

Traded To The Lycan King by MG Wattsons

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Chapter 50

“Hayes!” I call out, running toward him. “Where is he?”

He shifts back into his human form, looking past me to Penny as he waves to her to come to him.

“I have to get back to him. Where is Percy? I need both he and Penny.” He rushes out. There is a frantic nature to the searches for the two of them, as he tries to be respectful of me while trying to get around me.

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Percy isn’t well enough to go anywhere.” I tell him, not really wanting to get into the details right now.

“F u c k.” He growls both hands in his head as panic overwhelms him.

“I will go in his place,” I offer and he shakes his head like it’s the craziest thing he has ever heard in his life.

“No. You have to go back and-”

“And what? Cower and wait in the room and hope nothing terrible happens?

No!” I growl, cutting him off. “I will absolutely NOT be doing that. There is no stopping me. You are taking my protection, besides I will only follow you if you try to leave

me.

Hayes frowns and drags a hand down his face before he nods.

“I don’t have time to argue,” he grits out as Penny rushes toward him. “But I am begging you to stay, Luna. Please.” he says, looking at me.

“Not a chance in hell.” I tell him.

I know I am being difficult, but damn it, if the jerk controlling all these wolves wants me, they can have me as long as they don’t hurt Merikh. Whoever this is, whatever they want to do with me, I know Merikh can figure out a way to fix it, but only if he is alive and safe.

“Colette...” Caspian’s voice is wary as he looks at me and I push past Hayes, running in the direction he came from.

“This way, right?” I ask, breaking into a run and I hear them arguing behind me, then I hear them running. Penny and Hayes break into their Lycan form. I shift into my wolf and my father....well hopeful he left his sea legs in the mansion because he is going to have to keep up.

The entire time I run, my heart is in my throat, every stride feels too short and every second too long. What happened? What can I expect to walk into? I have nothing and know nothing about what I am walking into. There wasn’t any time to waste. Merikh needs help now, not after a quick debrief or an argument where I would just end up coming, anyway.

I glance over my shoulder, shocked that my dad, though always behind us, is maintaining a decent pace and keeping us in view. I don't know how long we run. It feels like hours until my wolf suddenly whimpers and I trip, tumbling over as I turn into my human form. I look to the side, seeing Penny, who looks at herself in shock and meets my eyes.

"My lycan is gone, she...retreated." she says, looking at Hayes in shock.

"Then we are close." He mutters, going on alert. He scans the woods, both he and Penny slightly crouched, ready for any attack.

Caspian finally catches up to us, giving me a confused look as he throws clothing at me and Penny. And a pair of shorts at Hayes. Not that I care about my naked state right now. I have more pressing issues. Like a Lycan King who is missing and in grave danger. But I slip into my shirt and shorts quickly.

"What are we looking for?" Penny whispers and Hayes takes a step forward.

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We aren't necessarily looking, we are listening, so shut up," he snaps and I strain my ears, trying to hear what I can even without my werewolf powers.

My body hums, my craving for water and the calm of it growing. It's like I can feel it beneath me, the source of life from the water and all it brings. I can hear it as it trickles through the roots of the trees and feeds the leaves. The water isn't just around me, it's inside of me, making me feel like weightless and nothing

I can touch me. It's overwhelming.

"Caspian..." I whisper, feeling like it's too much.

My body feels like it's throbbing. Like waves ebbing at the sand beach shore.

He is next to me in a second and I look up at him, hoping for answers. He frowns as he takes my hand, keeping me steady.

"Without your wolf you are simply a siren princess." He whispers. "It can be a lot to be able to feel the water everywhere it is. You will grow accustomed to it in a moment."

"Are you sure?" I ask him, fear in my voice.

I am here to find Merikh, and instead of focusing on that all I can do is think about f u c k

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g water. Where it's at, where it's going. Then I feel the water quiver. Like a ripple in a calm lake. I freeze, my head snapping to my right along with Caspian's.

"That way," He tells Hayes and Penny, who turn and look at him funny.

"They were heading this way when I left him." Hayes says, looking skeptical.

"He is right. I can feel it too. Something big is that way."

"Then that is where Merikh is." Hayes straightens his shoulders and looks at

Penny, then the of us, before he breaks into a run.

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We follow suit, the quivering growing stronger, beating in time with my frantic heartbeat. My stomach falls and I come to an abrupt halt when I see the massive thing throw an enormous balled up fist, striking Merikh across the face. He flies into a tree, his body thudding as he tumbles to the base, and then he rolls out of the way of the incoming foot from another of the beasts. Hayes lets out a war cry as he launches himself onto the back of one, trying to stomp on his brother, and Penny distracts the other. Merikh stands, hobbling as he winces, but he sizes up the beasts ready to jump in where he is needed. "What the hell are those?" I ask Caspian, who gapes at what he is witnessing. "I...don't know." He admits. "They kind of look like trolls..." "Trolls?" I hiss at him and he frowns. "Those are real too?" "No." He says like he is in deep thought. "No, I've never known those to be a real species and yet...here they are."

I squeal as Hayes flies in our direction, landing at my feet with a pained groan. He looks up at me, but quickly stands rushing back in as my eyes find Merikh, frozen in place, as he blinks at me in utter shock.

He looks awful. Blood is dripping from his hairline and just to the far side of his eye, dripping down to his shoulder. He is riddled with deep bruises, already taking form over his physique.

I take a step toward him. My body feels light, like I'm in a dream that none of this is real. How can it be? These beasts aren't supposed to exist and Merikh is a Lycan with no lycan to fight with or heal him.

"Stay there," he growls at me, anger taking over his face as he stalks toward me.

Then, out of nowhere, a third troll like thing grabs him by his ankle and Merikh is lifted and hammered into the ground like a rag doll. I gasp when he crunches into the leaf covered dirt, tears in my eyes, my body jolting as though the hit is a direct

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strike to my very core.

The beast lifts him again and my body grows warm, a flame of anger raging inside me as I stare at Merikh who, though conscious and trying to free himself, hangs.

His left forearm is bent awkwardly and I can see how his leg seems to look segmented, like the only thing holding it together is the muscles and flesh that could tear at any moment.

"Drop him." I growl, my chest aching in fear as I look at Merikh.

He gives me a determined look, like he is trying to tell me he's got this, but I am sick of sitting around and waiting to be rescued. I am tired of constantly hiding who I am, who I have always been. I'm over being cut off from the part of me I was always meant to know.

The troll blinks at me, red eyes zeroing on my location and I suck in a deep breath, before dropping to my knee and resting my hands on the grass. The water heeds me. It wants to do my bidding as I try to summon it. I don't know what I can do, or if I can manage to pull off what I want to, but if in my desperation I fail, then I at least gave Merikh a distraction.

"Now!" I hiss, looking up at the troll, who seems to focus on me. The other two stop fighting, turning to look at me like a statue as Penny and Hayes rush to Merikh and try to pry him free.

"I knew you would come for him," the same voice as early emanates from all three creatures, and I find that my anger only grows. I am sick of being played, of people manipulating me and thinking I am too meek to fight back. This person thinks they know what I am? They don't have a f u k i n clue.

"F u c k you!" I shout as a spout of water shoots from under one of the trolls. It flies into the air, not a sound coming from it as it falls back to the ground, crashing through branches and colliding with the hard earth. The water continues to spray like a geyser, wetting everything around us.

"Oh, the Princess has some skills. How f u -" They say as a spout strikes one in the face and the other grows a bubble around its head, suffocating it and forcing it to release Merikh who scrambles away. Hayes and Penny help him up, bringing him to us.

Water rains down, my body relishing the feel, absorbing as much as I can until I slowly feel the power of it leaching from me. The connection with the water around me slowly dissipates and after a minute, I look up, watching as the trolls morph into a human form, laying on the ground.

A hand grabs mine, and I am whipped around to look up at Merikh. My hand flies up, pushing his hair away as I witness his cut stitching itself up, and I realize the magic is gone. Whatever spell was used here has melted away with the water. His healing abilities are back.

"I gave you one order." He growls, his voice filled with anger, and all I can do is smile. He is safe, hurt and tricked, but dam n it, he is safe. "You promised me."

"I kept my promise." I remind him, stepping into his body, his arms wrapping around me no matter how mad he is. "See? I stayed with Caspian. Or rather, he stayed with me." CWed, 15 May Go

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"When did you become a ?" Merikh asks with a frown, but I see the glimmer in

his eye. amused even if he is still upset with me for coming when he demanded I not.

The one that
says
he is

“I’ve been taking lessons from Penny and Percy.” I say with a smirk, the mention of my sick g a m m a bringing me back to the reality of our situation as abruptly as someone flicking on the light in the dark.

Merikh is injured and not just a little bit. He hasn’t even tried to move his arm that looks to be broken and he isn’t putting any weight on his other leg. Not to mention all the blood and bruises over his exposed chest and abdomen. My hands shake and my eyes water as I reach out to touch him, so afraid of causing him more pain.

“Where is Percy anyway?” He asks like he is in no pain, but when I press my icy fingers to his heated flesh, he hisses.

I flinch, pulling my hands back in shock, and he grabs my hand with his good arm and drags me closer. My eyes meet his and my mouth goes dry, the world falling away around us as he places my fingers over his heart and then removes his hand to wrap his arm around me as he pulls me close.

“Your touch is the only thing that doesn’t hurt me,” he whispers, leaning down and rubbing his stubbled cheek against my smooth skin. My eyes fall closed, craving his touch, my skin needing the contact just as much as his.

“Merikh...” Hayes says behind us, the uncertainty and quiver in his voice one that puts me on alert and I pull back, looking at him. His eyes are focused on his older brother, a plea within them as he seems to dance between his two feet. He reminds me of an anxious child waiting for permission to use the bathroom at school.

“Go,” Merikh says with a nod. Hayes spins on cue, sprinting through the trees like he was just given an alphas order he can’t resist. “Where is Percy?” He then asks again.

Penny clears her throat and straightens her shoulders.

“He is locked in the bathroom.” She says. He looks down at me, confused, and then back at her.

“Which bathroom?” he asks.

“Ours,” I say. He seems to think for a moment before he nods and sighs heavily,

“Good. At least we know where he is. We need to get back to the mansion.” He says, groaning as he limps past me, his hand latching onto mine, tugging me along beside him.

“Should you be moving?” I ask him and he chuckles. “Maybe you should lie down for a bit?”

