



Wanted by the Wolves (The Last Shifters #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Shes the last omega wolf and her heat is almost here.

Nova has been in hiding for a decade, living off fresh game in the forest and managing to fend off feral wolves. With her first heat coming, shes forced to venture back into civilization to gather heat suppressants or risk being discovered.

But an accidental encounter with a guard in the city leads her right into the hands of the powerful Alpha King. Rather than submit to the Kings plan to take her for a mate, Nova turns to her wolf.

When the feral hunters catch wind of the Kings plan, they vow to protect the feral omega. But with her heat approaching, nowhere is safe. The brothers can only think of one person who is powerful enough to help them, but the healer wants nothing to do with omegas.

Can the brothers convince the jaded healer to help them bring Nova back from the brink?

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Age Fifteen

The howling of wolves rips me from sleep.

Ferals. Too close to the village.

I shoot out of bed, stubbing my toe on the wooden bedpost as I race down the hall, half hopping as I curse.

My grandmother is in the cabin's living room, peeking out the curtains. In the darkness, her white nightgown shines in the light of the waning moon. The image is haunting. The feral wolves' dark song makes the ghostly scene even more chilling. My heart pounds, terror rippling up my spine.

Her braid whips around as she turns, silver eyes shining with fear. "There are many. You must flee," she says, voice trembling.

I swallow around the lump in my throat, frozen in shock. This day was always coming, but I'm not ready. I'll never be ready.

Grabbing her book of spells from its place in the kitchen, Grandmother Natalia hastily flips through the pages until she finds what she's after. She rips out the page, muttering an apology to the gods. "Use this to suppress your heat when it comes."

"H-How?" I stutter.

Grandmother is a healer wolf, with the ability to harness magic beyond just shifting,

but there are very few wolves like her. I'm definitely not one of them.

"This is only a tea. It won't require any spell work," she says reassuringly as she folds the page and tucks it into a backpack she grabs from a hook by the door. It's our bug-out bag, packed for the eventuality of another feral attack. I hate that we need it. "Get to water near a cave. Don't go into the city if you can help it. If you must, wear the binder and cloak your scent. Take to your animal, but make sure you shift to your human regularly. You must not lose yourself to your wolf."

Her words are clipped as she gives last-minute instructions, but I can barely understand them over the pounding in my ears. I blink, and she's ushering me back down the hall to my room. She's long past the shifter age of being physically strong, already having passed her one hundred thirtieth year. Still, her spirit is so fierce it's easy to forget.

She's so much better at this than I am. I want to hide under the covers, pretend this isn't happening. She tosses clothes at me, and my quick shifter reflexes are the only reason I can catch them. My brain is foggy, my hands shaking.

"Nova." The warning in her voice snaps me out of it.

I tug off my nightgown and hop into thick jeans, layering myself in sweaters before adding a thick sheepskin coat. By the time my boots are laced, shrieks have joined the haunting howls.

The ferals have reached the village.

The blast of gunshots mixes with the snarling sound of wolves fighting. The village alphas won't make it, not with that many wolves. This isn't a lone feral. It's a pack of moon-mad shifters who are completely lost to their beasts.

The stinging in my nose and throat betrays my urge to cry.

My grandmother pulls me into her arms, and I hug her back, trying to memorize this moment and make it last. She smells of cinnamon and sugar mixed with strong nettle tea. It's the warm, comforting smell of my childhood pack home.

That was before .Before my parents died. Before I knew she wasn't my grandmother. Before the ferals wiped through the territory like a plague.

Pulling a jar from the pack, she hastily rubs an ashy mixture into my exposed skin. "Run, child. There is no time to fear." She pushes away from me, urging me to the window.

I grab her wrinkled hand and find her silver eyes. "Come with me. We can?—"

Her smile is full of so much sadness it stops my words. She doesn't even have to say it. We both know she is too old to run. She won't survive winter nights in the North Forest, not with ferals chasing us.

It doesn't make it any easier. I try to push back. "I can stay with you, fight," I insist.

She shakes her head, and it's full of determination. "You must survive. You may be the last of our kind."

With the stubbornness only an elder can pass off, she herds me out the back window. She follows on a leap-shift, turning into a small white wolf.

Down the hill, the moon madness is spreading in the village as the alphas battle against a pack of twenty or more ferals. The fierce snarls and shrieks accompany a scene of chaos and death. Neighbors turn on one another. Sane wolves fall to the moon madness. Everything left of my home will be gone after tonight. My heart

breaks at the sight.

A harrowing breeze blows down from the mountains, sending flutters of snow and a whistling wind into the village below our cabin at the top of a hill.

One of the ferals sniffs the air, and his head snaps in our direction.

Grandmother Natalia growls, crouching low. She snaps at me with her muzzle pulled back over her sharp fangs.

