

Owned by the Alphas |

The Past

Brax nuzzled into my neck, his whimpering waking me up. I wrapped my arms around his head where it had moved to nuzzle my breast.

I moaned, but not in pleasure. In exhaustion. Everything ached, especially my thighs and pussy that had only been left alone because I had fallen asleep. It didn't feel like it had been that long ago.

But the heat had changed my alphas. They weren't just craving me anymore, they needed me. It was hard to resist, but I was still a human and had human limitations.

I hadn't realized what the heat would do though. My alphas were insatiable, angry, feral to fuck.

All night they'd had me, ravaging me, but their dicks were still hard, still pulsing with a need that I was starting to think I couldn't fill.

Especially with Brax whining in my ear for more, but I was so tired and wanted food and a bathroom break.

"Spitfire, wake up, baby," Brax begged, his kisses moving over my breasts, my tired body responding to his touch, urging him on despite the muscles in me feeling like lead.

"I'm so tired," I sighed as he kissed down my naked stomach, his tongue stroking my skin with rough tugs.

I couldn't help the way my back arched at the feeling, my pussy responding without my permission. I liked sleep, no, I *loved* sleep, and I hadn't had enough of it.

"I need you, it hurts," Brax whined, and I opened my eyes reluctantly.

He was looking at me with the cutest big eyes that made me feel bad. I hated that it hurt them, but Brax felt it even worse with the way his shadows connected him to the pack.

All night the entire city had been filled with howls and whines from the females.

I wasn't sure what it meant, but I knew it made the alphas need sating. Like their bodies responded to the call of their females and when they didn't answer that call, it hurt them.

But I could only take so much before I had to call time-out.

"Raincheck?" I whispered, my eyes fluttering closed as I tried to roll over, but he was already kissing down my stomach, nudging my legs apart.

"Brax. Leave her," Derik said from somewhere beside me, but I couldn't be bothered opening my eyes again.

Brax's whimper broke my heart. "It's stronger this year," Brax breathed as I felt his body weight leave mine.

I almost wished it would come back. Almost.

"Our females are stronger. I can still feel them. The wolves won't be able to last the full heat with her scent here," Derik said in a hushed tone, but I heard it.

I was the reason...again. Why couldn't I just be normal? Or a wolf? But that was a thought I quickly pushed away. I didn't know how being turned would be affected since I was a winter born, but I wasn't trusting it enough to try it.

"So we call a pack meeting and have the ceremony," Kai said, like it was a no-brainer.

Derik and Brax were silent then, but I felt their eyes on me. Their voices were quieter when they spoke again.

"Her being there will change things. Her scent will make it worse." Derik sighed like he was uncertain about everything.

"She'll be with us, they won't touch her," Kai said, like he was promising it.

He probably was. I knew how safe I was with them and I trusted Kai to keep his promise, so I didn't mind being in the ceremony. Especially if it helped the alphas feel better during the heat that they couldn't act in.

"We won't be able to claim her there. It'll overwhelm her, she won't be able to resist the channeling. We'd have to resist."

"How, Derik?" Brax snapped. "I feel everything!"

His hushed voice rose. "Put me in a room with our pack, our females in heat, and add her to it? I'm not promising my control," he finished, and I peered out of my lid.

He was scowling, his arms crossed, but the pain was in there and I forced myself to rise. I winced as I did, ignoring the ache that plagued my bones, and crawled over to him.

I wrapped my arms around Brax's neck, my bare body against his back as I kissed his ear, his cheek, his neck. He growled, his shoulders sagging as I teased him.

"I can handle it. Even if you lose control," I promised. "If it helps you get through this and the pack gets what they need then we have to."

"No, beautiful. It's too dangerous. If you channel the collective pack during the heat, you'll be risking your life. We won't let you."

I shrugged at that. "You have to. And I told you I can handle it. I won't channel."

"If we claim you during the ceremony, you won't be able to help it," Brax bit through a clenched jaw as he rolled his head to the side.

I kissed over his sensitive neck, licking up the vein that revealed his erratic pulse.