"In war, staying still will kill you. Moving is the only option."

"But you are injured." I say, shocked.

"Correct, injured, but not dead or dying. Which means we need to move." He says, taking another step forward.

Caspian moves to his other side, sliding Merikh's arm over his shoulder as he provides stability. Merikh groans as they take a step forward, and then another me at his other side, holding his hand.

"My arm and leg will be mostly healed by the time we make it back," he assures me.

"Can we discuss what the hell happened now?" Caspian asks, anger and concern in his voice.

They were expecting us. We were ambushed." Merikh explains as he hobbles along with my father. Penny falls in behind us, and I look over my shoulder at her, only for her to give me an encouraging smile.

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"Who ambushed you?" Caspian asks, and Merikh scoffs.

"The f u c k i n g red-eyed d c k h e d , only this time they brought a whole other species."

"You were only supposed to be looking around," my dad says with a frown.

"Not fighting."

Merikh sighs heavily and shakes his head.

"We made it to this area and realized our lycans were being repressed somehow. That is when we turned back and ran into a group of red-eyed wolves. They were easy enough to defeat and then the f u c k i n trolls came in and we had to run. They drove us to where we would be at our weakest."

"That is why you sent Hayes for reinforcements." I say on a breath and he nods.

"Yeah, though he was supposed to bring Percy and not you," he grumbles, frustrated. "He will have to answer for that once we get back."

He grumbles along with Caspian for a moment about Hayes and how he is too distracted and obviously in a panic and though I am interested in why he thinks that. I can't let Hayes get in trouble for my decision. He isn't my keeper, nor is he able to control me.

"I refused to stay back." I tell him truthfully. "Hayes told me to stay, and I told him no," I say with a shrug, not caring if Merikh gets mad about it. He left me and swore he would come back when everything I witnessed pointed to him, likely not coming back at all.

Merikh frowns as he hobbles along with my father.

"Yeah, too bad for him. That doesn't negate the fact that he put his Luna in harm's way." He says.

"He didn't. I wasn't safe there," I scoff. "You left me and then I felt your

distress. When we tried to leave, Percy told me I was no longer safe."

"At least he is smart," Merikh scoffs.

I stop walking, indignant that he is being such a hard a s s right now about me coming to help. I may be weaker and still training to fight, but d a m n it, I actually did something. When all he could do was be a rag doll, I was able to save him. Me. Not Hayes or Penny or even Caspian. It was me.

"You are lucky I can look past my anger and still come to save your stubborn a s s." I growl.

Merikh sighs and stops, leaning heavily on Caspian as he looks at me with annoyance.

"No, you are lucky they didn't capture you. You walked right out into the enemy's territory and didn't think twice." He shouts.

"Your life was on the line." I growl. "I will never think twice when it comes to ensuring you come back alive. Plus, the enemy was hanging out in my room all along. You ran off and left me with them." I hiss, stepping into his space, glaring up at him, enjoying the glimmer of confusion I see in his eyes.

"What?" He says, confused, looking between me and Penny. "What do you mean, it was hanging out in your room?"

"Percy is compromised." Penny whispers Merikh's eyes snap to her, wide and full of alarm.

"What the f u c k do you mean?" he demands and Penny looks at me, begging me to explain.

"They got to Percy."

"Got to him how?" he grits out and I can see the way his chest heaves as he waits for more details.

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"He is red-eyed." I tell him, and he seems to stumble a little into Caspian.

"F u c k,"

"Yeah, that's how we felt," I mutter.

"We need to get back." He says suddenly, a look of determination set on his brows. He hobbles, Caspian moving with him as he looks over his shoulder at Penny and me. "Now."

We walk in silence, the speed steady, though slow, and I can sense his growing irritation with every passing minute. Then he stops abruptly with an annoyed growl and looks at me.

"This is just wasting time. Switch spots with Caspian." He demands of me, racing out and pulling me to him.

"Why?" I ask.

"Penny and Caspian, you need to get back as fast as you can. If Percy is compromised, they can make him do anything they want, including attacking

other council members to prove their point that we are dangerous and need to be eliminated.”

“Merikh...” I call to him, but he ignores me as I try to speak.

He talks over me, discussing things with Penny as my dad steps away and urges me next to Merikh. Before I can even try to get a word in, the two are sprinting off, leaving me with Merikh. I look up at him, frustrated that he didn't give me the chance to explain anything to him before he took charge and just pushed me to the wayside.

“Percy is taken care of.” I grit out, finally getting his attention. He furrows his brows, confused.

“Locking him in a bathroom is hardly taken care of. You don't think he knows how to break down a door or open a d a m n window?” He scoffs.

“Merikh...” I say slowly, stepping away from him so he can see just how angry I am with him. “Do you think I am dumb?”

He groans as he exhales deeply and shakes his head.

“Of course not,” he says.

“Oh? Then why do you assume we just closed the door and left him?” I arch a brow. “You didn't think to ask what transpired. You just panicked and sent them away without so much as thinking that maybe I had it covered.”

“Covered how?” He asks.

“I commanded him, as his Luna. They wanted to speak with me through him, so I let them say their piece and I demanded he kick them out of his head.” I tell him, my anger morphing to pride as I stand up for myself and show Merikh I'm not the empty-headed woman he seems to think I am right now.

Colette,” he sighs, limping toward me as he grabs the back of my neck and presses a tender kiss to my forehead. “You are stunning, and incredibly smart. But a Luna's command is not absolute like an Alpha's. It carries weight...but there is a real possibility that Percy is not going to have the strength to follow your order.”

I blink at him.

“I have faith in my G a m m a.” I tell him, “Just like you should have more faith in your Luna.”

“I have complete faith in you.” He whispers, the truth clear in the way he looks at me, the tingle of his skin on mine and through the mind link. Then he uses his finger to lift my chin as he dips low and kisses me sweetly before pulling away.

“A kiss won't make me less angry,” I pout and he cups my face, looking into me.

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“I am not used to being afraid, Colette. And since the second you came into

my life, I have felt nothing but fear and anxiety over losing you at any moment. I know you are not dumb, and I am sorry I made you feel that way. You have to understand, to them, you are a weapon. If they have you, they have complete control over the Lycans and the Sirens.” He says with a soft frown.

“You control the Lycans and werewolves, Merikh. Not me.” I remind him, trying not to be swooned by his sweet words.

He shakes his head like I am missing something important.

“You just don’t seem to get it.” he looks away and releases a shaky breath.

“Get what?” I ask with a frown.

“If they have you, they control me. I would kill any species they asked me to if I knew it meant you were safe, and I would sleep soundly at night, knowing you were okay.” he swallows roughly.

“Colette, you are my only weakness, my heart and soul living outside of my body, and they have a target on you. It makes me f u c k i n g irrational and panicky. When I ask you to do something, it’s not because I doubt you. It’s purely selfish, so I can. keep you with me, always. I need you safe, so I can be sane.”

“Okay...” I whisper, my lips brushing over his as the air feels thin. I am high on him, on the way he makes me feel exactly what he says he feels. “I promise I will do what you say.”

“Mmm, that’s my good little luna.” He rasps before he kisses me hard and breaks away. “Now let’s get back. I would like to thank you for saving me...” He gives me a wry grin, and I bite back a small smile, nodding in agreement.

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Merikh was right. As we approach the mansion, he no longer needs me to help him walk. Our hands are threaded together by our fingers, my skin p r i c k l i n g as we walk closer to the quiet building. There is a fog that has settled around the garden and the rolling green grass. My wolf pacing within me, ready to jump out at any moment to prove her worth.

“It feels wrong...” I whisper to Merikh, who pulls me closer. I can see how tired he is, the quick healing from his lycan taking a toll on his energy. He needs to sleep, and to eat something.

“What do you mean?” he asks, worry on his brow as he glances down at me.

“You can’t feel that?” I ask him, “It feels...I don’t know.”

“Tense,” He finishes for me. “The enemy is here, in this mansion, and they know we are aware of them. And those not involved...well they are about to be, whether they like it or not.”

We walk cautiously, then I see Hayes pacing back and forth, his hands in his hair as he lifts his head and spots us. He rushes over, panic written all over

his face, and my stomach falls. Something has happened, something terrible. "Is it Percy?" I ask, sounding small, feeling small.

Here I had been so sure that my order would work long enough to keep him safe. Had I been that far off? Did he hurt himself or worse, what if he couldn't get them out of his head so he took drastic measures? What if he...my heart stutters and my mouth goes dry with the thought, tears stinging my eyes.

"He was unconscious when we all got back," Hayes tells me before turning to Merikh. "But he is okay for now."

"And your mate?" Merikh asks, my eyes going wide as I look between the two brothers, shocked.

"Mate?" I ask and Hayes nods, a grim look on his face.

"Her name is Leandra. She is a Lycan." Hayes says and Merikh processes what he says. It looks like a silent conversation passes between them before Merikh seems to nod in understanding.

"Is she a rogue?" He asks and Hayes shrugs.

"It was hard enough getting her name from her, but she doesn't smell like a rogue, so I don't think so," He admits. "She won't see me. She-uh...she says she has a chosen mate instead."

Hayes looks broken, his eyes filled with tears as he clears his throat and tries to remain in control of his emotions. His heart is being torn to shreds, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

"We will speak with her." Merikh says, reaching out and tugging his hesitant brother in for a hug. "Things will be fine, Hayes. She has been through a lot, I imagine. Let's first get her taken care of so she can feel like she has control over her own thoughts again. One thing at a time, brother."

"I spoke with the elders, watching over the pack in our absence."

"And?" Merikh looks alarmed.

"There has been no activity, no red-eyed/wolves, no attacks, nothing." Hayes says, and Merikh nods.

"That is either great news or terrible news," He mutters. I squeeze his hand.

"Anything else happening?" I ask Hayes, who gives me a curious look.

"You feel it too, then?" he asks.

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I chew the inside of my cheek, trying to put into words it is what I'm even feeling. Tense? Uneasy? Worried? It could be any number of things easily equatable to emotions running high or just finally being so exhausted from an eventful evening into the night.

"Wait, you feel off too?" Merikh asks, looking worried between us, and Hayes shakes his head.

"No, but Caspian mentioned it when he checked in on Leandra. He says it

feels like a storm is blowing in, but I don't think he meant the kind of storm that weather brings."

"Yeah, something feels off. I just can't put my finger on it," I admit, looking around.