My heart races, knowing this will be the last time I see my home or her. Her warning growl urges me to run.

I turn and never look back, even as I hear her haunting song in the wind.

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Chapter 1

Nova

Ten Years Later

Ducking out of the tent, I shrug off my worn coat and slip on the one I lifted from the sleeping alpha inside. I'd watched the tents from my perch in the forest for an hour, waiting until I knew for sure that the younger alpha and his friends had finally passed out before I was brave enough to sneak inside.

The jacket and the hat were what I needed, but the canned food and cash were a nice surprise. I left him game in trade—I'm not a monster.

I stuff the cans into my pack, and the motion brings a whiff of sweetness. My chest wrap is soaked in sweat, and the fabric of my thermal shirt sticks to me after the two-day hike along the forest trails. The jacket I was wearing reeks of my tart green apple-and-cinnamon scent.

I'm not sure the jacket I lifted with the alpha's musky blend will be strong enough to mask it. Too much of my scent seeps through the blocking ash I've applied. Even though I'm dressed like an alpha, if anyone looks too closely, they'll see I'm too small. I'm not sure passing for a pup will work.

I waited too long to come.

As the nights count down to the full moon, my scent will continue to rise. It's still

two weeks away, but it's a date I've wished I could avoid forever.

This month is my twenty-fifth birthday. Only it's nothing to celebrate. I'm an omega wolf—possibly the last. My first heat will come with the full moon, and with it, my chances of survival nosedive.

An omega in heat in a territory full of only alphas? It's not good odds.

Does my perfume take that under advisement and simmer down?

No. It's all flashing arrows pointing toward the last omega.

The only way I'll survive is if I can make the suppressing tea and hibernate in my den until the full moon passes. I force myself to calm the fuck down before the fear in my scent makes me prey.

I toss my old coat in a lit barrel and pull the alpha's jacket tighter around me. The alpha's scent is strongest near the neck, and I practically rub myself along the soft inside, trying to mask my sweetness. The hat is next, covering the hack job I did on my long hair two nights ago before I left my den.

To keep as much of myself covered as possible, I tuck my chin into the collar and shove my shaking hands into my jeans' pockets. I pass a group of alphas drinking and playing cards in an open tent, but none of them bother looking my way.

Deep voices and snarls fill the night. Shifted wolves fight in small groups as others in human form mill about. Some cook or warm themselves by the open flames. Others are drunkenly brawling while a few try for sleep.

The tents of the Outskirts make me nervous. There are so many alphas in one place. Like me, all of them are here because they have nothing left. Their villages and

homes are gone, and their people are lost. It creates a sense of barely contained hopeless rage, the air charged with recklessness. One whiff of my true scent and this desolate place would become a free-for-all.

Weaving through the tent rows, I force myself to move at a pace that won't cause suspicion. I listen to their conversations as best I can, cataloging news. I've only been into the city a handful of times since I fled my home a decade ago, but the frequency of ferals in the forest is all I really need to know. Things aren't better. If anything, they're worse.

There are whispers of a new king, his lost boys, and his promises for a better future, but I think it doesn't matter if a new king has risen. As long as the magic is broken, our future is nothing but more death.

The omega wolves started dying out when my mother was a girl. When she and my fathers were killed in the first feral attack on our village, my grandmother, Natalia, told me the truth. My mother had been the daughter of the true Wolf King. It was a fact my mother never knew.

My grandmother was a woman of no blood relation to me. The night the usurper king and his wolves rose against my grandfather in an unfair challenge, the omega queen begged my grandmother—the queen's midwife healer—to flee with my mother. She did, taking the newborn pup back to her old village and raising her as her own.

According to my grandmother, the wolves' magic has been unbalanced ever since that night. Grandmother Natalia believed the usurper's betrayal broke our magic and angered our gods. She prepared me to hide and taught me how to survive in the forest as my wolf. Sometimes even surviving seems like too much to ask.

The hair on my body stands on end, and my wolf paces in the forefront of my mind, lending me her eyes as we weave through the crowds of alphas. The scents are

driving my wolf wild. It's equal parts fear and need. She wants her alpha mates' protection. In every crowd, she searches them out. Each wolf we manage to pass without being outed feels like a victory.

How can I blame my wolf's instincts though? She's hardwired to need alphas, to want the safety and stability they provide. She's not wrong. It's the world that's so fucked. But no matter what my omega needs, alphas aren't an option when I don't know which ones will turn feral or who can be trusted.

It takes another twenty minutes to pass through the housing tents before I find the makeshift trading square. My mouth waters at the fragrant grilled meats, the strong coffee brewing, and the freshly baked bread. I can almost taste the sweetness of the dough in the air.

My stomach protests in longing, but I force myself to keep moving. No matter how much I wish I could eat something other than fresh game, it's too risky. Being here at all is already a risk. I need to get the two last herbs I couldn't find in the forest for the heat-suppressing tea and hightail it back to my den where it's safe.

