

Chapter Five

By the time Perrine pulled up in front of his house, he had accomplished little in deciding what had happened. Slowly, so as not to disturb Marceline, he got to his feet and climbed carefully down from the bed of the truck. She barely stirred more than to press her face against his neck, a soft sigh falling from her lips. Thousands of nights swam before his eyes as he recalled her doing the same thing, late into the night. He coughed lightly in an attempt to break up the emotion that threatened to clog his throat.

“Perrine,” he said softly, looking toward the witch who still sat behind the wheel of her truck. “Thank you. I owe you two gators for this. At least.”

“You don’t owe me nothing, cher. Not this time. You just fix up that Marceline of yours,” she said firmly. “And take care of that Ramson.”

“What happ—“

She had already pulled back out onto the road and drove away, leaving Desmond to ponder her words as he walked up to his front door. He’d been in such a rush, it still stood wide open to the world, but that just made it easier for him to move inside. Briefly, he considered laying her out on the couch, not knowing how much she’d appreciate waking up in his bed, but he changed his mind after a moment, moving to his own room instead. It’d be easier to care for her and dress her wound on the bed where they’d both have room, instead of trying to work with the cramped space of the couch.

It took him a long time to lay Marceline out on the bed. He hadn’t held her in his arms like this in so long that the thought of letting her go, even to take care of her wound, left his heart aching. Sighing, he laid her out on what had been her side of the bed, making sure her head rested against her old pillow. Compulsion drove him to lean over her and press a soft, loving kiss to her lips. Even though she was unresponsive, her lips were warm and soft beneath his own.

“Let’s get you cleaned up, sweetheart. Then you can get back to living your life,” he whispered to her, the gentle words falling on deaf ears. He drew the blankets up around her, hiding the ugly bite wound from view, before turning towards the bathroom.

The shower still hissed, and judging by the lack of steam in the room, it had started to run cold. He turned it off, then dug beneath his sink, searching for the first aid kit. Marceline had insisted that they get one within the first few months they had been together after Arin had gotten into a fight with a bear and they didn’t have the

supplies to patch him up. At the time, he had thought she was over reacting, but right then, he thanked her fervently in his head. It would take some serious stitches to close the bite wound on Marceline's shoulder.

Sighing, he paused in the doorway, hesitant on returning to her side. Helping her now was only going to make it hurt like hell when she inevitably walked away from him again. Weakness clawed at his heart and he desperately wished he could change for his mate. He would do anything if it meant Marceline could be his again.

"Why must I love you, even now? Even after so long..."

"Because that's how your heart works..."

Desmond jumped at the words, his eyes flying towards where Marceline lay. Her eyes were open and stared up at the ceiling, glazed with pain. "That's how it's always worked. Once you love someone or something, you never truly let them go."

"It would have been so much easier to let you go," he whispered, slowly returning to her side. Hesitantly, he sat down on the bed beside her, a sad light clouding his gaze.

"I wasn't good for you, Desmond. You ruled with your heart when it came to me and it hurt you, as well as your pack," she said in a raspy voice.

Had Desmond not had the hearing of a wolf, he would have missed what she said. Honestly, he almost wished that he had. What Marceline said was true, but that didn't mean he wanted to confront that fact.

"I would have figured it out. We would have figured it out, but you didn't give us the chance."

"No. I suppose I didn't. It's too late now, though. You wouldn't want me back after..." she trailed off and closed her eyes. Desmond almost thought she'd fallen asleep. Until he witnessed a cool, shuddering hand curl against his own.

"I will always want you, Marceline. No matter what you did or do, will ever change the fact that I love you, so much," he whispered, gently squeezing her hand before bringing it up to his lips to kiss across her knuckles.

She nodded slowly, wincing as the movement pulled at her ravaged shoulder. Tears had leaked past her closed eyes as he spoke, but a small smile had graced her lips.

"I love you, too. I just hope you'll forgive me."

“Forgive you for what?” he asked. When she didn’t provide him with an answer, he sighed. If she wasn’t ready to talk about what was on her mind, he wouldn’t push her. Marceline was always like this. She’d be cryptic with what was bothering her until she’d worked through it with herself enough to tell him.