I have no idea what I am searching for. Maybe I'm looking for answers or maybe I am hopeful I will catch someone spying on us that will give us a single clue into who is behind all of this. I shiver at the thought of being watched and Merikh frowns down at me.

"Let's get inside. I need to get cleaned up and you need sleep." He tells me. "I will watch your room tonight so you both can sleep. Penny will be on you tomorrow, so I can sleep during the day." Hayes says and Merikh shakes his head.

"You need to be with your mate," Merikh tells him, but Hayes sighs and shakes his head.

"No, she has asked for space. I need to give her that space."

Merikh gives him a soft smile before leading me to the door, Hayes along with us as we enter in silence. I can hear Florence giggling down the hall, along with a deeper voice chatting and I already know she is with her current best friend Johannes.

I slide a glance up to Merikh who is still bruised and covered in blood, wishing there was another way to our room where we wouldn't run into these two, but there isn't.

Merikh tugs me under his arm, the warmth of him and the sparks of the bond fluttering through me reminding me I am safe whenever I am with him.

Florence doesn't even take notice until Johannes snaps his head in our direction as we pass the room where they are hanging out twitch the door wide open. I meet his eyes that are wide in shock and his lips mouth the word 'blood.

He moves in a blur. One second he is sitting and the next he is in front of us, snuffing the air and tilting his head as he looks over Merikh. I expected to find joy there, a sick sense of glee at Merikh's state, but instead, I find curiosity.

"What in the d i c k e n s happened to you?" He asks, looking Merikh up and down.

"Move." Merikh bites out, his mood shifting into protective mode as he steps in front of me. Johannes looks at Hayes behind me and must see something he doesn't like and he puts his hands up in defeat, licking his teeth before he steps aside. He flits his eyes over me before he rolls them.

"I really thought I would be the one to kick your a s s." He says as we pass him, Merikh's muscles tense, but he doesn't stop, he clenches his jaw and looks down at me, then a soft smile spreads over his lips and he drops a kiss to my

"You're welcome, by the way." Johannes hollers behind us, but Merikh keeps us walking. "What? No thanks for saving your ginger G a m m a?"

I freeze in my tracks, my face heating and panic brewing in my stomach. I whip my head around, facing Johannes, who is wearing a smirk.

"Poor fool was stumbling down the hallway, pounding his head into the wall."

Bile rises and my heart sinks.

"Did you hurt him?" I ask, trying to keep the emotion out of my voice, but he sees past my false show.

"I knocked him out and dragged him to the healers." He says with a frown. "I had the opportunity to kill him, but I didn't

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"And you want us to thank you for not killing him?" Merikh lifts a brow.

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"Your g a m m a was ready to kill himself to fight whatever demons he claimed were in his head. I figured knocked out was better than dead." he snarks,

"You're welcome," he says with a glare and a small smirk tugging hi lips up.

"Demons in his head?" I ask, feigning confusion.

I know what was in his head, what they want and their motives. But does Johannes? Not that he would outright admit it, but I think the fool is c o c k y enough to drop hints if he was a part of what is happening.

"Yeah, he kept saying there were demons and voices in his head. Wrestling with his inner demons or something to that effect. I have heard many humans use that phrase in my lifetime." He shrugs, waving his hand like it's not a big deal.

"And you helped him?" I ask and Johannes groans like he is annoyed. Clearly, he came out to get a rise out of us, but now that he is being interrogated, I can only assume he is now officially bored with us.

"I hate your kind, but my problem is specifically with you, Merikh. Not some little Gamm

a who would hardly be satisfying to kill. So yes, I helped him."

"How very kind of you, Hayes," clips out. I look at the two burly men bristling behind me, ready to go for another round if they could and I sigh. Tired of fighting, planning and plotting, at least for right now.

"Thank you, Johannes." I say sincerely, giving him a soft, sincere smile. Then I turn, grabbing Merikh and Hayes and dragging them down the hall.

"Did you seriously thank that f u k e r?" Merikh growls, low in his anger felt through the mindlink, sending shivers through my spine.

"One of us had to act like our status," I say with a teasing brow. He bites back a smile, his anger filtering away as he sighs in defeat.

We make our way back to the room, Hayes entering first and making sure the

room is clear before he exits and gives us a nod. Merikh ushers me in first before stopping to have a quick discussion with Hayes so I head to the bathroom, starting the water for Merikh and grabbing him a towel and a change of clothing. I head out when I hear the door close behind him and he saunters over to me.

“Ezrah stopped by. An emergency council meeting is happening in the morning,” he says, cupping my cheeks before he takes my lips in a gentle, loving kiss.

“Mmm, then we should get some sleep.” I tell him with a smile. “After you shower.”

“Oh, you mean we,” he smiles coyly, “You stink too, my little luna.”

I scoff as he kisses me again and spins me around, pushing me to the bathroom. I freeze when I see the mirror, my hands shaking, and I watch as Merikh’s reflection sees it too.

It wasn’t there when I went into the bathroom, but the steam of the shower must have brought it to life, because on the mirror, as if written in a fog, is the word ‘Burn:

Chapter 53

Merikh

I wrap my arms around Colette, holding her close as she struggles to control her heart rate. Her fear pours into me like a free flowing fall over a cliff so I lower my head, pressing my lips to her ear.

“It’s Percy’s writing.” I whisper, but it doesn’t make her less worried. She shakes in my embrace, and I press my lips to her skin, giving her a reassuring kiss and forcing my calm into the bond between us, trying to help her relax..

“Why would he write ‘burn’?” She asks, finally waking from the shock. I move away from her, reaching out and wiping the word from the mirror with my hand before turning to look into her shocked face.

“Either he was under their control, or maybe he is trying to warn us.” I offer, stepping forward and wrapping her in a big embrace. Colette releases a heavy sigh but shakes her head. Then she leans into me, the steam still swirling around us in the bathroom.

“We should go see him.” She says, spinning in my arms, looking up at me. Her eyes are filled with doubt and uncertainty. I reach out, stroking her cheek as I move hair from her face and I offer her a soft smile.

“Percy will be out for a while. At least for the night.” I tell her, and she frowns.

“How can you be sure?” She asks.

“If he wakes up, Penny is staying in the room with him, along with the healers. We will be informed. I promise, Colette.”

She mulls over the information before looking over her shoulder and nodding

that she is giving in. The hand writing isn't easy to determine as Percy's, but I remember the little pranks he would pull on Penny, the little notes he left on the bathroom mirror to make her paranoid that someone was watching her. This seems like a warning of what I can't quite tell, but burn could mean anything.

#

#

"I don't think I will be able to sleep." She mutters and I reach down, tugging at the hem of her shirt.

"I can think of ways to tire you out," I tease her, and she arches a brow.

"As tempting as that sounds, you truly do need a shower."

"Care to help me?" I ask, and she bites her lip nervously. Mated or not, this is still all very new to her. "I promise to be a gentleman."

B

She hesitates before she gently nods her head, giving me her approval. I remove my hand from her shirt, tracing them down her wrists and taking her hands and lifting them above her head.

Then I tug her top off, tossing it to the side. My heart is sounding in my ears, staring at her with her pink cheesy and lush breast on display. I hook my thumbs into her shorts, pushing them down to her ankles.

A shiver runs through her, and I step back, appreciating everything about her from her shy stance to her nervous energy. Then I strip my shorts off and place my hand out for her to take as I push open the glass door to the shower and bring us into the heated spray. She sighs on contact with the water, her eyes closing in relief as the droplets rain down over her.

I'm enraptured by the picture before me Her chin tilted up for the water to roll over her face and down her chest. There is no looking away as a soft smile breaks over her lips and she reaches up, dragging her hands through her hair. It's not until her perfect brown eyes open, watching me curiously, that I snap out of my trance. I instinctively wrap my hands around her, stepping closer to her as the water runs over my sore flesh. The water temperature surprises me and I hiss, trying to step away, but she clings to me, giggling.

"Don't be such a baby," she says with a teasing lilt in her tone.

Chapter 53

"You are boiling me alive." I grimace and she presses her bare, wet chest to mine.

The stinging stops, my body tingling with the sensation of our bond, and I bite my lips, trying to force the moan away. The mate bond can do so much for a couple. From expediting healing, down to a dopamine hit.

"Let me help you," she whispers, as she steps around me, grabbing a bar of soap.

Her arms wrap around me from behind, her hands dragging up and down my check and stock with the soap before she presses a gentle kiss on my shoulder and slides around my front. She proceeds to scrub my entire torso and shoulders before setting the bar aside and moving me fully into the spray of water.

“Only washing my upper half?” I tease her and she again grows shy and shrugs. I sense her hesitation, her worry about what to do, how to please me or start without looking like a fool, and I chuckle. “Turn, I will wash your hair.”

“But I was washing you.” She insists, and I grab the soap.

“And you did wonderfully. Now, allow me to return the favor.” I tell her as I lather my hands up.

I scrub her scalp, making her moan with pleasure as she closes her eyes. I scrub her body with a loofah, making sure to cover every inch of her, my hands following along behind for good measure. Her eyes are on mine the moment I touch her collarbone, not once looking away from me.

I glide over her skin, dropping sweet kisses along the way until I reach her waist. She waits for me to decide what to do as I drag it over her perky cheeks, pressing her just a touch closer to me.

She gasps when I press into her soft stomach, but she doesn't seem shocked in the slightest. Then I spin her around and hold her close to me, cradling her as the water washes away the suds.

I itch to do so many things for her. The options are endless and the access open, but I promised to remain a gentleman. So begrudgingly, I will remain just that. Her head falls back onto my shoulder, her eyes closed.

“Do you think this could be our last pleasant moment together?” She whispers and I give her a squeeze, hating the thought process.

“Not a chance in hell.” I whisper, pressing my lips to her cheek.

“How can you be so sure?” She asks. “I mean, they have trolls on their side.” She makes a solid point, but what she doesn't get is that trolls don't exist, especially not troll shifters. Which means those trolls, they are just someone being used by magic, like the red-eyed wolves.

“What happened when you brought that water down on us?” I ask her, and I see the side of her little frown.

“I'm not really sure.” She whispers.

“You washed away the magic spell.” I tell her. “And what happened to the so-called trolls?”

“They turned into humans.”

“Exactly.”

“Wait...so they were just spelled? The area didn't allow you to transform, but it gave them the ability to.” She whispers as she unravels it all. “But why water?”