Okay, safe is a stretch.

My den is as safe as it can be for an omega alone in a forest full of ferals. I would still rather risk it with the moon-mad than here with the alphas of the North Pass. There are too many of them to be safe, and my omega scent could turn them feral.

By the time I reach the apothecary tent, the moon is high in the sky. My body is tense, and my hands are still shaking. Being in civilization feels strange. Everything is too much. I'm not used to the loudness, the deep voices, or the overwhelming scents of food and pheromones.

My eyes burn with the need to sleep after my days of travel, and everything inside me

wants the enclosed space of my nest. I take a deep breath and give myself a mental pinch to snap out of it.

Just go in and grab the herbs. Simple. Easy.

The chime above the tent flap jangles as I walk into the brightly colored shop. The cheerful bell startles me, and I almost dive out the way I came. I force myself to move forward, ignoring my racing heart, and head straight for the crates lining the walls. No one is here but the grey-haired, grizzled alpha grinding herbs behind a partition.

With so many crates stuffed full, it takes me a moment to find what I'm after. Most of my grandmother's tea ingredients can be found in our native forest, but a few must be grown in a garden. I take extra herb sachets, hoping to store enough that I won't have to return for another year.

My voice is a giveaway, even when I mimic the deep sounds of an alpha, so I stay silent as I set the herbs on the counter. I leave more than enough cash for the shopkeeper.

Thank you, passed-out alpha.

The healer looks me over, his silver eyes shrewd and assessing. "Interesting combination." He wipes his hands on an apron, stepping closer. "Care to explain what you need these for?"

We both know these are herbs wolves use to suppress heat, but that isn't all they're used for. As long as I don't speak, he can't confirm the suspicion I see in his eyes.

Without answering, I swipe the packets and take off. I lose myself in the street crowd. Looking back over my shoulder, I sigh in relief. The old man isn't following.

I shake off my fear and turn to run, but my first step smacks me headfirst into a member of the guard. The alpha is a wall of muscle, his pine scent so sharp it burns.

“Watch where you’re going,” he grumbles. One of his big paws clasps my shoulder, trying to steady me.

I feel the moment he gets a whiff of my scent. His body goes rigid as he lets off a low growl, and I know it’s over. He lunges for me, fangs already dropped and eyes glazed.

“Omega,” he snarls.

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Chapter 2

Nova

The pungent scent of ammonia forces my eyes to open. My head is pounding, and every muscle aches. I blink, and the world is off kilter, with a slight spinning that makes everything seem too fast. Before I can get my bearings, someone pinches my chin and draws my eyes upward. I wince, and the fuzzy shadows and light are replaced by an alpha crowding over me.

What the fuck? Or maybe where the fuck?

I blink again, but the alpha's large shadow remains unclear amid the specks dancing in my vision.

"You're quite the little troublemaker," the alpha says, his voice laced with something dark and hungry. "And the gods have seen fit to give you to me."

The cruel and possessive violence in the cadence of his voice rattles my bones. It's all alpha power, pressing his will against mine. He bounces to his feet from his crouch, looking behind me and raising his arms to cheers.

I swallow my fear, blinking through the dizziness, and look around the room. This is some kind of meeting room, wooden and open. The packed-in wolves are barely contained, all eyes on me—their prey. The room pulses with pheromones, the thick, spicy musk edged with lust.

Memories filter in—the tent square, my need for the herbs, running into the guardsman, and trying to fight for my freedom. There was a rushing crowd of alphas, then darkness.

The guardsman must have fought his way out of the tents and brought me here... but where is here?

The alpha's commanding voice forces my attention back to him. He's big, but so are most alphas. Something in his stance, though, betrays his savagery. That thinly veiled threat makes my gut clench and fear race up my spine.

Wherever here is, it isn't good.

He speaks to the crowd, but his eyes are on me. "Brothers, this is the sign that we're following the right path. The gods have blessed me, given me a mate, and given us all an omega queen for our new kingdom. We have risen from the Outskirts and taken back the throne. Under the full moon, we will make a new future for wolves, just as our ancestors did before we were lost. The omega will be mine by bite but all of ours by right. Let us take her together."

Growls and cheers explode around the packed room, the alphas stomping their feet in a thunderous roar of approval.

His words are splinters digging under my skin. This must be the new Alpha King. He means to mate me and let the others breed me under the full moon. The shock of his plan pulls me into action, and I drag myself off the wooden floor.

My body smarts with aches, and pain lances my head. My wobbly legs want to collapse, to give up right here because it's hopeless. What can one omega do against an alpha army?

But I refuse. I let the shock of the Alpha King's treatment fuel my resolve. Not so long ago, omegas were cherished. They were integral parts of packs, and they were protected.

