk.

“Don’t piss off her pet.”

Derik rolled his eyes with an exasperated sigh. “That thing is not a pet, it’s a menace.”

Kai laughed again. “I want one,” he said, just as the swamp beneath my feet turned to wood.

I looked up, and there was a dark wooden ramp that led to a log cabin. There were no lights on and it seemed kind of abandoned, but it wasn’t. There was a plump, dark-skinned woman out the front watching with a smirk on her face.

She held a cane, wore a knitted shawl and full skirts that were a tattered, faded floral pattern.

She smiled as Kai walked forward, embracing the short woman.

“And how is my favorite wolf?” She smiled warmly, kissing Kai’s cheek.

“Mom, what have I told you about playing favorites when you’ve only got one child? You have to pick me.”

Cain sighed, coming away from a dark wooden post on the deck around the house. I hadn’t even seen him there dressed all in black, blending into the night.

“I’m great, Aunt Tabby.” Kai grinned like a kid and stepped back as Derik came forward and kissed her on the cheek next.

“I can feel that. I haven’t felt you so...distracted since the last heat.”

She chuckled, kissing Derik on each cheek before nodding to Brax. He offered a half smile and nodded back.

That was something I was going to find out about later. She didn’t like Brax much, and my curiosity was piqued. He seemed the most relaxed of them all...most of the time anyway. Not here though.

“And your guest. Lorelai,” she said, then turned to me. “The winter born.”

She smiled softly, then stepped forward with her hands extended, her smoky voice triggering a feeling inside me. A tug at my shadows.

"Hi," I said timidly, giving her my hand that she reached for.

She closed hers around mine, and the carriage came back to me. I gasped and snatched my hand back.

"That was you," I realized, the feelings the same when she touched me as they were in the carriage. Like her imprint on whatever she had done was making sure I recognized it.

She wanted me to know it was her.

"Yes."

"What were you doing?" I demanded, feeling a little violated that she had been in my head. Or maybe intimidated that she could get in there in the first place. Reading my thoughts was much more intense than just getting a feeling.

"I was reading you."

"What does that mean? A proper answer, please," I said, not wanting a vague nonanswer.

She wanted me in her house, eating her food, to meet me. That meant having my trust. I needed a reason to give it.

She smiled knowingly, like she knew exactly why I was annoyed, exactly what I was thinking. Brax squeezed my hand tighter.

"I read every thought and feeling you have had since meeting the alphas to understand what motivates you, what your intentions are, and whether I can trust you," she admitted, her chin high like she wasn't even sorry.

"You could've asked."

"You could've lied." She shrugged.

"You would've known if I had."

"Yes," she stated simply, and I clenched my jaw.

"A compromise then. I won't lie, and you won't dig in my head without permission. If I lie, then you can find the answer yourself," I offered, and she grinned, hobbling forward and pressing her lips against my cheek.

I pressed mine against the papery soft, crinkled texture of hers.

"If I hadn't found what I found in your head then I would be feeding you to Ruby, but you were genuine. I like genuine," she said, then turned on her heel, shaking her walking stick.

"Dinner time, friends, come in!" she called, and the house lit up, the curtains drawing on their own.

I gasped and looked through the windows at the feast she had laid out on a crowded circular table set with enough seats for us all. There were pitchers of wine, and the lights were strung up in flowers along the rafters.

The others filed in behind her, but I hung back, looking up at Brax. "You okay?"

He nodded once, and I frowned at the lie. "Can I help?"

He shook his head. "You can help later, Spitfire." He winked and I smiled, wrapping my arm around him, snuggling in before walking into the house.

It was not just a house, it was a home, filled with plants, crystals, and tapestries hanging. It was cluttered but still tidy, like everything was in its place for a reason.

The living area was quaint with a homey sofa of florals, a rug, and bookshelves, all facing a fireplace that was roaring with life, making the whole place warm.

An incense burned, filling the space with a calming lavender. Candles were lit all over every surface that wasn't already occupied.

Tabitha sat down in a chair facing the kitchen along the back wall. It wasn't like the clean, modern wood of the estate; it was weathered, but loved. Like her kitchen and dining room was the true hub of her home.

It felt like it anyway.

I sat down in the chair next to her, Cain on her other side. Brax sat next to me, shuffling a little closer, widening his legs so his brushed my thigh.

I eyed him, and he smiled. He wanted to be touching me. When I looked at Kai, he didn't even look possessive about it like he usually did.

I had to know what was going on with Brax, it was driving me insane. But this also wasn't the place to find out. Of course, that made me want to find out more.

Kai sat next to Cain, Derik opposite Tabitha at the round table, and then they dug in. No talking or a speech, just serving the food like the villagers did on holidays.

It was nice, the feeling of being so comfortable. I got stuck in too, and before long, the conversation drifted from wolves to the full moon and then on to the tougher subject for me to hear about. The heat.