I mean, it could just have easily rained and would it have worked to wash it away? Not to mention the trolls weren't instantly transformed."

I sigh, not sure how to answer that question as it's been one on my mind too.

Why was the spell so easily dispersed? Then I remember that the person behind this all was talking to her, saying things through the troll before she got rid of them.

"What was the troll saying to you?" I ask her and she frowns up at me.

09:46 Thu, 16 May MG

Chapter 53

"The princess has some skill..." she murmurs, her eyes zoning out for a moment before she blinks herself back.

89%

+5

My stomach sinks, and I tuck her into me closer. They knew who she was, that she was a hybrid and Caspian's daughter, but I have long wondered what took them so long to come after her. Why wait for her to be with me? Surely attacking her in her old pack would have been easier. Instead they attacked me, us.

"They wanted to see if I was truly a hybrid." She whispers, coming to the same realization as I have.

"And they want to see what kind of power you have." I finish for her and she shivers despite the hot water hammering over us.

"Now that they know...what will they do with me?" She whispers and I spin her to face me, reaching out and shutting off the water before I grab a fluffy towel and wrap it around her.

"They have to get you first, Colette. And that will be over my dead body."

C BA

Chapter 54

I hold Colette's hand as we stop outside the double doors leading to the meeting room, I can feel her nerves through the mate bond, the fear she has for whatever is on the other side of the thick oak door. If things go like I think they will, she is about to be exposed, but hopefully that will come after we are back on the council.

"Are you ready for this?" I whisper, and she nods, biting her lip. I reach out, my hand at the nape of her neck as I pull her close, kissing the top of her head. Then I pull away, meeting her eyes as she looks up at me.

"I'm a little nervous." She admits,

"There is no need to feel nervous, my little luna. Even if things don't go how we hope, we will figure out another way to keep you and all of our kind safe." I

promise her. A small smile plays across her delicate lips.

"I trust you," she whispers, and I feel my heart stutter. She trusts me. My hand reaches out, cupping her cheek as I stroke my thumb over her soft skin.

"And I trust you." I tell her, forcing every ounce of that sincerity through the mate bond so she can feel it. Since Lauren, I have trusted very few people. Only those I have known for years and the one I trusted the most shares my blood. But this is different. Colette has done nothing but prove herself when she never should have had to.

I trust her. With my pack, my life, with my heart.

She smiles softly, leaning in to press a chaste kiss to my lips before she turns and pushes the door open.

Caspian sits at the head table. Pouring himself a glass of water. Florence and Johannes bicker in the corner, and Brent sits looking exhausted next to Elm. I notice two empty seats, watching them closely as I look at Elm, who gives me a courteous nod.

"Why are you two here?" Johannes scoffs, finally taking notice of our presence with a sneer on his face.

"I have invited them to sit in on this meeting, as it is important for their kind and their future," Caspian says, sounding bored.

"Can we start then?" Florence whines. "This is so much earlier than our usual meetings, and I would like to head back to bed"

"Not everyone is here," Elm reminds her and she rolls her eyes.

"My best guess is Giselle went back to her cave of riches and Joffrey is the flightiest Fairy there is, so he probably-"

"Is just late?" The tall thin fairy says, sounding amused. "If you haven't noticed, Florence, I have had business to attend to for the majority of this month long session, but I do indeed come back for the important moments,"

"Oh wonderful," Florence says, her eyes filled with lust as she licks her lips. Then she slides a glance to Colette, giving her a flirtatious wink.

"Has anyone seen Giselle?" Caspian asks and no one answers, all of them just looking around and shrugging.

Typical of the dragons, never on time." Johannes chides.

The doors slam shut as a petite blonde woman stares at us, then finds her seat without a word. Caspian looks around once more before sitting forward, resting his elbows on the table before him.

First things first, he sighs. "Before we proceed, we have a vote to make and where I once was convinced this would be a swift and easy vote, I am no longer convinced."

Oh? Did people change their minds?" Giselle asks, looking amused.

15:51 Fri, 17 May BG.

Chapter 54

36%

"I vote to reinstate Alpha Merikh and his kind back to the council." Caspian says with authority. Giselle chuckles dryly and Johannes scoffs as I look around, assessing the others, searching for any blatant response that might single out the asshole causing trouble.

"Why the sudden change of heart, Caspian?" Johannes asks skeptically before sliding an annoyed glance to Colette. "Did the lycan's pretty luna woo you? A few nights with the luna and you change your vote?"

A growl erupts through my chest at the insinuation behind his words.

"I would never allow my mate to be used in such a way," I grit through my teeth, Colette clutching to my hand as she tries to hold me back. I can feel her calm leaching into me through the mate bond and I try to let it overcome me.

"I can't imagine any other reason his mind would change," Johannes says with a smirk. I know what he is doing, what he is trying to showcase with his words, and I also know I shouldn't be playing into it. But I will be damned if I let him make such suggestions about my mate.

"That is enough," Caspian roars, slamming his fist on the table, his face red. My eyes snap to him as he silently "This is a vote, not a debate or trial."

"I also vote to reinstate." Elm says, speaking loudly to command the attention to him. He looks at Colette, who gives him an appreciative smile.

"I vote against it," Johannes says, settling into his seat, a mischievous glint in his eyes as he grins.

"I vote against it as well," Giselle says.

I look at her curiously, not that I am surprised by her response. But when her eyes meet mine, I find a challenge there just before she looks at her fairy neighbor expectantly. Joffrey clears his throat, looking around the room and then he trains his gaze on Colette as if he is trying to get a read on who she is and what she stands for. Then he clears his throat.

"I am usually big on second chances," Joffrey says, leaning back in his chair.

"But not this time. I vote No as well."

"I vote for reinstatement." Brent says, making everyone stare.

"What the hell did you just say?" Giselle asks, irrationally angry with him.

Brent gives her a confused, lifted brow before he crosses his arms over his chest. "I believe that makes the votes even."

Everyone looks at Florence, who seems to preen with all the attention. She smiles sweetly at me, tossing a wink my way before Johannes shoots me a victorious smirk. Florence stands, making a show of her decision as she walks around the room, knowing the weight of her answer.

She stops in front of Colette, looking at her before she reaches out and tugs a strand of her hair. I hold my tongue and fight my lycans' urge to rip her hands from her arm as she slides a smirk in my direction, clearly taunting me.

"Enough of the show, Florence." Caspian groans, though I can see his unease just as well as I can feel my own bubbling in my chest, causing a stabbing pain in my side. If she votes no, there will be war over Colette's existence, that is, if the person we are looking for chooses to expose it.

"Fine," she rolls her eyes as she makes her way silently to her seat. "I vote...in favor of reinstating them."

"WHAT?" Johannes roars as he stands, his chair flying out from under him, clattering to the floor. "You bit c h!"

"Oh hush, blood su k e r, I live for chaos and you are only feeding that for me," she hisses at him as he sneers.

"This isn't over," Giselle scoffs.

"This topic is closed." Caspian says, giving her a pointed look, and she rolls her eyes.

15:51 Fri, 17 May DG

Chapter 54

30%

"The hell it is! Do you truly think we can all make a decision without revealing why you have so quickly changed your mind on the matter?" Giselle asks, crossing her arms over her chest defiantly.

"I would like to know," Joffrey says, sitting up in his chair.

"The reasoning is pointless now," Caspian says quickly. "The voting is closed and Merikh and his kind are back on the council. It is done."

"Wait, wait... There is a specific reason you all changed your vote?" Johannes asks, growing more irritated. Colette grips my hand and I am ready for anything, my lycan teeming just beneath the surface prepared to kill who we must in order to protect Colette.

"Merikh's little mate is a Hybrid." Giselle snaps out. "She shouldn't even exist, and the best part? Caspian is her dear dad."

All eyes skirt between Colette and Caspian, a varying degree of shock and curiosity as they come to terms with what she exposed. But I'm not focused on them, no I am focused on the a s h l e who just exposed herself to us. And how exactly do you know that?" Elm asks, standing and coming to Colette's other side in a show of protection. Giselle rolls her eyes.

"Because I was the one who hunted her down. A dragon never forgets the smell of her prey, and we don't lose them." She hisses, her eyes growing gold and her skin steaming. "I am curious about how you got away. Your mother wasn't so lucky."

Chapter 55

Colette

I fly from my seat, a roar of rage tearing from my once composed lips. She

just openly admitted to killing my mother, to trying to kill me. My chest feels like it is cracking open and the anger in my body seems to supersede my size. I want revenge and answers. Merikh's hand wraps around my shaking body as I glare at her, words failing me as I try to keep myself from breaking down. "Woah, easy there little luna." Merikh whispers in my ear. "Now is not the time,"

"Of course it is," I growl at him and he hugs me to him tighter. "She killed my mother, Merikh."

My voice breaks, making me sound young and broken as my lip quivers, my anger morphing into an aching sadness in my chest.

Caspian frowns, his eyes skirting over me as I allow Merikh to calm my nerves. Then he turns a wild gaze to Giselle, staring her down with a ferocity that should be reserved for a battlefield.

"Giselle, I will ask you plainly, and you will answer me." Caspian grits out the words and she gives him an amused smile. "Did you kill Melody?"

The room falls silent, the tension palpable, almost as intense as the urge for me to sink my teeth into her dragon flesh and tear until I make my way to her stony heart.

Giselle sighs heavily, rolling her eyes before she waves her hand in the air as if shooing a fly from her presence.

"It doesn't really make a difference, does it?" She asks, "I mean, Johannes killed a wolf and yet there was no punishment. That woman was not protected under the council, so she was fair game."

"She was my mate!" Caspian roars, "So you will answer the f u k i n g question, or I will drown the fire from your very core!"

"Mate?" Johannes asks, his eyes growing wide as I look at him, his shocked expression surprising me.

"Did you claim her as your mate? Was she the queen of the sirens and in your many years with her, did you ever acknowledge her as a mate to anyone? Or did you hide her because you were embarrassed? Too afraid of what everyone would say?" Giselle asks with a grin.

My chest feels like it is going to explode as I look at my father, who stares at Giselle, blinking like he has been bested in a duel. His guilt-ridden eyes drift over to me and he looks away, ashamed of himself. My mouth runs dry and Merikh tugs me closer to him.

"She makes a fair point, Caspian." Brent says, and Caspian shakes his head.

"The point is null and void if she knew. Which she clearly did, otherwise she would not have come for Melody and my child." He yells at Brent.