In the age of Vikings, the shifter wolves were made by Odin to be the people's protectors. Omegas give heart to that purpose. This new Alpha King believes he can fix our problems by taking an omega mate by force? It's an affront to everything we are.

His audacity makes me laugh. It bubbles from my throat and spills into the space between us until the alphas in the room are frozen by my hysteria.

I know my worth. I won't be reduced to a breeder for a pack of wild wolves. They will have to kill me first. That knowledge frees me, lets me give away my humanity to my wolf.

The Alpha King takes my face between his palms, his hands too tight and his lips turned down. "You laugh now, bitch. Just wait until the full moon. I will own you."

I spit in his face. "You will never own me."

My wolf takes my skin. She attacks, her jaw clamping down. She misses his throat but snags his ear. Something hits her side, sharp and swift. Darkness rushes to meet me. Right before passing out, I hear the rip of his tearing flesh.

A triangle of light breaches the darkness. I stir, trying to gather my bearings. Down here, in what the guards call the pit, time is without meaning. I don't know how long they've held me here, but the aching warmth in my gut and the slick between my legs tell me the full moon is close.

After I bit the Alpha King, I woke up here. At first, the king came to me and tried to

coax me into submitting. He's offered almost everything but my freedom. When promises of fine clothes and comfy nests didn't work, he tried to convince me with his talk of fate and his plans to right the wrongs done by our last king. His pretty words didn't fool me.

Any semblance of kindness vanished after that. He left me to the guards, ordering them to persuade me with their fists. That cut through all his bullshit to the truth: I'm his prisoner, and he plans to claim me during my heat.

A guardsman approaches, the scent of the soup he carries combating the sharp tang of my piss. He's guard number four. My wolf managed to maul the first three before they wised up and put me in a wolfsbane-coated collar. No more shifting. But even as a human, I will strike if I get an opportunity.

The alpha tentatively puts the tray on the dirt floor.

I lunge for him, teeth bared. Chains yank me back to the wall. White-hot pain sears my neck.

The alpha gives a throaty laugh. "I can't wait to see how much fight you have left after a pack of wolves has knotted you. I bet you'll be sweet as pie, strung out on dick like a good little omega."

I hiss, flinging the tray against the stone wall. The mess splatters us both. His laugh bounces off the walls, flooding the room with his pheromones. His excitement at my resistance is as clear on his face as it is in the boisterous sound of his laugh.

The way my fear makes the guard hard pisses me off. I snap, this time sinking my teeth into his thigh. The clap of his backhand throws me into the stone wall, the too-tight collar chafing my skin.

“I like that you’re a biter.” The dark-haired alpha’s fangs glint in the shallow light.
“Just remember, omega, I’ll bite too.”

His big boots shuffle up a cloud of dirt on his way out, his oily scent following in his wake.

My wolf growls, the sound vibrating in my chest. I don’t know if omega wolves can go feral, but if my wolf gets a chance, she will rip out every one of their throats.

A stabbing heat hits my stomach, and I crumble at the cramping ache reverberating inside me. Panting through it, I curl into a ball and force myself to think of the wide-open green of my forest home.

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Chapter 3

Briggs

The Jeep rolls to a stop outside the training arena. In the stillness of the cold mountain night, the crunch of gravel beneath my feet is loud.

The Alpha King demanded we return for the full moon tomorrow, cutting off our latest mission early. He's lucky he caught us in a village when our phones were on, or he would have waited another month. I almost wish we had missed him.

We've been on the road for months. Both of us could use a week of sleep and a damn good shower. But if the cost is suffering through the victory party the new king has planned for the full moon, I'd rather stink and sleep when I'm dead.

It's too bad my littermate, Dex, is so huge. Otherwise, maybe no one would notice if we skipped out on the king's festivities.

As if Dex hears my thoughts, he growls in protest. He hates coming here. If he had his way, he would turn to the woods and never look back.

When Dex and I returned from our last mission almost a year ago to find the king and the Wolf Council dead after a run-in with the famed white dragon of Moon Lake Valley, we weren't exactly heartbroken. Under his reign, the wolves had begun to turn feral and our gods-given mating runes had died out. To me, that doesn't look like a coincidence.

The new king isn't any better. Krum came in after the last king was killed. The pack alphas had decimated their own ranks, and all the long-standing powerful families had been wiped out. It wasn't until they were weak that he challenged for Alpha King. He may have taken the title of Alpha King in a fair challenge, but his victory was uncontested at that point. Some think he was smart, but he waited until it was a sure thing before fighting. The move reeks of cowardice.

I'm sure this celebration is supposed to be a gesture from the new king. With the numbers left, there should be no divisions between us, but the new Alpha King rubs me the wrong way.