Sighing, he set the medicine kit beside him and set to work flushing out the deeper puncture wounds. Each time the liquid bit into the wound, Marceline’s hand would clench around his and she’d hiss out a breath through her nose.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. We’ve got to get this cleaned. Just a little more,” he soothed. A gentle look had softened his usually angular, stone-like face as he worked.

“It just burns. I’m fine,” she assured, though as her teeth clenched when he poured another round of peroxide over her shoulder, a whimper contradicted her words. She always put on a strong face when she was upset or in pain, and Desmond respected her for it, even if he could see right through her guise.

Finally, he set the peroxide down and her hand relaxed again.

“Thank you, Desmond,” Marceline said suddenly. He could feel her eyes staring at him as he sorted through the kit, finding both needle and thread to stitch up the worst of the wound. The words were a surprise and something he hadn’t expected. Marceline was too proud for her own good, and to take help from anyone was a challenge for her, let alone him.

“You’re welcome.”

After that, they were silent as Desmond worked to stitch up the wound on Marceline’s shoulder. She looked exhausted and rightly so.

“Why don’t you go shower? The stitches will hold well enough. I...” he trailed off as a faint blush curled across his cheeks. “I’m sure I can find some of your old clothes you left for you to wear.”

His words were rewarded with a soft laugh as Marceline slowly sat up and got to her feet. “I’d rather wear something of yours to sleep in. It’ll be easier to get into a baggy t-shirt with this shoulder than in whatever I left here.”

Desmond’s heart skipped a beat at this and he smiled, his eyes soft and gentle as he looked at her.

“I’ll find something. You go ahead and get in the shower. I’ll leave the clothes on the sink counter.”

“Are the towels still under the sink?” she asked as she brushed past him. Her scent, finally clean of blood, enveloped Desmond in a cloud of euphoria. From the day she left, he’d dreamed of having her back in their house. Now that she was here, he could almost pretend that nothing had changed.

“Yeah. They’re still under there,” he called after her, just in time to hear the door shut.

For a moment, he just stood in the middle of the room, between the bed and the bathroom door, taking in everything that had happened. In less than twenty-four hours, he’d gone from intentionally avoiding everything that had to do with Marceline, to having her in his house after being attacked by another werewolf. It was exhausting to think about.

His phone started ringing then, still on the nightstand beside the bed where he’d left it earlier. Slowly, he crossed the room and answered it without looking at the number.

“Desmond,” he answered.

“You limp fucked mother fucker!” a furious voice shouted from the other end, so loud he had to pull the phone away from his ear.

“You give her back to me. That bitch owes me her protection fee. We already destroyed her pathetic strip club for not making her payment. Don’t think we won’t start targeting other things.”

“Ramson?” Desmond said sharply. As soon as it registered who he was talking to, his blood began to boil and a snarl rose in his throat.

“You have no rights to her, Ramson! I’ll pay you what she owes you, but then you leave her the fuck alone!”

His words were met with dark peals of laughter that left the hairs on the back of his neck rising.

“Didn’t the little bitch tell you?” Ramson sneered on the other end. “She’s a whore, Desmond! Your pretty little ex gets fucked by me and I tell my boys not to mess with her.”

“Liar!” Desmond shouted, to which Ramson only laughed harder. That’s what Marceline was talking about when she was hoping she’d forgive him. Fury reared its head and bubbled in his chest until he lashed out at the wall with all the pent up aggression he could muster. The drywall gave way and his knuckles split open from the force of the blow.

“I’ll kill you, Ramson. I’ll kill you for doing this to her!” With that, he hung up the phone and threw it across the room so hard that it broke to pieces against the wall.

There had never been a time in his life that he’d been angrier than he was in that moment. All he wanted to do was track down Ramson and rip him to shreds. It was only the sound of the bathroom door opening that kept him from doing just that.

“Desmond? What’s going on?” Marceline asked, her sodden hair dripping to the carpet below. A towel was wrapped around her waist, but from the sound of the shower still running, she must not have been done.

For a split second, all of his rage turned on her and his eyes turned to the silver of his wolf, aggression rolling off of him in waves. And then his eyes locked on the bite wound. She was a victim in this. Nothing more than a toy for Ramson to play with in exchange for the semblance of freedom that Marceline had always craved.

Desmond deflated like a balloon and rushed towards her then, wrapping her in his arms despite the water on her skin.

“I’m sorry,” was all he whispered to her, his face pressed against her wet, curly hair.