"Ah, see, I just assumed you were f u c k i n g her. You were not marked, and neither was she. There was no mate's mark on your neck and no crown on

her head. So, as far as I could tell, you were using her to create a hybrid.” Giselle shrugs like her point is the most nonchalant thing she’s ever said. Like anyone would have had the same train of thought.

“But you did not alert the council of any of this,” Elm accuses her.

“Did I have to? Hybrids are illegal, and werewolves are not protected.” She shrugs. “I was well within my rights and you all know it.”

Chapter 55

“These things should always be brought to the council first.” Florence argues.

“He is the leader at the moment. Should I have brought it to him?”

I watch on as the whole meeting dissolves into a bunch of angry super natural beings speaking as if they can change the past or give Giselle a slap on the wrist. My eyes watch Caspian, who stands silently, looking like he has m n t a l l y left the room, staring at the ground, his eyes filled with water and his shoulders slumped.

Then he looks up, his eyes swirling gray as his fists clench. Giselle stops talking, training her eyes on him with a pleased smirk. This is what she wants. For him to snap and attack another council member. I look up at Merikh in desperation, knowing he can feel me, and he gently moves me to the side and rushes to Caspian, stepping in front of him.

“Move, Merikh.” Caspian’s voice sounds warbling, like he is in a sea of water, his voice filled with anguish and hatred.

pure

“This is not the time or place, Caspian. You would just be playing into her hands.” Merikh warns him, trying to calm my father. Then Giselle lets out a shrill laugh.

“Do you really think you scare me, water sprite?” Giselle giggles. “I have been around for centuries, watching you, studying your kind. You are untouchable in your little ocean city, but here, you are the weakest of us all.”

“That’s enough, Giselle.” Elm orders, but she keeps her eyes trained on Merikh’s back. Fear licks up my spine, warning me she will try to hurt him. Brent rushes in front of Giselle, standing before her with his shoulders squared and ready to take whatever she was planning to deliver to Caspian or Merikh.

“Who killed Colette’s mother?” Brent asks, his voice echoing as Giselle glares daggers at him.

“No one.” She finally grits out, looking right at me. “She is alive, but not well. Dragons love treasure, things like gold, gems... silver bars.” she smirks and my stomach burns with hatred.

“You are torturing her...” I whisper and she shrugs.

“Torture seems like a hefty statement. She is just simply living in a room of silver. I do wonder, though, how many years it would take to make a werewolf

go mad.”

“You will release her immediately. Her kind is officially under the protection of the council now.” Caspian says, but I can see the pain in his eyes, the way he doesn’t know how to process what he is hearing, the same way I am struggling to comprehend. How much pain has she been in all this time?

“I disagree.” She hisses at Caspian. “You tried to trick us into voting for it so your precious hybrid would be safe. I say the vote is void.”

“I agree,” Joffrey says with a frown, “Though I do not condone the violence Giselle.”

“Oh, shut up, you fairy.” She groans, rolling her eyes.

“This isn’t up for a vote,” Caspian states, moving over to stand with Elm, Merikh, and me. “Colette is protected. She is mated to a member of the council.”

“And you all agree with this?” She asks, looking around. Everyone averts their eyes, including Johannes, who clears his throat and looks at the ground. “This is b u l l s h i t.”

“What’s b u l l s h i t is you manipulating other kinds for your own purpose and pretending you didn’t break council laws yourself,” I accuse. “How are you doing it? Who are you using to control the red-eyed wolves?”

Her flaming eyes land on me, a viscous smirk pulling her lips taut across her face in such high alert.

a way

that makes

my

wolf go on

2/3

15:35 Mon, 20 May MBB ·

Chapter 55

“I don’t have any idea what you are talking about.” She gives me a fake smile.

“You know exactly what I am talking about.” I hiss at her and she shrugs.

84%

“Don’t you think I would admit to whatever crime you are accusing me of if I did it? I mean, after all....I renounce my place on this council.”

“What?” everyone murmurs, looking around to see what the others

+5

Giselle has gone mad. It’s the only explanation that seems to make sense. By stepping out of the council, she opens her kind up to attacks of any kind from anyone.

“You all have left me no choice but to remove myself from the council. So, which of you wants your kind to be first in my rapid fire elimination?” She

taunts, scanning the room for any takers.

Everyone looks around, and for a moment, I think they will stand their ground. That is, until Florence sighs and gives me an apologetic look.

"I prefer not to take sides, but if keeping what few of my species are left alive is the cost, then I agree with Giselle. We too withdraw from the council." She averts her eyes as Johannes scoffs.

"A traitor twice in one day, Florence." Johannes shakes his head. "I expected more from you."

"You don't get to talk bloodsucker. I rule my kind with logic, not emotions. This is the logical option. One hybrid for the good of all kinds? It hardly seems like a big ask. No offense, Letty."

"And what about you?" Giselle says, scowling at Johannes. "Do you truly think your coven will agree with you siding with the likes of a dog and fish? This isn't the time to be noble, Johannes. You have never been one to be. I wouldn't suggest you start now."

My stomach flips anxiously, watching as everyone looks at one another, trying to decide the best course of action for their kind. The council is falling apart, and it's all because of my existence. There is no helping the guilt that weighs down on me with every torn glance I get from those wishing to remain at my side.

"If you are renouncing your position here on the council, you must leave the property at once," Caspian growls, looking around at everyone.

"Oh, with pleasure." Giselle roars.

Her eyes glow the same red as Percy's had last night and a blaze of fire propels from her mouth heading directly toward my chest. Merikh is on me in a second, his body sheltering me as I close my eyes as we fly backward into the wall.

My head slams hard into the hard surface and black dots dance in my eyes, impairing my vision as all hell breaks loose around me. Merikh lays over me unmoving as I try to reach out and feel him in the bond. But I can't reach him, I can't feel him in my mind.

Chapter 56

My head aches and I can feel the trickle of warmth down my neck, dripping as I try to force my body to move. The sparks of the mate bond where Merikh touches my skin with his gives me hope, knowing he is at the very least still alive. My chest burns and my stomach twists. Fear overcomes me with the very real possibility that he is gravely injured.

"Merikh," I force out, trying to breathe under the weight of his body, but even with how close my lips are to his ears, I doubt he can hear me.

A fight rages on behind him. Fire, water and shades of varying colors light up the only portion of the wall I can see. There is no telling who is fighting with who or if it's an all out fight to the death since the protective order of the council is now over, at least for several members.

"Colette!" My name breaks through the room, my father's voice calling to me, panic lacing through every syllable.

"I'm here..." I cry out, emotions overwhelming me the longer Merikh remains motionless.

"Take cover!" He roars, his voice coming closer as a rumbling resonates through the room, and I look up, massive scaly tail swipes away the ceiling and rooms above us.

watching as a

Lumber and drywall clatter down over me, but nothing lands on us as a silver-colored barrier appears overhead. I blink at the debris as it bounces off the shield before it shivers and drops, only dust littering down over us. Suddenly, Merikh rolls off of me and I gasp for a full breath of air, clattering across the singed carpet floor to him and cupping his face.

"Merikh..." I whisper, begging him to open his eyes. Tears fall like a cascading wave down my cheeks and onto his face as I heave, trying like hell to compose myself.

"Are you okay?" I feel a hand on my shoulder but I ignore it, not caring who is talking to me. After a moment, they leave me, their footsteps retreating, but I don't look to see who it was. The only thing that matters is Merikh, unconscious and hurt.

"Merikh, wake up." I blubber through s o b s.

I can hear things being tossed about behind me, furniture clattering and people screaming something incoherent. But I can't spare them a glance or even a moment. I can't bear to look away from his face, the face that makes it look like he is in a completely comfortable slumber and not potentially in death's grips.

"Luna!" breaks through the room and I recognize it as Hayes. I look up to see him as he scrambles toward us, landing on the other side of Merikh. His eyes meeting mine, looking for answers. "What the f u c k happened?"

"H-he jumped in front of me." I try to explain, but I can't completely recall it all as Merikh was in front of me before I could even register what the hell was happening. Hayes places his hand on his brother's chest, running it over his body, looking for the wound that has Merikh looking so close to death. Then looks me in the eye.

"I need to push him toward you so I can look for injuries." He tells me and I nod.

I reach over and prepare to take the bulk of his weight onto me. Hayes gently

shoves his brother's shoulder toward me as he pushes him to his side and I latch onto Merikh, hugging him close while keeping him upright enough for Hayes to search him over.

My eyes are trained on him the entire time, watching his stony like features as they give nothing away before he drags his hand down his face and looks around.

There's a t w i n k l e of franticness in his eyes and I notice him avoiding looking in my direction. It must be bad if he can't even bring himself to look at me. I try to swallow the lump in my throat, hoping to force the fear down with it.

Chapter 56

"It's bad, isn't it..?" I ask, and he sighs heavily.

"It isn't good," he mutters. "Have you seen Brent anywhere?"

"No...I don't even know who sided with her or us..." I admit, and he furrows his brow.

"I think you are going to have to explain what you mean by that, but first we need to get him out of here and somewhere I can at least clean the wounds and see how bad it is before a real healer has to step in."

I meet his eyes, my heart thudding with painful force in my chest.

"It's really bad, isn't it? I need to know..." I ask, trying like hell to remain hopeful.

This time I see the c r a c k in his stoic face, the uncertainty in his face as she licks his lips and looks down. I lean forward slightly, venturing to see it for myself, but he places both hands on my shoulders, pushing me back slightly.

"It's bad, Colette. He wouldn't want you to see it, not like this. Just....we need to get him out of here. And then I need to look for the others." He mutters, scanning the room around us.

"The others?" I ask in alarm, finally turning my head to survey the damage.

My mouth drops open, water leaking from an exposed pipe, a massive section of the ceiling and stories above head missing as the sun filters in, shining through dust particles, making it look like a heavy fog has fallen over us.

I see someone sitting in a dark corner, their dress shoes poking out and someone crouching next to them. Not a single other person appears to be in the room other than those two and I feel myself growing numb. Not in the sense that I have grown cold or lost the sensation of feeling things physically. I am numb to the shock of what I see.

There is blood splattered along the walls that aren't singed black, everything is wet, dripping with dirty drops of water and insulation hangs from the only part of the ceiling still intact.

But none of that has any bearing on me. Not a single one of those things

seems to surprise me. Too much has happened, too much was at stake, and it was all because of me, all over me.