I don't guess it matters who leads. No matter how powerful the king is, he can't compete with extinction. Dex and I have traveled most of the wolves' five territories on our mission to rid the forest of the feral packs. Few villages remain, and none are without casualties. Our people are dying without omegas. Wolves are desperate. Unless the King has some magic to rid us of the ferals and stop the moon madness, all we can do is hold on. Even that won't work forever.

As Dex falls in step with me, he is quiet. We make our way up the lawn toward the Alpha King's compound. The burned-out evidence of the dragon's wrath scars the walls, though the new construction tries to obscure the wreckage.

Word is the previous Alpha King tried to take the female dragon by force when she refused to comply with his plans. It doesn't take more than natural sense to know that was a bad idea, but it seems common sense fled with our magic. I doubt it will return with this new king.

Maverick, a young wolf who works the front guard tower, races down to meet us. "You guys are back? How many ferals this time?" He takes the jar from Dex, silver eyes wide as he catalogs the number of fangs we will deliver to the King. "You two are badass. This has gotta be more than a hundred!"

Dex growls in reprimand, and the young wolf pales. My littermate is intimidating by sheer size, but the added scars and burned flesh make him look meaner than he is. About lost wolves, though, he's serious.

"We don't celebrate the passing of wolves, Mav. Even the ferals. Every one of those fangs was a man we lost," I explain.

The young wolf swallows roughly before nodding and lowering his eyes in submission.

It doesn't take more than a moment for the bouncy young wolf to find his beat again. In the next breath, he's talking circles around us and sharing news. I tune out most of it as we walk the last leg across the sprawling lawn to the compound, but the word "omega" jerks me back to attention.

"What did you say?"

The blond wolf misses the danger, too excited to read the change in my tone. "We caught one!"

This time, it's my growl that makes him pale. "What do you mean we caught an omega?"

Wolves don't catch omegas. They aren't fucking rabbits.

"She was in the Outskirts. The king had her brought here. He's taking her as his mate," the boy rambles.

"Alphas don't take mates," I warn.

An alpha's power should come from his ability to protect, not force.

Krum is from the Outskirts, like my brother and me, but we aren't the same. Dex and I grew up orphans in the Outskirts, never knowing our family pack, until a chance encounter with Elder Mako saved us. Mako took us in as headstrong teen wolves and made us into alphas. Though he was never a pack alpha, his lessons rang with truth. He taught us about the concept of balance, about giving as much as we take.

Krum talks a big game about protecting wolves, but as a young alpha, he was ruthless in his drive to become the top wolf in the tents, and I'm old enough to remember his willingness to kill sane wolves who got in his way. If he would do that to an alpha, what's to stop him from taking what he wants from an omega?

Maverick looks nervously between us.

The rumbling threat of my growl hasn't let up, and beside me, Dex has gone still. We're on the same page, but it clearly isn't the same one as other wolves.

"Explain again from the top," I demand.

Maverick steps back, his body finally cluing in to the danger. His words are fast as he details the last two weeks. It sounds like a tall tale, how a guard found her in the tents and the harrowing story of how she was almost mauled to death by the alphas in the Outskirts when she was spotted. The longer he talks, the more my wolf wants to be let loose. When Maverick gets to the part where he explains how the king promised that she would be his mate and he would share her for pack breeding, Dex almost loses his shit. I can feel him radiating barely restrained fury.

Right there with you, brother.

Each word makes my wolf more agitated. My stomach flips in horror at what my people are capable of. She's an omega wolf—possibly the last of her kind—and this is how the king thinks to treat her?

Dex grinds out his words. “To her. Now.”

The young wolf hesitates. “She’s in the pit. They say she’s killed two already. That maybe she’s feral.”

An omega in the pit? The king has lost his damn mind.

Without waiting for the boy, I take off for the back of the compound, Dex on my tail.

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Chapter 4

Dex

The pit is empty, but it reeks of her terror and rage. Old food rots along the wall. In the corner next to the mounted shackles is a singular blanket.

My wolf tries to take my skin, and I force myself to retract my claws.

Briggs bends down and inspects the chains, sniffing. "Blood." He looks at me, his eyes reflecting the outrage I feel. "From wolfsbane."

Fuck.

Wolfsbane is used to magically suppress a wolf. It hurts like a bitch. It's inhumane torture, the way it muzzles a shifter's beast. If given long enough or in high doses, it severs the soul bond to our wolf.

We're hired fangs, and we don't even use wolfsbane to subdue ferals. We take out ferals because someone has to keep us safe, and the lost wolves deserve dignity in their deaths. There is no dignity or honor in using wolfsbane.

Typically, we keep our noses down and don't interfere much with pack politics. Most of our time is spent far away from the wolves we've sworn to protect. But caging an omega? With wolfsbane? Forcing her to bond? I can't ignore this. I give my brother a look, and he nods.