“For someone so tough and mighty, you’ve sure got a serious amount of emotional instability,” Marceline whispered. Slowly, she ran her fingers through his short blonde hair and she pressed her face against his chest with a sigh. “I always liked the softer side of you.”

“I think you’re the only person who’s ever said I have a soft side,” he mumbled, mind too busy cursing Ramson to tease and joke with her.

“Probably because I’m the only one who can get away with it,” she teased. “I don’t suppose if someone like Ramson said that, they’d walk away from the conversation without a fight.”

At the mere mention of the rival alpha’s name Desmond’s shoulders tensed and he had to force himself to remain in Marceline’s embrace.

“Ramson will be lucky if he so much as survives our next conversation,” he growled, clenching his teeth together. To his surprise, Marceline suddenly pushed herself away from him and gripped either side of his face with her hands. Her eyes met his, searchingly and then they slowly widened as she realized that he knew.

“Desmond. Just let this go, please... You said you’d forgive anything I did,” she begged, fear coloring her voice. She finally allowed herself to examine the room, eyes moving over first the hole in the wall and then the broken cell phone, before

she looked back at Desmond with accusing, tearful eyes. “I knew you wouldn’t love me after this. This is why I never came back to you after the first time that—“

“It’s not you I’m angry with!” Desmond snapped, struggling visibly to control himself. “You were trying to survive! You were too proud to admit you needed to just come back home! Sure, that was a mistake, but he was the one who took advantage of that prideful weakness!”

As he ranted, he paced back and forth across the room, his entire body trembling with the strength of his rage. He would never dream of telling a rogue wolf that they had to let him sleep with them in exchange for not killing them. Especially not when he knew that rogue posed no threat to himself or his pack!

“Desmond, please... Just, leave it alone. There is nothing you can do about it!” Marceline cried out. “It... He... What’s done is done! I did what I had to, to keep his wolves from killing me, or worse! When... When he told me I would need to pay him, I thought he meant money. But then he showed up and...”

With the tortured sigh of someone who knew they could run no more, Marceline left him to find her phone and, after some fumbling around, gave it to him.

Confused, Desmond took it and looked at the screen. It took him a moment to put two and two together, but when he did...

“Marceline... who is this?” he asked, his voice strained with emotion. He could not take his eyes off the image on the screen – a photo of Marceline with a little girl in her arms, a girl with Marceline’s curly hair... but his blue eyes.

“Her name is Therese,” Marceline finally replied, a weak sound so unlike her that it tore into his heart even more than the realization of what she was about to tell him did. “I didn’t know I was pregnant when I left,” she told him, “It was too early to tell. But when I realized I was about to have your baby... I didn’t think straight, Desmond. I was still too angry to come back, but I wanted a good life for us and didn’t have many options on how to go about it. I knew I had to keep her away from all this ugliness, though, so I went to my Auntie May’s, over in the north county. I hadn’t seen her in years, but nobody in the pack knew about her, not even you, and I needed to be somewhere safe until I had Therese. She took us in, and when then time came, she agreed to keep Therese for me so I could work without worrying until I had enough to build us a home of our own.”

Tears had begun streaming down her cheeks and soft, hiccupping sobs tore past her throat as she sunk to the floor. “The first time Ramson came demanding payment... I said no, but he then mentioned Therese, saying how it’d be a shame if she and Auntie May had to suffer for my stubbornness, and I just... I couldn’t let him hurt them, Desmond. I’d do what I did and ten times more to keep them safe.”

The more she spoke, the more choked her words became. “I didn’t know how he found out about Therese, but he did... he knew about it when I first came to him, and he planned the whole thing from the start. And after that first time... all I wanted to do was come back home... All I wanted to do was forget I had sold myself to him... but I couldn’t face you, Desmond. I just couldn’t. I was terrified of your disappointment, of you taking Therese from me, and I just... couldn’t.”

Desmond just stared at the wall with a hard glare and listened as she broke down, his anger mounting until she mentioned wanting to come back home. As soon as she said she couldn’t face him, his heart shattered in his chest and he slowly moved towards her.

“Marceline,” he sighed, kneeling beside her and pulling her into his arms. “Sweetheart, I wouldn’t have turned you away – and I sure as hell wouldn’t take away your baby... our baby. This isn’t your fault,” he whispered to her, rocking her slowly back and forth as she cried against him.