"Cole..." I hear, spinning, hoping to locate the voice. It's Caspian, a breathy, pained version, but it is him, no doubt.

"Where are you?" I ask, and I see one foot move in the corner. The figure crouching next to him stands and helps him up. and I finally feel a little tension release from my chest, finding him standing with his arm over Brent's shoulder for stability.

"How is Merikh?" He asks, and I bite my lip, shaking my head and shrugging. There is no way I can say the words 'I don't know' without sobbing. His eyes are tired but soft as he gives me a weary smile.

"He needs immediate care." Hayes says, standing. Penny comes flying in next, her eyes finding mine and then landing on Merikh. Her face instantly goes cold, like she is hiding all emotion as she rushes and helps me up.

"You are bleeding too, Luna." She tells me, but all I can see is the mess I created.

"Help Hayes with Merikh, We need to get him taken care of right now."

"Yes, Luna." She says, reaching down and grabbing a shoulder. Hayes stands, grabbing the other side and the two of them hoist him, his body dangling between the two of them and his back revealed to me for the first time.

A shocked gasp tears from my lips as I slam a hand over my mouth, the tears trickling free again. His shirt is completely burned away, his flesh raw and red, his muscles exposed where it looks like a meteor may have hit him.

The skin surrounding the circle is already raised and blistered, licking up his arm in a grotesque display of how quickly

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Chapter 56

flames can melt away the flesh.

"I will do everything I can, Colette." Brent promises me.

"Can you walk?" Caspian asks, softly and I nod, feeling slightly lightheaded, but my legs are sturdy and if it means being with Merikh through this all, I could run a marathon.

"I will be right behind you." I whisper, looking through the rubble on the way out. "Where is everyone else?"

I look at Brent, who frowns, his eyes scanning, then he freezes, motioning for me to rush to him. I move over to him and he rests my father's around over my shoulder as he stumbles and trips over soaked dry walls and crushed furniture.

"Elm!" He screams, throwing things to the side. Cursing under his breath, he reveals a large bark like slab of wood, trying to pry it to the side before it

slowly shrinks and disappears, revealing Elm, holding an unconscious Joffrey in his arms.

“The others ran.” He coughs. “Took off with Giselle on the f u c k n g dragon she called.”

I furrow my brows and look up at Caspian.

“But isn’t she a dragon?” I ask, confused. “Why would she need to call one?”

“That is an answer I don’t have right now, my daughter.” He says, sounding like he may pass out at any moment. I can feel how weak he is. The water in his being is drained, weak, and I can’t tell if it is because he expended himself or because he has been away from the ocean for so long.

“What does all this mean?” I ask him as I lead him out of the room carefully, following Penny and Hayes as they drag Merikh away. “For the council?”

“It means there is no council. Not any more. It’s time to go to our own kinds and prepare for a war.” He breathes, his eyes falling closed for a second before he grows heavier and leans into me.

“Stay awake,” I say, shaking him. “I need you to stay awake, please...”

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Caspian leans on me, his head lulling before he snaps it back and shakes it like he is trying to not pass out. I cling to him with all the strength I have, trying to keep him upright as I look around for anyone who can help me.

“Just hang in there for a few more minutes,” I beg him, and he chuckles lightly.

“I am okay, sweetheart. Just drained, I need water. It has been too long.” He says weakly.

“Should I take you to your special bathing room?” I offer, not really sure how the hell I will get him up the stairs, or how long it will take. My heart yearns to be at Merikh’s side. As much as I care about Caspian and his well-being, he is my estranged father and not the man I love who is in much worse shape.

“Caspian!” Ezra yells from down the hall before he sprints toward us, taking the other side of his arm over his tall, slender shoulders. “What in the blazes happened?”

Caspian just smiles and shakes his head, too tired to speak, and Ezra looks to me for answers.

“Giselle disapproved of the vote to place lycans and werewolves back on council.” I explain, and his eyes grow wide.

“So she destroyed the place?” He asks and I nod.

“She tries to attack me, and then everyone started fighting. She escaped on a dragon.”

“Why would she be on a dragon when she is one?” he asks, confused.

“I asked the same thing,” I admit before biting my lip and looking up ahead where Merikh is no longer in sight.

“Go Colette, Ezra can see to me getting to water.” He whispers. “Merikh will need you close if he has any hope of a speedy

recovery.”

“Merikh is injured?” Ezra asks, shocked, a look of concern over his dark brows as he glances at me, taking in my barely restrained tears. I nod, unable to answer. Injured makes it seem like it isn’t as bad as it is.

“I will check in on you later,” I promise with a quivering voice. Ezra gives me a reassuring smile.

“I will take care of Caspian, concern yourself only with Merikh and his healing.” He says as I step away and, with one more torn look, I turn and take off down the hall. It feels like it’s gotten longer, every step doing nothing to bring me closer as the panic settles deep inside my chest.

As I round the corner, I come to a halt, spinning, trying to figure out which way they went. There is a massive chunk missing from the mansion, so I know they have come this way, but the question of where feels like a daunting one.

My hands fly to my head as I try to force myself to breathe, focus and then move, checking every damn room if I have t

o. Then I realize, I can use my mind link. The barrier has to be down for everyone to have been able to use their magic.

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Where are you?— I shoot out to Hayes and Penny, waiting anxiously for a response.

-It is best you wait to see him—Hayes' responses sounding morose and tired.

1/4

- that. As your Luna I am demanding you tell me where the hell my mate is— I growl through the link, making sure he can feel my frustration with him.*

I am not some weak little girl who is incapable of seeing grotesque things. Merikh and I have come so far, hurt each other and healed at the same time. I refuse to be on the sideline just because his wound will scare me.

Fear and love are no strangers to each other. They can't be. Without fear, love is bland. How do we know the depths of our love? The lengths we will go to in order to show it, to feel it?

-I will come get you, Luna— Penny's voice resonates through my mind as I sigh and lean over, my hands on my knees, a wave of

nausea washing over me as I shudder.

-I am in the dining room— I tell her with a long exhale. The adrenaline is fading fast and my head is aching, but none of that matters. I can rest when I know Merikh is okay. Until then, I will fight my body's needs just to remain at his side.

I can hear Penny coming before I see her as I stand up straight and move to the hall, watching as she waves me down. There is no thinking as my body takes off toward her and, without exchanging words, she turns and runs to show me where they are. She stops at a door, turning to face me, keeping me from going in.

“Penny, move.” I say firmly and her eyes grow soft.

“I will, I promise. But first I need to tell you what to expect, because it’s not pretty.” She tells me and I roll my eyes.

“I don’t care.” I grind out and she shakes her head and takes my hand.

“Luna, this isn’t me warning you about the wound on his back. Alpha is a proud man, and he has been injured many times, but never,

not once, has he been taken down like this. There is a chance he will feel...well...”

I shake my head, understanding what she is trying to say. But she doesn’t understand him the way I do. She wasn’t in the room when

everything happened.

What Penny doesn’t realize is Merikh threw himself in front of me to save me. In his mind, he will wake up and know he achieved his goal. His biggest annoyance will be the downtime I will force him to take.

“Penny, I appreciate your thought process, but I know for a fact Merikh will not be like that. There are things you do not know and I refuse to wait another minute trying to explain them to you. You are my friend and my gamma, but that is my mate and your alpha in there. So please, for the sake of our friendship, move.”

She drops my hand and looks at the ground before she steps to the side and I push the door open. I am hit in the face instantly with the smell of fresh herbs and Merikh’s faint scent.

Hayes looks up at me, surprised, as I walk past him and drag a chair up to Merikh, taking his hand. His face is turned toward me, his arms above his head as he lies on his stomach, and Brent gingerly cleans his wounds.

I eye him suspiciously before watching his every move, making sure he isn’t doing anything that would

seem off. He swabs the deep wound on his back with a brown liquid, then swiftly he grabs some herbal leaves and places them in the groove in Merikh's back where his muscles are still mildly exposed.

"You being here will speed his healing immensely." He tells me without stopping his movements.

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Chapter 57

"How bad is it?" I ask him, swallowing thickly as he exhales and his hands stop. He lays down the items and then lifts his arms, stretching them over his head as if he is trying to relieve tension. When he finally settles, his eyes land on me with a frown.

"He will live. Lycans are hard to kill, and this blow was not fatal. To you, with your frame, it very much would have been. You are lucky, Colette, that he cares for you the way he does." He says sincerely and I blush, looking down at the still out cold mate who should have just let me die.

"It would have solved more problems had he just let me take the hit." I scoff, and Brent chuckles.

"You can't truly believe that," he says, and I shrug.

"I am the reason for the fight." I remind him, and he shakes his head.

"No, you were a scapegoat. This fight was a long time coming. Besides, do you really think your death would have solved anything? Your father and Merikh would have dismembered and drowned the world to avenge you."

I press my lips into a flat line, thinking about his words, letting them sink in as I rub a circle over the top of Merikh's lifeless hand.

"You think they were looking for a reason to fight? They wanted to disband the council?" I ask him curiously. Brent shrugs and then

sighs.

“Supernatural beings are self important. They all think their kind is better than the next and with most being immortal or having extended lives, they think they are better than others.” Brent says.

“The beauty of our kinds, you being werewolves and humans and me being solely human, but with magic, we value what brief life we have. We love harder, our loyalties lie in friendship, and we have no time to waste with people who do not respect us.”

“And their kind has the time to scheme and plan wars hundreds of years in advance.” I murmur his words, making me think.

“Exactly.” he says. He moves the tools he was using away, putting them on a table to the side before he feels the skin around the wound on Merikh’s back. I watch as he pushes and prods at him when I feel someone come up to my side.

“Brent...” I say, my mind whirling with everything he has said and trying to recall all what happened in the conference room.

“Mmhmm?” he hums in response, inviting me to continue.

“How did the barrier go down?” I ask him, and he freezes, his eyes snapping up to meet mine.

“What?”

“The magic barrier. The one you have supposedly been placing up and taking down when commanded by Caspian...it was supposed to be up, suppressing everyone’s abilities, but yet...”

“I did not bring the barrier down,” he says, alarmed.

“Then who did?” I ask him. “Who else has the ability to do it? As far as I know, you are the only wizard here...right?”

“That is true, but there are ways to break it, ways that don’t require me to bring down the spell.”

“And how many people know how to do that?” I ask him, watching as he grows increasingly more uncomfortable.