"You don't know that," I tried, and Kai grinned, coming over to grab my jaw, holding my mouth in a pout, stealing a kiss that seared my body with heat.

I don't know how I managed to feel so strongly after what they had been doing to me, but apparently I was going to fuck until I died.

What a way to go out though. It was preferable to the shadow death that Elias was offering, so I was taking the pleasure until I physically couldn't.

I kissed him back, still kneeling on the bed, my body still against Brax. I reached around, stroking Brax's cock. He let out a growl through his clenched jaw as I kissed Kai.

"You two! Back the fuck off," Derik growled, yanking Kai and Brax away, catching me before I fell off the bed.

He held me against him, kissing my cheek, his hard cock pressing into my stomach as he put me back on the bed, kneeling in front of me.

"Let her rest. If she's serious about the ceremony, then she's going to need it."

"I am serious, Derik. It's the only option where you don't have to go out there and fuck the other females, right?" I asked, and he clenched his jaw, giving me my answer in silence.

I nodded. "Exactly, so call your meeting. We're having an orgy."

I laughed, and Derik's serious face broke into a smirk.

"We're just watching one," he reminded, trying to sound stern.

I knew they were going to try to be good so I had to try too, but I was looking forward to seeing what happened to wolves in heat.

Was it going to turn me on? Be hot as hell? Or was I going to be terrified? I was looking forward to finding out.

He must've seen that in my eyes because he shook his head. "Just watching, beautiful. I'm not risking you channeling. So behave, got it?" he said, and I nodded.

"Got it." I smiled innocently, then looked over at Brax, who was staring with heated eyes roaming over my body.

Kai had the same hungry look, and I had a feeling that if Derik moved right now, I wouldn't be getting off the bed. I did need a bathroom break though. And food.

"It'll have to be outside," Brax said, breaking the connection.

Derik looked over his shoulder with a frown as I climbed off the bed, standing close to Derik so I had a chance of making it to the bathroom before getting ravaged again.

“We’ve never held the ceremony outside before,” Derik said, and Brax shrugged.

“I’m telling you right now, putting me in a room won’t work. I might have a hope of maintaining control if we’re outside,” he admitted, his eyes locking on mine.

I bit my lip, smirking at the heat that filled me. I liked that he couldn’t help himself when it came to me. Then Kai groaned and went to step forward. Derik blocked him, pushing me back behind him.

Kai bared his teeth. “You sensed it too. She wants it,” Kai bit, but Derik rolled his eyes.

“Go for a run while she deals with her human needs. She needs to be as strong as possible for tonight.”

He backed Kai off, but it didn’t matter because Brax grabbed me, dragging me toward the bathroom and shutting the door before Derik could stop him. He pressed me into the door, holding me there as his mouth closed over mine.

He was so fast it made me breathless. He lifted me onto his waist, his cock begging at my entrance, his lips covering mine, his hands fucking my wild strands of hair up even more.

Derik bashed on the door. “Brax!”

“One more, then I swear I’ll go sulk somewhere far away until the ceremony,” he called out, then went back to my lips.

It went silent before I heard Derik sigh. “You okay, beautiful?”

“I’m not promising shit, she’s mine the second she gets out of that bathroom,” Kai warned darkly, and I shuddered.

I wanted them so much, but I didn’t understand how. Self-preservation had left, leaving only desire in its wake.

“I’m okay, Derik,” I said back, and it was all the permission Brax needed.

He sank into me with a low groan. I still needed the bathroom, but somehow that made it better, like I was even fuller. I didn't even care that I couldn't release it because it made it so much more intense.

Brax fucked me into the bathroom door, pinning me there as his hips thrust against me.

I gripped his shoulder, my other hand digging into the wood of the door as I cried out, his cock slamming inside me, the ache and the pleasure driving me to my orgasm so fast.

I gasped and moaned, gripping Brax as his muscles strained with the pace. He grunted and groaned as I took him in, meeting his hips.

