

Scotland

Elowen POV

The landing gear thunked down with a jolt that made everyone groan, and I swore Daxon muttered something about kissing the ground the second we got off.

We touched down on a private airstrip nestled in the Scottish Highlands, about ten miles outside Inverness, surrounded by rolling hills, damp fog, and a thick scent of wet earth and pine.

The plane taxied to a stop, and the strike team immediately snapped to attention like we were about to walk into a war zone instead of a quaint ass bed and breakfast.

"Welcome to Scotland," Ash muttered dryly as he unbuckled, tugging on his jacket. "Where the magic is older than your grandmother's grudges and everything smells like moss and ghosts."

He wasn't wrong. The moment I stepped off the plane, the air hit different. It was cool and damp, tinged with wild herbs and ancient secrets. Lyssira practically purred in my head. "This place has teeth," she whispered. "I like it." I took a deep breath and nodded my agreement.

Two sleek, black SUVs were waiting at the bottom of the stairs, parked like we were the goddamn royal family. The drivers wore dark suits, and the strike team formed a silent perimeter around us so tight, I couldn't have

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scratched my ass without one of them adjusting their earpiece.

Taya stumbled beside me, yawning. "I've never been so tired and turned on at the same time."

Rylen gave her a smug grin, his hand grazing the small of her back as they walked. Jace lagged behind, clutching a pillow like it was a lifeline. Meanwhile, Daxon and Ash flanked me like twin towers of testosterone.

"Do we really need this much security?" I asked as the guards opened the SUV doors like clockwork.

Ash slid in first. "We're high value targets now, darling."

"Pretty sure I was a high value target the second the Moon Goddess got involved," I grumbled, climbing in after him.

The drive into Inverness was a fog drenched dream. Narrow roads wound through ancient woodland that looked straight out of a fairytale, with the horror filter turned on. Gnarled trees clawed at the sky, and thick mist curled around the branches like ghost fingers. If witches were real, and they fucking were, I was absolutely sure they lived out here summoning the dead and baking cursed scones.

The bed and breakfast appeared suddenly at the end of a long gravel path. Stone walls. Ivy covered windows. Lanterns that flickered with actual flames. A carved wooden sign swung above the door:

The Thistle & Thorn – Est. 1742

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Adorable. Creepy. Totally haunted. I was in love. The owner, a plump older woman named Isobel with wild gray curls and eyes like polished onyx, greeted us like she'd been expecting us. "Rooms are ready," she said with a thick Highland lilt. "You'll find them cozy and warm, dears. Breakfast at eight. Tea whenever ye like. And if ye see the cat in the hallway, don't look it in the eye."

"What happens if we do?" Jace asked, already half asleep.

"Best not tae find out."

Awesome. We dragged our bags upstairs and each headed to our own rooms while the guards did a sweep of the property so thorough I thought they might start exorcising the furniture. My room had a canopy bed, a window overlooking the moors, and wallpaper older than America.

I collapsed backward onto the mattress with a sigh so deep it might've come from my soul. Tomorrow, we'd head into the Dunbrae Woodlands to find Morrigan Lairch at The Wyrd Hollow Cottage. But tonight?

Tonight was warm beds, weird cats, and praying I didn't accidentally open a fae portal in the bathroom.

Next Morning...

I don't remember inviting them. Hell, I don't remember hearing the door open. But when I woke up, I was smothered in muscles, legs, and heat,

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Daxon's arm thrown across my stomach, Ashrian's cold feet tucked against my calves, and someone's pillow jammed under my ass.

There was maybe two inches of mattress left for me.

"This is my bed," I growled, my voice hoarse with sleep. Ash let out a noise that might've been a vampire snore and burrowed deeper into the blankets like a cat. "Then be grateful we graced it with our presence."

Daxon snorted, his voice rumbling low and smug. "You love it. Don't lie."

I rolled my eyes so hard it might've counted as a workout. "I'm living in a damn cuddle sandwich."

And despite the sarcasm? Yeah... I loved it.

It took a good fifteen minutes of groaning, shoving, and Daxon falling off the bed once (which was funny as hell) before we finally got up, got dressed, and stumbled downstairs to the breakfast solar.

The smell hit first, thick bacon, fresh bread, and something cinnamon-y that made my stomach growl like a demon. We found Taya already at the table with Jace and Rylen. She looked like she'd just walked off a runway with an "I got laid and I liked it" smirk that matched mine perfectly. We locked eyes and burst out laughing.

"I see you had a fun night," I teased, nudging her with my hip as I sat down.

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Rylen looked smug. Jace looked like he hadn't slept at all. "I slept," Jace grumbled, stabbing a sausage. "I just didn't rest. There's a difference."

The strike team sat off to the side like stone statues with ear pieces and death glares. Super subtle.

"Anyone else feel like we're about to get Secret Service escorted into a horror movie?" I muttered to Ash. He raised a brow. "Please. I'd be the horror."

Breakfast was incredible...fluffy eggs, crispy bacon, fried tomatoes, toast slathered in golden butter, and enough tea to fuel a coven. We all dug in, trading jokes and commentary about everything from magical theory to who snored the loudest (spoiler: it was Dax).

But under it all, a quiet buzz of something wrong started to scratch at the back of my brain.

"You feel that, right?" Lyssira whispered.

I stilled, mid bite. "Yeah... something's off."

"The trees are listening. And the land here...it knows who you are."

"Cool. Totally comforting." I didn't say anything to the others yet, didn't want to sound paranoid, but the hairs on my arms were standing up like lightning was coming. Once we were fed and caffeinated, the strike team stood up in sync, and that was our cue.

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Two sleek black SUVs waited outside. We loaded in, the air misty and damp as we pulled away from the Thistle & Thorn. The trees loomed closer with every mile.

Our destination?

The Wyrd Hollow Cottage

Dunbrae Woodlands, Inverness

IV3 8RP

The home of Morrigan Lairch. The witch who could break my spell.

Or maybe... wake something far worse.



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