“Here? Not many...” he admits, then his eyes grow wide. “Just myself, maybe Elm; as it is a nature related thing. And Ezra.”

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“What?” I swallow the growing bulge of fear in my throat. “Ezra?”

Yes, he has the abilities to bring it down, though I highly doubt-

His words drone on, sounding like nothing in my ears as I try not to hyperventilate. Did I send my father off with the enemy? Had Ezra really fooled us all so well and planted himself here? It would make sense, all the ‘letters’ being in the right place at the right time. Ezra is with them, whether he is the leader or not. I don’t know. All I know is that I have to get to my father.

Now.

I tear from Merik’s side, praying he will forgive me for leaving him to heal on his own for a moment. There is a flurry of shouting behind me as I stumble into the wall at the turn and scramble up the stairs, trying to make my way to the room meant only for sirens.

My lungs burn in the frantic panic of getting to them, my skin crawling with worry. The second I hit the landing, I sprint down the long narrow hall, past the two doors on my left and slam into the only door on my right-hand side. My fingers wrap around the brass doorknob as I shove, but it doesn’t budge. It’s locked. I jiggle the handle, then slam my fist into the door, making the oak rumble. My foot flies out, kicking the base as I hear something from beyond the door, but I am past being cordial and calm. What the hell could Ezra be doing in there to him?

“Let me in!” I roar, my hand aching from striking the wood so hard until finally it gives way, splintering and I use my wolf’s strength, shove the door off its hinges. I scan the room, searching for Ezra, ready to strike at him with everything I have, but I freeze when I see him exit the bathroom and blink at me, shocked.

“Colette?” Caspian calls to me, alarmed, and his voice filled with concern.

“What is it? What happened?”

My jaw falls open as Nook at the man calling my name. He is transformed, his hair slicked back and his skin a luminescent blue with gills on his neck. As he seems to glide closer to me in the water, his webbed fingers reach for the marble ledge and I gasp as he pulls himself up onto the side. His massive scaled tail glimmers from his mid torso down, his side more defined and

matching his gills.

It's one thing knowing I'm a siren, it's another witnessing what that means.

"Y-you're okay..." I whisper, looking from him to Ezra, a spark of confusion in his eyes. Ezra places his hands in his pockets, watching me closely.

"I told you I would take care of him." He furrows his brow, then his eye light up like he has solved a puzzle.

"Right..." I stammer, looking back at Caspian as he tilts his head.

"Is Merikh alright?" he asks, his voice sounding warbling as if he is gargling water and peaking at the same time.

"Uh..." I pink the bridge of my nose, trying to make sense of everything happening. "Yes. He will be fine. It's just that..."

"What?" Caspian asks.

"The magic barrier was down and I talked to Brent and he said only a few people have the abilities to take it down."

Ezra exhales and shakes his head.

"And you assumed it was me," he says.

Inod, guilt seeping into me. Was I wrong in assuming it was him? Or did I just get to him before he did something? It could also be possible Ezra is playing the long game. Pretending to be on our side, even though he is just waiting for the right moment.

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ZOMA

I haven't decided I shrug, choosing to double down.

He arches a brow in amusement and then he chuckles, nodding to the door I just hammered through. He walks out, and I see him stop waiting for me. I stomp out after him, glancing at my father, who pulls his full tail from the water and swings to the side before I step over the broken door.

He looks at me, no judgment or anger in his eyes. And he releases a sigh.

"I apologize for whatever I have done to make you think I would ever betray the council," he says. I cross my arms over my chest and lick my teeth, trying to control my emotions that are admittedly all over the place.

"The council is dead now." I say. "Everyone has gone their own way."

He scoffs.

"The council can fall apart, but the mission lives on. I now work in the face of unity, like the council did for many years." He says, and now it's my turn to scoff.

"You think it is that simple? Just say some flowery words and I will believe you?"

"Colette, enough." Caspian says, walking toward me, now back in his human form.

His silver streaked hair and slicked back with the water and he looks so much

healthier. The light in his eyes is back, and he frowns at me. I never thought I would want a frown from him, but I am overwhelmed by how well he looks and I throw my arms around him.

He hesitates, before I feel him pat me on the back and the rumble of his chest as he chuckles.

"I'm so glad you are feeling better." I tell him, and He takes hold of my shoulders, pushing me back with a soft smile.

"Me too, kiddo." He murmurs before looking over my shoulder at Ezra.

"Ezra, go and take over for Brent. I want to speak with him as soon as possible. Elm as well." He bows and sends me a sly smirk as I scowl at him.

"No. I don't trust him." I demand and Ezra's smirks morphs into a grin.

"Good." he says, but he doesn't sound c c k y or demeaning. He sounds like he is genuinely impressed with my statement, and I furrow my brows.

"What?"

"You do not know me well enough to trust me. I would expect nothing less from a Luna. Especially in this situation. But I will tell you I did not bring down the barrier. Someone else did."

"But Brent said..."

"The barrier fell right before Giselle planned to harm you." Caspian explains.

"She stalled until she felt it fall, then she struck."

didn't feel it," I tell him.

"You don't know what to look for to open yourself up to it yet," Ezra explains.

"It takes time to understand it, to feel it."

drag my hands through my hair and take three deep breaths. Why is there so much to freaking know about all of this? Why can't it all be easy?

"The person who brought down the barrier did it from the outside, not from in the room with us."

Inod, thinking hard, and I meet Caspian's eyes, like he is trying to guide me, figuring it all out.

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Chapter 58

"The red-eyed wolves, whoever is using them." I whisper, and he nods.

"You saw it too, then? The glimmer of red right before she attacked you?" He asks.

"ts she being manipulated too, then?" I ask, and he shrugs.

"Maybe."

"You don't think she is?" I ask, confused.

"No, I think she is working with someone who wants to make her seem innocent. I get the feeling Giselle isn't quite who or what we think she is."

"I believe Giselle, like those trolls I hear you all encountered earlier, is using magic to mask what she truly is. Which is why she did not have a dragon of

her own but rather was carried out.” Ezra explains.

“The issue now lies in figuring out what she is and what her ultimate goal is.” I say, following what they are saying.

Chapter 59

*Merikh

My muscles twitch, first my fingers itching to move. The lycan in my head whining and forcing my consciousness awake. Each second, I become more and more aware of the searing sensation on my back. My skin tingles, pins and needles pinching and stabbing my back as though I had been numb for too long.

I try to inhale deeply, but the agony of my injury forces me to stop, taking only short, quick breaths as I force my groggy eyes open. The world is blurry, my pain overwhelming as I blink away the fog.

I want to move, to get up and stretch my stiff muscles, relieve my chest that aches. But my back is on fire, the waves of heat and pain ebbing and flowing as if it were a hot coal exposed on a windy day.

“Merikh.” I hear Hayes’ surprised voice as he rushes over, gently pressing me back down as I try to make my way to my hands

stomach. and knees. He fights my efforts, winning out as my body gives way and I grunt, collapsing back into my

“I want up.” I rasp out, my voice dry and painful. The room seems to move, swirling from side to side as I try to focus and fail. I blink over and over again until Hayes comes into focus and everything comes flooding back in.

The meeting from hell, Giselle going berserk and trying to kill Colette. I choke on the panic as I tear myself from the bed before Hayes has a second to stop me.

“Brother, you need to rest.” He insists.

“Where is Colette?” I demand, ignoring his request. “Is she okay?”

“We can talk about it in a second, but you need to lie back down.” He says. “You are going to undo all the bandages and herbs that are healing you.”

"Where is my Luna?" I grit out, trying to force myself to stand on my own.

Hayes sighs, scowling at me, and my stomach falls, the worst thoughts climbing up from the dark place in my mind. Did I not save her! Was I too late? Or had my being injured left her exposed and open for another attack she couldn't fight off?

I can hear Hayes speaking to me, but the anxiety and pain from the thoughts is enough to send me off the deep end. , had I failed her? Had I unknowingly broken another promise to her? I try to turn toward the door, releasing the bed as I take a step and tumble forward with a cry of agony. My body falls forward , but not before Hayes catches me.

Tingles ripple through my body, a satisfied sigh breaking from my chapped lips and I look up to see it wasn't Hayes who stopped my fall but my sweet, perfect Colette. She is on her knees before me, her soft hands on my face, cupping my cheeks as she lifts my eyes to meet hers.

"You're awake," she whispers, tears breaking free from her eyes as she lunges forward and pressing her lips to mine. My arms cling to her back, my body protesting, but I ignore the pain. How can I feel anything other than sheer relief when she is okay?

She pulls away, her forehead pressed to mine as she breathes heavily, her hands still clinging to my face, like she is afraid to touch any other part of me. My arms grow tired, slipping down and falling to my side, my body unwilling to respond to my demands any longer.

"Are you injured?" I ask, scanning her face.

"No," she says, pressing her lips to mine again as she sobs, moving as close as possible, just wanting to be near me. I welcome her touches, the sparks calming, the fire burning on my back like a hose to the flames.

"Thank heavens," I murmur, breaking away once more. She looks past me and nods to someone.

"Let's get you up and back on the bed." She says, and I furrow my brows

"No. I do not want to be in bed any longer." I tell her and she sighs,

I meet her eyes again, witnessing the sadness there, and I frown. My injury must have scared her, hell it scared Hayes, so it must be pretty bad. But I am an alpha, one with a true mate, so I will heal soon and it will be like o

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Chapter 59

“What happened after Giselle attacked you?” I ask her, and she shakes her head.

**I will explain everything once you get on the bed. You are bleeding through the bandages, so we need to change them.”*

Hayes gently grabs me under the arm, Colette following suit on the other side as they lift me with heavy grunts. I try my best. to help them, using my legs that feel like wet noodles. They both struggle to get me to the bed and I lean forward, scooting myself as far as possible.

Hayes walks around to the other side, grabbing my leg as he drags me on all the way, and I turn my head to see Colette kneel on the ground beside me. She props her chin up on her crossed arms on the white bedding and a happy smile on her lips.

Her hand reaches out, dragging her nails through my hair, gently massaging her way through my locks. I moan in satisfaction, happily distracted from the pain of moving

“Hayes, go get Ezra.” She whispers over me. Hayes silently exits the room, looking at me once before closing the door behind

him

“Ezrah will be in to change your bandages.” She whispers.

“Ezrah? Why not Brent?” I ask, a little surprised. Healing is usually Brent’s realm of things. I can sense she feels my confusion, and she frowns a little, then sighs.