His fingers dug into my ass, yanking me on him, and I couldn't hold back the cries of ecstasy that fell from me with every stroke of pleasure he sent to my core.

My skin became damp. His thrusts were wild and uncontrolled, his breaths were pants as his fangs scraped my shoulder. It only added to the intensity. His claws were piercing the skin of my ass, but I relished it.

Everything he gave me, I wanted—and more. I urged him on, meeting his thrusts, riding his cock against the door, desperate for release.

Tears sprang to my eyes at the overwhelming pleasure that filled me. It was so much, he was so carnal, his body taking every part of me with it. I wanted it to.

I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, pressing myself against him, finding his mouth, kissing him harshly as he gripped my ass tighter. His fang scraped my lip, making it bleed as something inside me flickered.

My shadows came to life in me, glowing like something I'd never felt before. And then I was with him fully. Connected with him on such a profound level, my entire body shook, the need so intense I could barely breathe.

I cried out, my body tightening and releasing in the next second. My scream fell, and I wasn't sure whether it was pleasure or pain.

I gripped him, needing more skin, more pleasure, my greedy pussy soaking his cock as I rode him like a woman possessed, and that's kind of what it felt like.

I couldn't get enough. My orgasm was there, in my body, pouring from my core with pleasure filling every part of me, but it wasn't leaving, like the high was too high.

Brax growled and dropped to the ground. I fell with him, landing on his thighs, his cock still buried inside me. He yanked me on him, the force aching my pelvis, but I didn't care. I was still lost in him, connected with him.

The glow was bright inside me, and I kissed him, his taste filling my entire body.

I clutched him so tight before he swore and shoved me down to the floor. He gripped my throat, my airway closing as he looked down at me, his cock throbbing as he pumped it into me.

I writhed, my cries garbled behind his hold on me.

"Fuck!" Brax growled, and then he was cumming. So hard and so fierce, I had no idea how I was still alive.

He let me breathe, and the second the air hit my lungs, the high intensified. It was like I had channeled him, but not fully. Like his shadows had found mine and were making it so much more intense.

Brax rode out his orgasm, fucking me into mine until we were both panting messes on the floor, the pleasure pulsing and radiating from our damp bodies.

He kept his cock in me, holding himself up with his hand splayed, the other loosening my hips. I ran my fingers down his impressive body, sighing as his dick twitched in me.

"This heat is going to be the death of me," he breathed, finally pulling out and falling back against the door, his head down, his hand brushing back his blond hair that he hadn't tied up.

I sat up and moved over to him, moving between his legs, kissing him as he brushed his thumb over my cheek.

"I'm sorry that me being here is making everything worse. I can go stay at home for a bit if you want?" I asked, the idea making my heart clench, but I didn't need to worry because Brax scowled at the idea.

"You're the only thing getting me through this," he whispered, his eyes on mine.

It was so intense, I didn't even know what to say, like speaking would break whatever connection we had formed.

"It's just having a human scent around while we're so in touch with our wolf makes us a little more animal. Makes us crave a hunt, and resisting that and the craving to sate our females is hard. Especially when I can feel everything from the entire pack," he said, his head falling back on the door, his eyes closing.

"What do you feel?" I whispered.

"Their lust, their need, their fury. Our females are strong this year, and the wolves are trying, but they have to fuck and fuck until the females are done. The wolves can only go so long before they tap out and a new male takes their place.

"It can go on for days, usually three, but this year? The males are struggling to keep up. It's fucking pathetic, to be honest, but we are the alphas, and usually our strength is a part of the collective that keeps them going but we've cut ourselves off so we don't lose ourselves to the frenzy," he explained.

It was blowing my mind to hear of their crazy wolf traditions but then they probably thought that about our dumb human ones. Like the choosing ceremony.

"It's easier for Derik and Kai, they cut themselves off, put up a temporary wall that only drip feeds the pack our connection, but I can't. Not with my shadows," he admitted.

I didn't know how to help or what to say, so I snuggled up next to him, ignoring the pressing on my bladder and kissing his pec. He held me under his arm, our bodies naked and leaning on the door as he sighed deeply.