"So. Have you told the wolves you have no intention of being available for the heat?" Tabitha asked, her fingers clasping in front of her.

Everything went silent, and I cleared my throat, laying my fork on the plate.

"We're in negotiations. The council is aware."

"And how are they taking it?"

"Tabitha, not now," Derik tried, but she chuckled.

"She needs to know these things, especially if you plan on keeping her long term."

"I'd like to know," I interrupted, and Derik pursed his lips.

Braxton put his hand on my thigh under the table as Cain leaned forward.

"The council are demanding that there be a heat celebration when it comes on."

"I have a feeling I am going to regret asking this, but what is a heat celebration?" I asked, not sure I even wanted an answer.

"The main pack and the unmated wolves of the city are locked in the estate, the ballroom, where they all give in to the heat together.

“Being all in one place means they can feed off the power and magic in the room. It makes everything stronger and more intense. It will replace the power that the females are missing out on from the alphas,” Cain explained, leaning back with his hands behind his head.

That didn’t sound too bad to me. It sounded like a reasonable demand, but something in the way Derik and even Kai were glaring had me thinking there was a vital part that Cain was forgetting.

“Not going to happen,” Derik bit.

“It sounds like it could be the only option, Derik,” I said, and Kai snarled.

“No!”

Tabby put her hand on the fist he had slammed on the table.

“I’m missing something here?” I assumed, and Brax leaned closer, like he was only talking to me.

“The alphas have to be present at the celebration, even if they’re not participating. But we won’t be able to leave you alone while that is happening in the estate or the wolves could lose control and sense a human.

“A human is a dangerous scent to have around, but a winter born human? Even worse because of the power,” Brax said softly, rubbing his thumb over my hand.

“Oh. So I would have to be in there with all of you. And all the wolves from the city would be fucking?” I asked, and everyone stayed silent, until Tabitha laughed.

“Yes, dear. That’s the idea.”

I didn’t care what I had to watch or be in the same room with if it meant the alphas got to stay mine.

“Then say yes. I’ll stay in the room with you three and that happening if it means I’m yours and you can stay mine. And if it keeps the wolves happy with our arrangement then it kind of seems like a no-brainer,” I said, and Brax chuckled, bringing my hand to his lips to kiss it.

Kai grinned then and looked at me with hungry, lust-filled eyes. I smiled at him, avoiding Derik's glare.

"Thanks for your hospitality, Tabitha, but I think it's time we were leaving," Derik said, sliding back his chair.

Tabitha sighed as I stood up with him.

"Can I ask a question? I don't want to seem rude, but I also don't know how to make it sound like I don't mean it in the wrong way," I asked, wanting an answer before we headed back to the estate.

Tabitha nodded, standing, accepting her stick from Cain. "Ask."

"The alphas told me that the witches don't usually get along with the wolves. Why do you?" I asked, and she smiled.

"Because I have a son who is half his father, and I wouldn't be a very good mother if I ignored that fact, now would I?"

"Half wolf, half witch. I thought wolves could only procreate with their own race?" I asked, hating how intrigued I sounded and not sure what the wolves were going to think of my question, but I asked anyway.

"I was blessed by some very cruel gods to be given a hybrid. It is not possible, but there are usually exceptions to the rule. Apparently I was one. I have no answer as to why, but I'm sure destiny had its reasons.

"I can also see the alphas' true selves, and they are not like the ones who came before," she said, and I nodded.

Even my mother had said that about the current alphas.

"Did you know Elias, the winter born before me?" I wondered, lowering back into my seat.

Derik leaned back against the kitchen, not in such a hurry to leave now that the subject had changed. Tabitha sat back down too.

"I did. He was just as evil as you've heard. Rotten to the core."

"Is that why you wanted to meet me?"

She nodded. “I wanted to get a sense of your shadows and who you were as a person.”

“And I passed your test?”

“As long as you say no on the next full moon.” She eyed me knowingly, and I nodded.

“I planned to.”

“I’m aware. But I also sensed your indecision. Your brother is heading down a dangerous path, young winter born. Be sure you don’t follow,” she warned, and I nodded, swallowing a tense breath.

The room filled with tension as the alphas froze. I hadn’t mentioned my brother or that he had shadows, but I got the distinct feeling my new friend Tabitha had known that and wanted them to know.

I was about to answer, to defend my decision—more to the wolves since I’m sure she knew my reasons—when a metallic, iron taste hit my mouth.

Blood pumped in my ear and the strong scent of chemical or potent sanitizer, I wasn’t entirely sure, hit me hard in the next second.

Tabitha gasped as the wolves all stood from the table, growling and snarling, their claws and teeth growing, red eyes taking over them.

Panic rose in my chest, but I wasn’t even sure why until Derik spoke.

“Vampires,” he seethed, and then the wolves were no longer my alphas; they were beasts, defending their territory.