*"Brent is in a meeting with Caspian." She says, then she looks away solemnly.
"The council is finished."*

I chuckle. "I am not entirely surprised by that"

"Some people have taken sides, others have just disappeared." She shrugs, looking at me once more.

I arch a brow. "Who is still here?" I ask her.

"From the council, Brent, Caspian, us, Elm and Joffrey."

My eyes widen a little, my hand reaching up to stop her from her assault on my skull, making me sleepy again. This is important information and I want to be as awake as I can be as she relays it to me.

"Joffrey?" I ask, confused.

"It wasn't really his own choice!" She frowns. "He was injured and Elm saved him. He is still unconscious. Caspian and Ezra really have more details than I do right now."

"Why is that? You are on the council. You are my Luna." I say, growing defensive and she laughs. Her smile and the melody of her happiness fill me with hope and I give her a soft smile. Damn, I love this woman.

"I have been a little preoccupied." She admits, her smile fading, and I find it's like watching the sun hiding behind a cloud. "With what?" I ask her.

"With worrying about you. Trying to make sense of why you would allow yourself to get injured. You are the important one, Merikh, and you could have died."

I scoff, letting my emotions flow through the bond so she can feel how much I disagree with her. She shoots me an unhappy

look.

"How many times must I say it, Colette? You own me, all of me. Without you, I am nothing but an empty shell. The thought of you getting hurt, the thought of losing you. My voice breaks and I clear my throat. "You are my strength and my weakness, and I will always protect you without a second thought."

Tears tumble from her eyes and she wipes at them, chuckling to break the serious tone she is so uncomfortable with.

“Well,” she sniffles. “Ugh, you always know the right thing to say.”

“Only when I mean the words,” I grin.

She stands, leaning down as she presses her lips gently to mine.

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Chapter 19

Π

“I love you, Merikh.” She whispers. “So damn much. We will figure this all out, and then we will have a beautiful life together.”

I arch a brow, ignoring the pain lacing through my nerves as my muscles begin to twitch.

“Does that mean you forgive me?” I tease her and she laughs, standing up straight.

She tries to hide a smile, but it lives in her eyes, unable to be masked as she looks at me and I feel her love like a gentle warmth in my soul, filling me with nothing but hope for the future she plans for us

“Nearly dying seems like the easy way out.” She says, biting her smile back.

“Oh wow,” I grin. “Noted.”

“If you want to be forgiven, promise me you won’t ever do that again.”

“What? Nearly dying to protect you?” I ask, flabbergasted.

“Yes!” she says with a head nod.

“How long do you think you can hold a grudge?” I ask thoughtfully. “Because I will never promise to not protect you.”

“Oh, then I just may never be able to forgive you.” She says, defiantly,

“Hmmm, then I suppose it’s a good thing I’m a glutton for punishment.” I grin as the door opens and Ezra pops his head in.

“Hello old friend, rumor has it you are ready for a bandage change?”

“I guess so.” I mutter, not too excited about my wounds to be messed with.

“This will hurt quite a bit, so hold on to Colette’s hand for a little less pain.”

“Maybe this will be your reminder to think before you act?” she whispers, dropping to her knees and taking my hand.

“Unlikely.” I grin, then I grimace as Ezra touches me, the pain rushing through my body and making my toes feel numb. This is going to hurt like hell.

Chapter 60

“How are you feeling?” Hayes asks, sitting next to me as I lay on my stomach for yet another damn day waiting for the green light to move. If it weren’t for my inability to sit upright, I would have been gone the same damn day, back to our pack where we are safe, where Colette is safe.

“Like a dragon tried to burn a hole through my body.” I grumble, my mood more sour by the minute.

“Considering that’s exactly what happened, I’d say you are fairing pretty well.” He says with a smile, though I can see the way it doesn’t reach his eyes. He looks tired as he plops into the chair opposite of my bedside. “Where did Colette go?”

“With Penny to change and shower, then grab some food.” I tell him and he nods before a yawn breaks free. I watch my brother as he fights to keep his eyes open, no doubt running ragged because of my injury and his mate he has still told me nothing about. “How is she?” I ask.

“Colette?” he asks, snapping his eyes open. “Uh, she seems stressed, but she is managing well enough.”

“No. I mean Leandra.” I say with a point stare. He drags his hand down his face, leaning forward, his elbows landing on his knees as he exhales.

“That would be easier to discern if the woman would talk to me. Instead, she refuses to say a damn thing,” he groans. “It’s like she j

ust shuts down when I am around. She has spoken with Penny and Brent. But me? Nothing.”

“Maybe you make her nervous?” I offer and he scoffs..

“Why the hell would I make her nervous? We are mates, we are supposed to calm each other.” he stands angrily. He paces away from me before he quickly spins, his hand on his hip as if he is thinking.

“Have you discussed the mate bond? Accepted each other verbally yet?” I ask him, and he scoffs.

“She is a traitor to her kind. Why the hell would I accept her?” He asks, like it’s a simple assessment.

“Hayes.” I say, and he shakes his head, scowling at me.

“No, no. I already know what you are going to say. Trust me, I have thought of every scenario. I know what I have to do next. It’s just that...I don’t know that I can do it yet,” he blabbers on, rattling nonsense as if I have the strength to follow his ramblings. I try to get his attention, but he is so far lost in his own thoughts.

“Hayes!” I yell and he freezes, blinking at me like he can’t fathom why on earth I am yelling at him. “What the hell are you on about?”

“Rejecting her, obviously.” He says it likes it’s so simple and I chuckle dryly. The idiot thinks this is the only option? “Why do you think you have to reject her?” I ask him, arching a brow as I try to move. My back burns and I hiss, pushing myself up despite the pain. Hayes rushes over to me, but I shove him off. “Answer me.” I demand.

“She is one of them.” He replies, the answer tearing him up inside.

“Is Percy one of them?” I ask him, my hands gripping the side of the bed for dear life. His brows furrow, and he shakes his head.

“Of course not. He is our gamma.” He says.

“And what makes him different from her?” I ask. “Is it because we don’t know her? She could very well have been kidnapped, coerced, or even brainwashed.”

“Percy was trusted before this all took place and he fought them off. She is a Lycan. She should have been living in our pack and yet, no one knows her. Where did she come from? How did she wind up with this group?” He asks. “It comes down to previously established trust. And I have none with her.”

you

“Have you asked her any of these questions?” I ask him and he frowns, looking away from me. “I will take that as a ‘no’ then. How about tell me what you have asked her?”

3:43 PM

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“What does it matter?” He exhales. “Clearly I have to reject her, but I can’t do that if she doesn’t even acknowledge I’m even

there with her

“Why would you reject her? Because she had the redevyes?” I ask him and he throws his hands up like it’s obvious.

“She is the enemy,” he huffs.

1 stare

at my usually level—

headed brother. The one with the sage advice who always calms me down and makes me think harder than I wish to at times. He is so caught up in what is going on around him he is not capable of understanding the gift he is being given.

The mate bond is difficult, and though Lauren was a nightmare, without her, without

the pain and suffering I experienced at her betrayal, I would not be who I am today. I would not have found the one person who can see beneath my shit mistakes and issues and stand at my side wanting to help me get better.

"She was used as a puppet." I remind him. "Her actions were not her own and we all know that."

"Does it matter?" he asks, sounding defeated. "How the hell do I trust someone who could kill us at any moment because she is being controlled?"

I sigh, leaning forward to ease the soreness in my back.

"You start by getting to know her. Who she is, not who she was when she was under someone else's control." I push myself to stand, grunting as I reach out for the bedside table to steady myself.

"You shouldn't be up and moving around yet, Merikh," He says, rushing to my side.

"And you are avoiding the subject." I frown at him. "I am fine here. You need to go talk to Leandra. Not as her mate, but as my beta, perhaps she will answer questions not related to you and your bond with her."

Hayes is no doubt unhappy with my suggestion, but he shakes his head and sighs before he runs his hands through his hair. "I'd really rather not," He grumbles. "I think I just need a little more time"

I look at my younger brother, really look at him and I can see the way this all hurts him. Hayes has always been the sensitive one. The one I turn to when I am being too dense or hard to notice something needs a gentler touch. Hayes has waited for his mate for years only to find her not able to be herself. Of course it breaks him.

"How about this then, help me get to Percy's room?" I offer, "And I will go with you after to visit Leandra. We can try to talk to her together."

"Do you think I really want to get my ass drowned by my luna?" He scoffs. "Because that is what will happen. I saw how she drowned that damn troll thing with a freaking floating water bubble. Sorry, brother, but your mate is scarier than you."

The door opens on cue and in strolls my stunning Luna, her wet hair slicked back in a high ponytail and an unsatisfied frown on her pretty lips. She rushes to my side, slipping under my arm to help me stand up straighter. I bite back the groan of pain as she grips my waist, trying to avoid my burns.

“What are you doing? You should be in bed still.” She hisses, looking up at me as I grin down into her perfectly pinked, angry face.

“I was just about to go visit Percy” I grin at her. She slides her eyes to Hayes and then clears her throat, looking away. Her lack of response to my answer has my skin crawling, waiting for the bad news. “What happened?” I ask.

“Percy..he isn’t really himself right now..” she whispers, and I furrow my brow.

“What the hell does that mean?” I ask her and she bites her lip, looking into my eyes, her own filled with tears she is trying to keep at bay.

“He feels guilty. He won’t speak to anyone. Not even Penny.” She says, sadness in her eyes.

I look at Hayes, who seems to have the same thought I do.

3:44 PM M

Chapter 60

“He was talking with Penny the other day?” I ask her and she nods.

“Yeah, he seemed like he was doing so much better, and then suddenly he stopped talking to everyone and started refusing food.” She says, looking between Hayes and me like she is trying to figure out what is going on.

Both Leandra and Percy are no longer speaking. I don’t know if Leandra is eating or not, but the fact that neither is choosing to speak makes me think we have two options for what species is helping the red-eyed wolves.

Many species have the ability to control or possess others, but only two species leave their puppet a shell of a person until the one in control is close enough again to either release them or reuse them. Witches and Fae. But not just any witch or fae. Those of higher status. Considering both Elm and Brent are here, on our side, that means one of their species is being used against us.

Now the question is which species, and who?

“I need to see Caspian. Now.” I tell Hayes. “And bring Brent and Elm as well. I think we may finally have a direction to work in.”