"Why do you have the shadows and they don't?" I asked. It had been niggling at me for so long. I held my breath for the answer, but he tensed and I knew it was something he didn't want to talk about.

"I was winter born," he finally admitted, and I gasped, sitting up and staring at him.

"But you're not human?" I asked, confused as hell.

"Not anymore. I was. My parents were both wolves, my line pure, and yet when everyone started turning at puberty, I didn't. My parents hid it, didn't say anything. Then they took me to Tabitha, and she found the shadows in me. They had burned through my wolf gene," he said quietly.

I waited for the rest of the explanation, so many questions filling me. How was he a wolf? How was he an alpha? Is he what I would become if I turned?

He looked at me and chuckled. "Nobody but the alphas know this, Spitfire. Derik would be pissed if he knew I was telling you," he said, his voice low, but I just shrugged.

"I won't say anything," I said, not doubting my loyalty, and neither did he because he took a breath and when he released it, gave me more of his past.

"My parents hid the fact that I couldn't turn, and then Tabitha found a way to fix it. She said she could give me the wolf I needed to become the alpha I was meant to be.

"My family had been alphas for years, alongside Derik's and Kai's. It was expected that I would take over. It felt wrong though, something in my shadows said I shouldn't, but my parents insisted. Even when Tabitha said there would be a price. She insisted that it wasn't her price, just the price of the kind of magic it would take.

"But my parents were so sure that the worse fate would be to have an heir that wasn't a werewolf, so they agreed. They didn't care what the consequences were. They didn't even find out what they were." He shook his head, still not looking at me, but I wanted to know.

"What were the consequences?"

He opened his eyes then, a deep pain filling them, a guilt that I didn't understand piercing me.

"Another wolf had to die. A newborn wolf. One that had just turned with my friends," he said, his voice shaking, his fists closing as his anger radiating through me.

I sucked in a breath at the feeling, not sure what to say to make it better.

"And Tabitha knew?"

"Oh, she knew. She sent Cain to kill him. To retrieve his blood that I had to drink, to cut out his heart that I had to hold while they branded it—and me," he said, his voice so deep and raw.

Tears filled my eyes at the emotion I felt in him. I didn't mean to channel him, but the guilt and resentment was so strong, it took me over. I shook, leaning into him, holding him as I took on his pain.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, and he held me tighter to him.

"It worked though, I'm a wolf like Derik and Kai, just like my parents wanted. Our line survived another generation." He scoffed. "I wish I had known before I had trusted them. I was naive and scared. I wasn't like my friends, and they made me think that was worse.

"But then they wanted me to hold his heart, and I knew something wasn't right. I refused, and they tied my hands together, made me take it. I won't forgive them, Spitfire. So I will go there when I need to as a united front for the alliance we keep between our pack and her, but I will never trust them, and especially not with you," he said, holding my face, his gaze burning into me.

I swallowed hard, not sure how to take his past. I trusted Tabitha and Cain. They had both stood in the way to protect me, and I couldn't see the version he gave me, but I didn't doubt its truth, which left me so confused.

"You think they'll hurt me?"

He shook his head. "No. I won't let them. But I think Tabitha will always do what needs to be done for the greater good. No matter the consequences."

He let out a breath, his thumb brushing my lip. "I don't want you to be one of those consequences," Brax said, and my heart swelled at his words.

The whole time I had thought his anger came from a race thing, not liking that she was a witch or not liking that Cain was a hybrid, but it was so much worse. Now I had no idea what to think.

I held him, silently mulling over what he had told me. "Have you ever confronted her about it? Asked her why she did it?" I wondered, and he shook his head.

"I can't. I was never to question it; it was part of the deal she made with my parents. I could never talk about it with her because if I did then the future would change. She refused to risk it, and now it's a blood oath that I can't break," he muttered, and his rage was almost tangible.

"Derik and Kai know though?" I asked, and he nodded.

"We can't hide anything from each other. When we took the throne as alphas, every thought, feeling, memory became each other's. We were linked through the oath we took. The only separate thing I have is the shadows.