He turns to Maverick and assesses him. The boy looks nervous, backing away. How someone could smell this and be okay with whatever happened here is beyond me. They tortured her.

“I didn’t see you guys. I’m going back to my post.” Maverick’s words are shaky, his movements tense as he scurries out of the hallway and sprints to the door.

I growl, half tempted to chase him and ensure he doesn’t squeal.

Briggs pats my shoulder. “Leave it. He’s too scared of you to talk.” He hands me the ratty blanket. “I’ll find us an out. You track her scent, get her outta there, and we haul ass. We can worry about the rest later.”

My nostrils flare as I let my wolf scent fully. Behind the acrid fear and the stink of filth is tart apples and spicy cinnamon. I follow the trace out of the pit and through the back entrance of the compound.

Briggs takes the lead, making small talk with those who stop us as we move through the halls. The place is busy in anticipation of the king’s planned celebration. No one bothers to address me. Briggs is the mouth of our operation, and we use this to our advantage.

I split off and follow the trace until I’m in the wing of personal rooms downstairs.

A young wolf darts off a trio of guardsmen, holding out an arm. “This area is off limits.”

My words sound gruff after so long without much use, but I force them out anyway. “That’s why they sent me.”

The dark-haired wolf looks down the hallway and over his shoulder. A crash makes

him wince. The other two guards shift nervously on their feet.

These guards are a joke. It looks as if the king plucked the pups right out of the tents and plopped them here.

“You’re the feral hunter? The king thinks you can tame her?” the braver of the three asks, already selling the lie for me.

I nod.

One of the other guards cocks his head. “Did you just get back?”

I nod again.

“You don’t talk much,” the first one points out.

I growl in warning, already done with these pups and their questions. Forcing myself to keep my alpha leashed and speak instead of using my fists, I grumble, “Can I get to it?”

The first guard nervously steps aside, and the others nod me through.

“Good luck. She’s sent another half dozen to the healer today,” the kid warns.

His words piss me off, but he isn’t the root of the problem. I brush past him and down the hall. Her scent is getting stronger. I know I’ve found her when I stop before a set of double doors that smell like the coming of fall.

The room is wrecked. Curtains lay in tatters on the floor. The furniture is overturned. Among the macabre streaks of blood and shredded bedding, pillows spit their feathers.

The sound of running water draws me to the bathroom, where two guardsmen have their backs to me. Their weapons are raised, pointed at a hissing woman backed into a corner by an overflowing tub.

She's a fierce thing, dirty and small but full of fight.

And she's an omega.

I take out the first guard with an arm around his neck, the pressure point sending him to his knees. The second guard I pile drive to the floor after he takes a shot at me and misses. For that, I shoot them both with darts for good measure.

The omega warns me with her crouch that if I come closer, she'll attack. She snarls, and her scent spikes with fear.

My voice doesn't want to work, but somehow, I force out the words. "I'm here to help you escape. I won't hurt you."

What the fuck were we thinking when we decided to send me for this? I'm the absolute wrong man for trying to calm a scared omega. My ugly mug and bulky size are going to send her over the edge. I crouch with her, making myself as small as possible and keeping my eyes downcast.

We stay that way for tense minutes. I feel the air shift and know she's come closer, but I don't dare move a muscle.

She sniffs the air and takes another crouching step. Up close, she smells like burnt apple pie. The warm, homey scent mixed with the sharp tang of distress makes my wolf want to howl. It's all wrong. She should only ever smell happy. Safe.

She doubles over, holding her stomach. The small omega cries out in pain, and the air

fills with her tart apple.

I force myself to stay still even though every part of my body wants me to go to her, to pull her into my arms and run out of this nightmare. I won't do that. She needs to come to me so she can feel in control.

My purr rattles from deep in my chest, the sound so surprising I almost stumble in shock. It hiccups, then starts again. I've never made the sound and only heard it a few times as a pup. The magic of it works to soothe the air, and I feel her tension dissipate.

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart. Let me take you somewhere safe. I promise I'm not here to hurt you," I say, keeping my voice steady, trying to be calm for her.

She crawls closer, and I hold out my hand. Her small fingers clasp mine. I look into wide silver eyes full of fear. "Alpha."

"That's right, omega. I've got you," I promise.

A rumbled growl sounds from behind me, and the small omega hisses before sinking her teeth into my leg. Before I can strike the intruder, the little omega falls to the floor. The motherfucker hit her with a tranquilizer dart.

"Dude, she bit you!" the young guard shouts.

"No shit," I say as I land the first blow. It takes another two hits for the guard to join his friends on the wet bathroom floor.

"Damn. That fucker was fast," my brother calls from the outer room.

I glare over my shoulder at Briggs as he stumbles into the bathroom. He at least has

the sense to look sheepish.