Heavens, this was a whole lot to wrap his head around at once. He wanted to cry, and rage, and laugh, all at the same time, but he knew he had to set processing all he just found out for another time. Marceline needed him to be strong now. To keep her safe and make things right.

“Listen to me, sweetheart. I’ll fix this. Ramson will pay for what he’s done to you... And then you and I? We’ll fix things between us like we should have years ago.”

She nodded slowly against his chest and sniffled softly, to which he sighed and kissed her forehead.

“Ok,” she whispered.

Desmond smiled. “Good. Now, finish your shower, and I’ll bring you clothes this time. I promise.”

Desmond had time to bring Marceline clothes, heat up a can of soup in the microwave and clean up the first aid kit before she turned off the shower and moved back into the bedroom. Both of them had calmed considerably. Tomorrow, he’d worry about what he was going to do about Ramson. And after he’d dealt with that, he’d travel up North to meet his daughter. But tonight, he told himself, was all about Marceline.

“Are you hungry?” he asked her, unsurprised when she shook her head.

“No, just tired,” she mumbled. One of his t-shirts covered her body down to her thighs and the towel she’d used to dry off with was tangled in a mass on top of her

head. "I think I might just try to sleep. Are there still spare blankets in the hall closet?"

Desmond looked at her in confusion. "Spare blankets? What do you need one for?"

"To sleep on the couch? I didn't figure you'd want me in here since..."

"No. You're sleeping in here," he said firmly, shocked she'd even ask such a question. He'd longed to sleep next to her again for years, and wasn't about to pass up the opportunity to share a bed with her again. If he was honest with himself, he hadn't slept quite right since she'd left him.

"Are you sure?" she asked. She was met with a withering look as she slowly pulled the towel from her hair and laid down against the pillows. Already, her eyes began to droop.

"You've had a rough day, sweetheart. You need proper rest and you won't get that out on the couch," he said, reaching over to the lamp beside the bed and flicking it off. Slowly, he laid beside her and cradled her to his chest with a soft hum, pleased to find she made no attempts to move away or protest.

"Besides," he whispered, hugging her closer until his lips rested just above her ear. "I missed you too much to sleep away from you tonight."

Marceline giggled softly and pressed her face against his neck, a soft hum falling from her lips.

"I love you, Desmond."

"I love you, too."

He waited until he was certain she was asleep against him, before kissing her on the forehead. It wasn't like him, being so outwardly emotional, but then, the day had been tense and he owed it to himself to love Marceline. After all, there was no promise that Marceline would keep wanting to fix things between them in the morning.

Chapter Six

Desmond didn't know when he had finally drifted off to sleep, but it seemed only seconds had gone by before he jerked awake. At first, he wasn't sure why. The sky was still dark outside and the clock beside the bed showed it was just past three. Marceline laid curled up beside him, her curly hair splayed out like a mane around her head.

Slowly, he relaxed beside her again and closed his eyes again, only to tense as a strange smell hit his nose. He stilled completely, not even daring to breathe as he strained to listen around him. Something was wrong.

Marceline's deep breathing was distracting beside him and deadened the other soft sounds of the night, yet still he strained until—

"Say goodnight, Desmond." The soft *shnk* of a knife being pulled from its sheath sent adrenaline flooding his system, fueled all the more by the softly whispered statement. His eyes flew open only to stare straight up into Ramson's cruel green irises.

He moved—too late—to attack the rival alpha that stood over him, only to feel the cold bite of steel sink into the flesh of his chest.

"M-Marceline!" he choked out, eyes lightening silver with the danger of Ramson presence.

"Shut up. She's mine, Desmond. There is nothing you can do to stop that," Ramson snarled, turning the knife handle as he bore deeper into the wound he'd created.

Blood poured from Desmond's chest and yet his skin still shivered. The clicks and pops of bones reshaping could be heard for a mere handful of seconds until a wolf exploded from Desmond's body.

With a thunderous snarl, he charged at Ramson, lunging at his legs, his sides, his hands, anything he could get his jaws around. At one point, he sank his teeth deep into the rival alpha's calf, but even as a human, the man possessed a strength and agility that he should have.

With a few sharp shakes, Desmond lost his hold and Ramson bowled him over, a second knife gripped in his hand.