"They didn't agree with it, but they don't begrudge her for it like I do. She convinced them it was to protect a future we can't see yet."

He rolled his eyes and blew out a breath before his head fell back against the door with a huff.

"I've gotta go, Spitfire," he said, and I wanted him to stay. I wanted to ask him more, but I had to pee so bad that all I could do was nod and let him help me up.

"The meeting?" I assumed, and he shook his head, his eyes roaming over me.

"I can feel it getting worse, and I need to leave you alone until after the heat ceremony. If I don't, neither of us will have the strength to resist what's coming." He smirked, his eyes lightening.

I smiled and kissed him, then he left.

I finally used the bathroom and enjoyed a long bath, soaking until my fingers turned wrinkly. I tried to relax, but everything Brax had told me made me second-guess everything.

I wasn't bound either, so if I asked Tabitha, she'd have to tell me. I'd also know if she was lying. But would it get Brax in trouble? What if the pack found out?

I had no idea, and it was still running through my mind a couple of hours later when there was a light knock at the door.

I frowned and covered my chest, bringing my legs up and wrapping my arms around them.

"Hello?" I asked.

A tall girl poked her head in with a head of dark hair, a young face and a thicker body. Her cheeks were flushed as she stepped into the room.

"Lorelai? I'm Anetta. Alpha Derik sent me to help you dress and escort you to breakfast," she said, smiling, but her eyes were full of curiosity as they tried not to stare.

I knew I looked a sight. The alphas weren't exactly gentle, and I had human skin that apparently bruised easily.

"Thanks. I'll get out and meet you in the dressing room," I said.

She nodded and I climbed from the tub, wrapping a towel around myself. I went through to the dressing room where Anetta was picking out a dress for me. It was simple and didn't require a corset, so I was happy with her choice.

"You're a werewolf?" I asked, and she nodded, handing me my undergarments.

I put them on, not caring if she saw me naked. I was about to go to an orgy ceremony, there was no point being modest anymore.

"Yes." She nodded once.

"An initiate?"

She nodded again.

"You don't talk much, do you?" I prodded, slipping on my dress of deep purple with a tight bodice that was almost as suffocating as the damn corset. It pushed my tender breasts up and clutched my waist like Kai when he fucked me.

"I don't have much to say."

I scoffed at that. "Liar." I called her out, and a smirk played on her full lips, the shine in her dark skin glinting off the glow of the candle.

"I'm not supposed to ask questions," she finished, and I grinned.

"What would you ask if you were allowed?"

She sobered then, her face falling as she looked at me. "I would ask you why you're here," she murmured, and my eyes widened in surprise.

She didn't seem angry or annoyed, just...sad. I frowned at the feelings I read off her.

"Because I belong to the alphas, they own me," I said, hoping I sounded convincing because I know they needed to seem in charge, they needed me to be the damsel.

She shook her head and crossed her arms. "May I speak candidly?" she asked, and I nodded.

"Please."

"The last winter born in the city took over, killed our families, manipulated the alphas. We worry that we don't know what your plans are for us. The alphas have already changed so much, we don't want it to be like last time."

She swallowed, and I had to admire her bravery. If I was like the last one, then I probably would have killed her. But I wasn't, and my heart hurt for the fear she felt. I hadn't meant to be the one they worried about.

"I don't have any plans aside from being theirs. The werewolves have nothing to fear from me. I don't know what you mean by manipulated the alphas though?" I wondered, because it was definitely not a part of the story I had been told.

She frowned at the question, but I felt her want to answer it, so I waited as she sized me up.

“The last alphas. They were the reason the winter born got in the city at all. They had been fooled, sent to chase their tails, protecting the humans, but the winter born never wanted humans. He wanted werewolf magic.

“So he came for us. Befriended the alphas, made them think he was the informant from the human villages, the one we let in. And he turned on us, used everything he learned against us.” She let her emotions free, rage spilling onto her features as she glared at me.

I shook my head. “I am not him.”