He raises his hands in surrender. “Sorry, they were headed to check on you. I got his friends, but he made an escape.” Briggs tries to go to the omega, but the menacing growl rising from my chest stops him in his tracks. He looks at me, his voice softening. “I’m not gonna hurt her, big guy. Take it easy. But if we plan to get out of here without alerting the king, we gotta move our asses.”

I scoop up the sleeping omega and cradle her against my chest. She doesn’t wake—the dart should keep her asleep for hours— but she curls a finger into my shirt. The contact makes it feel as if my heart is about to leap from my chest. The way my heart thunders to life as it rips its way out of long buried layers of war and death is startling.

Everything becomes crystal clear with her in focus. She’s the mission now. Nothing matters but keeping her safe.

“Rest now, sweetheart. I’ve got you,” I promise her.

Briggs shucks off his flannel and wraps it around her. He searches the passed-out guards for weapons and clears the room before coming back for me. “Let’s move.”

“You got a plan?”

“Yeah, but it involves a window.” He shrugs.

Of course it does.

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Chapter 5

Briggs

The scent in the Jeep is so intense that I'm having difficulty focusing on the road. She floods the enclosed space with sharp cinnamon mixed with crisp apple. Her scent is sprinkled with rich, creamy vanilla, and all I want to do is roll around in it. With the pull of the moon, it's nearly impossible to focus beyond my baser instincts.

My wolf wants to get her to a den, breed her, and claim her throat.

I mentally tap his nose.

Bad wolf.

Now isn't the time for that bullshit. Just because she's an omega doesn't mean she's mine. No matter what the moon is telling my wolf.

My job is to keep her safe. Nothing more.

I roll down my window to clear my head, and the chilly mountain air helps cut through the rising need to rut. Feral howls echo through the forest, and I check the mirrors again. Her scent is so strong they're going to catch it if they're close enough.

We've barely escaped the Outskirts of the North Pass territory. The Alpha King and his wolves will learn of our jailbreak soon if they haven't already. I have no doubt he'll send teams for us.

Getting out of there was easier than it should have been. Nobody thought to guard the window to where they were holding her.

Bunch of amateurs.

More than half the new king's guards are pups from the tents. The soldiers are untrained and too busy gloating at their newfound lot in life to be vigilant or strategic.

Once they realize she's gone, it will be too late to follow her scent trail. The ferals, on the other hand, are gonna be a problem. If this is how much she's perfuming before the full moon, her peak during heat will draw wolves like a homing beacon. The only way we keep her alive is to get her somewhere where we can hide her scent.

In the backseat, my brother has her bundled up in his lap. He's purring for her. You'd think that seeing an omega would be the strangest thing of the night. I haven't laid eyes on one in almost a decade. But listening to my normally silent brother—the one who scares most living things—purr for the tiny omega? That shit is the wildest thing I've ever seen, hands down.

A howl, closer this time, forces my foot on the gas.

"Where?" Dex asks, keeping his tone low. I don't know why. The tranq dart they hit her with should keep her out for at least the next twenty-four hours. With her injuries, it might be longer.

"Briar Ridge?" I ask. The village is one we just visited on our way back to North Pass, so I know it's not been compromised. They have a compound we could fortify, but with her scent, it's a risk.

Dex gives a rough shake of his head no. "Needs a healer. The venom."

Shit. He's right.

Healers have never been common, but almost all of them have been wiped out or become so weak they're like regular wolves. Wolves have shifter magic that allows us to harness our beasts, but healers are wolves who can practice magic. The king has healers, but obviously that's not an option. Who the heck is left who is powerful enough to help her?

I rack my brain, searching through the places we've been in our years on the road.

"Gage!" I shout in realization, warmth growing in my chest at the memory of the healer.

I haven't seen him in a long time, but I don't know why I didn't think of him first. He's powerful, and the last time we were with him, he had wards. Those magical boundaries will keep the ferals out. Perfect.

I watch in the rearview mirror as my brother looks at the sleeping omega. He is enraptured by the tiny bundle in his arms. Never before has he acted like this. It's as though he's been on autopilot and has only just now awoken.

"You know our job is to protect her, right? She isn't ours." I hate that it needs to be said. Already, he's too attached.

He meets my eyes in the rearview mirror, the silver in his almost appearing to glow. No words are spoken, but I can see the war in his expression and feel his turmoil through the littermate bond. He knows I'm right, and he hates it.

That makes two of us.

The ferals have been closing in for the last fifty miles. I pull off the mountain road.

The half-cut trail is a bitch, making us bounce and jerk as we crawl across the rough terrain. It gets increasingly difficult to drive as the forest thickens. Another half mile and any semblance of a trail is gone.

I park, knowing the Jeep can't take us farther. To get to Gage's, we will have to go on foot the rest of the way. I abandon all but the small hiking backpack with our essentials, tossing the bag to Dex. He manages to get it on while holding her, refusing to let the omega leave his arms.