"Give it up, Desmond," he sneered, lunging forward with blinding speed that left Desmond with a fresh slash across his snout. He snarled deafeningly but made no

move to attack further as his eyes started blurring with blood loss. “Marceline was never yours! She never wanted you! You’re stifling! Uncaring! She h—“

Three loud cracks of a gun firing cut off his word, and with wide eyes, Ramson looked down at his chest. Blood welled up from three, near perfect, circular wounds until, much like the wound Desmond had suffered, it coated his entire front and dripped to the floor.

“Don’t speak like you do any better, Ramson.” Marceline murmured, the gun she had threatened Desmond with the morning before was once again gripped firmly between her hands.

The rival alpha’s eyes flew wide as he stumbled about, turning to face the woman with pure hatred in his gaze until, with a gasp, they rolled back in his skull and he fell face first into the growing puddle of his own blood.

Marceline shivered as she dropped the gun, tears of fear and anger apparent in her dark brown eyes as she quickly ran to Desmond’s side and with trembling hands, inspected the stab wound on his chest.

“T-Turn back, baby... Please. W-We,” she sniffled, a look of panic on her face. “We need to get you patched up.”

Desmond whined, his eyes hazy and distant. For a moment, he didn’t think he had the energy to change back, but one look at the sheer desperation on his mate’s face and he slowly, painfully shifted back into his human form.

The wound on his chest was deep. Far deeper than anything he’d ever received before and his entire body felt cold. In the growing darkness, though, he was aware of Marceline’s touch as she held him.

“Gauze...” he whispered, forcing his eyes to focus on her perfect face. “Pack the wound with gauze.”

“I can’t leave you!” Marceline cried, clutching desperately at his hand as tears rolled down her cherub cheeks.

“Sweetheart, I’ll be ok,” he whispered, a faint smile on his lips. “Pack the wound. Stop the bleeding.”

He watched as she nodded and smiled. With a shaking hand, he reached up and brushed away a tear on her cheek. She laughed sadly and pressed into his touch, shaking herself, she got to her feet and walked away.

In the moments she was gone, Desmond had to seriously struggle with himself not to fall asleep.

“It’s just a little blood loss,” he scolded himself, gritting his teeth. “What’s the big deal?” But, he’d be a liar if he said he wasn’t relieved when his mate returned and began stuffing the stab wound with gauze, as instructed.

“Son of a...” he swore, alertness gripping him as pain at her prodding rocked through him. A cold sweat had broken out on his skin by the time she was through. Things must not have looked so bad, though, because Marceline smiled and laid down beside him on the blood soaked floor, her hand resting against his bandaged chest gently.

“I thought you were the one who was going to take care of me,” she teased softly. Her lips pressed lovingly against his side before he could answer, and he sighed, knowing she meant the words to help him feel better.

Ramson was dead. His pack would scramble to find a new alpha that, hopefully, wasn’t as corrupt by lust as Ramson had. There was nothing left to worry about, except—

“Marceline?” Desmond whispered softly, his voice hesitant as he forced himself upwards just enough to look at her properly.

“Desmond what—“

“I want to meet Therese,” he told her, “Soon.”

Marceline stared at him with a stunned expression on her face. Her dark eyes were puzzled, scared and excited all in the same instant. For a moment, he worried that her concern about him taking their daughter away from her still haunted her, but then her face softened, and a rock fell off Desmond’s chest. “I’ll call Auntie May tomorrow, see if she can bring Therese,” she told him gently.

She began to settle at his side again when he called for her again.

“Marceline?”

“Yes, Desmond?” she asked, no doubt expecting another glimpse into the soft heart of him, the one that he saved just for her... and, now, their child.

“Will you marry me?”

Whatever she was expecting to hear, the look on her face told him that was not it. Her mouth gapped open, and she clearly didn’t know what to say. As she closed it slowly, still silent, he began to fear she would reject him, but then she curled ever closer and rested her head just below the wound she’d taken care to bandage.

“Of course...” she whispered, tears in her eyes once again and a smile on her lips.
“Of course I’ll marry you, Desmond.”

He smiled and laid his head back down with a sigh, eyes slipping closed. “Good,” he whispered, finally allowing himself to wrap an arm around her and pull her closer.

“I’m never letting you get away from me again.”

“Do you promise?” she asked, kissing over his heart.

“I promise.”

THE END