“But you could be. You could change.”

“I won’t,” I swore, but she shook her head.

“How can we trust you? How do I know you aren’t manipulating me now?” she demanded, her anger growing, her teeth dropping, her eyes flashing red.

I backed up, knowing I only had the truth to back up my claim. So, I gave it to her.

“Because I love the alphas as much as you do. I would never hurt them,” I said, and she froze, her eyes widening. I waited for the repercussions of my confession, but instead she composed herself.

“Good. Now that that’s out of the way, I’m Anetta. I’ve been told to get you food when you need it, but I’m not picking your fucking dresses again and you can wipe your own ass, got it?” she said, shoving her hands into her coat.

I raised a brow and realized I was the one who had been manipulated. “That was a test?”

“Yeah, you walked right into it.”

“And everything you told me?”

“Totally true, but I had to make sure you weren’t going to be an entitled bitch before I agreed to be your gofer. Now that I know you’re just a lovesick idiot, we’ll do fine.”

She shrugged, then yanked a jerky from her coat and chomped on it between her scarily sharp teeth.

I chuckled at the way she had handled me. It was well done, and I had to thank Derik for picking someone that I might not mind spending some time with.

“How does loving the alphas make me an idiot?” I asked, following her out of the dressing room into my suite, where breakfast was waiting. My stomach growled in response.

“Because you’re human. That ends with them mating someone else, turning you and fucking you up because of the whole winter born thing, or you die. None of those should be appealing, but love is a bitch like that.”

She sighed, then pulled the lid off the dish waiting at the table for me. Oatmeal and toast. My stomach rumbled again.

“You don’t believe in love?” I asked, ignoring her predictions because she was right, they all sucked.

She extended her wrist so I could see an infinity brand on her wrist. “I kind of have to. I’m mated.”

I nodded, shoving a piece of toast in my mouth. It was dry as hell, but I needed the sustenance.

“Is that why you’re here and not crippled by the heat thing?” I assumed, and she nodded.

“Being mated is kind of like being in permanent heat, so you kinda get used to it. The cravings just get worse when I’m around my mate. It helps that he’s hot as hell.” She grinned, her cheeks flooding with heat.

I smiled and went back to my breakfast. “So mates don’t participate in the ceremony?”

She shook her head. “Nope. Might go anyway though. The more that join, mated or not, the easier it is for the unmated males to draw on our strength to satisfy the females. Normally it’s fine, but a lot of males mated this year and your scent is going to drive them all insane,” she said, then chuckled.

"I can't wait to see how it goes with you there. The alphas are idiots for you too it seems," she said, but it didn't feel like an insult, so I smiled too.

"You think I shouldn't be?"

"Oh no, you have to be. Because the alphas have to be. It'll work and the heat will go smoothly, all our whores getting off, but if they start claiming you there? That's going to drive them wild. They say they can resist, but Kai can't resist shit."

She shook her head, laughing again as she went to the bench and started putting things in cupboards, snacks and food, for which I was grateful.

I sipped the tea from my tray and was pretty sure it wasn't Kai that was going to give in. "I don't think it'll be Kai to lose control. It'll be Brax for sure," I said, knowing his shadows would make it harder.

But nobody else understood that feeling, so she raised a brow.

"Kai is impulsive, never does anything by the book. He'll give in first," she predicted, so I put my tea down and grinned at her.

"Care to bet on it then?"

She narrowed her eyes. "If you win?"

"I want one free pass to leave my suite. You have to take me anywhere in the mansion that I want to go," I bartered, and she nodded slowly.

"And if I win, I want your recommendation to the alphas to get out of initiate status," she said back, and I frowned at that.

"I don't know if I can do that. I try to leave the werewolf business to them."

"But they listen to you, and they will do whatever it takes to make you happy." She grinned back.

I didn't like that idea.

"Can I tell them about our deal?" I asked, and she smiled.

"If I say no?"

“Then I don’t want to do it. It feels like lying, like I’d be stepping in on something I don’t understand,” I admitted, remembering the initiate stuff being quite important to the wolves.

I didn’t want to change things and have the wolves hate me more, but she just laughed.

“Okay, I’ll stop. Test two passed.” She caved, and I rolled my eyes.

“So is the deal a thing or not?”

“I have to tell the alphas everything we talk about, they were adamant that they wanted details, so I’ll tell them about the deal. If they okay it, then you’re on.” She grinned, then went back to stocking the shelves.

I smiled and ate my breakfast.

Anetta left soon after that, and I tried to as well, but my door was locked. As I had known it would be.

It wasn’t until much later, when the crescent moon had spilled its rays into my bedroom, that my alphas returned. They were sweating, panting, their eyes feral as they woke me up from my nap.

I looked at each of them, frowning, my mind automatically jumping to the wrong conclusions.

“Time to dress, human. And stop looking at me like that. We went running to get you out of our heads so you could rest. It didn’t work, by the way.” Kai grinned, scooping me up and taking me to the dressing room.

He tugged my dress off as I yawned, waking up properly.

“I missed you,” I said, going into him.

He paused his searching through my closet to hold me, and I closed my eyes again.

“Mmm, you smell good,” Kai said, sniffing my hair, and I laughed, pulling away.

“Is it time for the ceremony?”

He nodded and pulled out a gray velvet cloak that looked the same color as the moonlight, its cowl big.

He got rid of my dress, then draped the cloak over my shoulders and clipped it closed with a werewolf pin. I looked down, holding it closed.

“Uh, Kai? There’s nothing under this?” I said, blushing hard.

He grinned hungrily and backed me up until I hit the racks of clothes. “I know,” he said, before kissing me, yanking my jaw to his.

I sighed into the kiss, his hand holding me there. I wrapped my arms around him, my hand snaking around his neck. His tongue delved into my mouth, and I was all hot and bothered when Derik came in.

“I knew I should’ve sent Anetta in.” He sighed before yanking Kai back.

Kai just winked and left the dressing room. I laughed and turned to Derik, who was hungrily taking me in.

“I hate this,” he said, and tugged my cloak closed.

I chewed my lip and looked up at him. “Do I have to wear this? Nothing underneath?”

He nodded. “We took you on as our lover. It’s tradition. The council insisted. Kai thinks it’s great, like it’s a challenge to the wolves that will bring out the competitiveness in them, but I hate the idea of even a single one of them seeing what is beneath here,” he said, his finger running down the seam of the cloak and lifting it, his finger brushing my nipple.

I sucked in a breath and stepped into him.

He held me, his lips pressing on my head before sighing. “It’s time to go.”

I followed the alphas out of my suite, out of the mansion, down the same path I had seen so many times now, but this time, they led me through silent streets of cobblestone.

“Keep your cowl up, don’t look any of them in the eye. And don’t challenge any of the females,” Brax whispered, walking beside me as my cloak dragged, my head down.

I watched my steps, the velvet of my cloak keeping me warm, but it felt so strange being naked beneath it.

When we arrived at the clearing, I hadn't seen anything more than a cobblestone path of the city, and then it turned to grass.

The second our presence was known, the wolves howled. Kai held my elbow, leading me to where there was a blanket spread out over the grass.

I stepped onto it; bowls of grapes and berries and a pitcher of wine on a board were on the blanket. I kept my head down, Kai's hand slipping into mine as he stepped us forward.

"Wolves!" he called, and they all quieted. "Tonight, we worship our females!"

They all cheered.

"Satisfy your heat, fuck until you can't walk, and draw on our strength. We are together tonight, as a pack, as one. Enjoy!" Kai announced, and the howls ripped through the air before the entire atmosphere changed.

The lanterns flickered, the night got heavy, and the growls, moans, and gasping broke the serenity as the wolves lost themselves to the heat and I started to realize exactly what they had been worried about.

Because I wasn't sure it was the alphas I should have bet on losing control. I should have bet on myself, the heat slamming through my body like a wave of intensity that had me falling to my knees with a harsh gasp.