The tranq gun is next. He holds it with one hand and her with the other. It would be best if he could shift—his human legs will make us slow—but that isn't an option with the omega in her current state.

I don't bother hiding the Jeep. Her scent is impossible to mute without access to shit I don't have.

My wolf is eager for my skin, and I let his senses take over, shifting my form. Dex takes my wolf's nod to the east as a command. We set off into the thick trees, racing against the backdrop of a rising sun as the howls of ferals ring through the forest. My wolf's paws pound the dirt, eyes scanning for the first attack.

The ferals are tracking us from the west and the north in two distinct packs.

After another mile, the faint scent mark we're tracking deepens, and my wolf nips at Dex to hurry. He picks up the pace, but it's not enough.

The first feral attacks less than a half mile later. He's fast but goes down easily. Feral wolves are guided by instinct, but the moon madness makes them erratic and dangerous. They don't always act as wolves should. Normally, Dex and I work together to lay bait and ambush them. We're the ones hunting then. This time we're on the run, and we're going to have to face them head on.

Another two wolves take the fallen one's place. My wolf strikes, ripping out one's throat. The other wolf sinks his teeth into my right hind leg. The burn of the bite fuels my determination. I can't let him get to Dex. Before he can do any more damage, my wolf turns and pins him to the ground, making the killing bite.

After that, it's a shit show as more feral wolves rush in. Dex shoots as many as he can with the tranquilizers. That keeps them from overrunning us while my wolf fends off those who manage to get closer.

It doesn't matter though. Every bite sends the feral's venom through my blood. Already, my wolf is growing weak. We have too far to run before we reach safety.

Two wolves jump on my back as another leaps for Dex. My wolf snarls and thrashes, fighting with all I have. Another three jump into the fray, and my left hind leg snaps.

A blast of power echoes through the forest, and my wolf whimpers at the influx of magic. My vision blurs, and my ears ring.

Gage.

The ferals recover slowly from the healer's spell, allowing Dex to pull ahead. My injuries make it impossible to keep up, and my wolf falls behind. I nudge my brother through our littermate bond, urging him to get her to the wards. He looks back at me over his shoulder, his face a mask of indecision.

My jaws snap, a wolf's plea to protect her.

He's torn, but my bond is firm.

She is what matters. Keep her safe.

With a nod, he takes off.

My wolf turns back to the newest wave of ferals with a satisfied snarl. At least they will make it.

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Chapter 6

Gage

“N o. Absolutely not,” I mumble.

The battered, half-dead wolf in my arms doesn’t respond.

The fucker brings this shit to my door and thinks he’s going to die a martyr on the lawn?

Not today, Briggs. Not today.

I’m patching his ass up, then he and his brother can find somewhere else to ride out their tragic love story with the sweet-smelling omega. I refuse to watch this play out.

Skirting around Dex’s mammoth size, I lead him into the kitchen. The omega is damn near in heat, billowing perfume so thick it makes my eyes water. I hate that she smells so warm and inviting. The homey scent sinks in like barbed hooks.

“Set her down over there.” I lift my chin toward the butcher block table. “He’s out, so you better start talking.”

Dex shakes his head, looking down at the omega. A low warning sound pulses from his throat.

Fucking great. The alpha fog has already set in. There will be no reasoning with Dex.

“Fine. Don’t put her down.”

I place Briggs on the table. If he wasn’t in such bad shape, I’d consider kicking his ass. As it is, the self-sacrificing hero is covered in feral bites, and his left hind leg is broken in two places.

Dex growls again when I stand before him. “Easy, killer. Let me take a look so I know what I’m working with.”

He sits at one of the small kitchen chairs, the omega in his lap. I move slowly, telegraphing that I’m going to look her over. If this beast bites me, I’m not above zapping his ass.

The blanket hides a tiny blond-haired omega. She’s gotta be at least twenty-five, though she looks malnourished. Despite her sweet and inviting scent, she’s covered in filth. Purple and yellow bruises line her body, but it’s her neck that draws my eye. It’s scabbed and swollen, and the skin is so badly marred that it will probably scar.

“What the fuck happened to her?” I growl, eyes darting to Dex. My wolf pushes to the surface, ready to defend the small bundle.

That’s the problem with omegas—their biology is hardwired to make alphas want to protect them. Only in this fucked up world, that’s not possible. It’s a lose-lose.

“Captive. New king. He wanted her for breeding,” Dex grits out the words, his voice raspy. The guy hardly speaks, so that’s probably as much as I’m going to get.

No matter. It’s enough. It sounds as though this king is as bad as the last. Besides, doesn’t the king know that won’t work? Breeding is the surest way to kill an omega.

I move my open palm closer, letting my magic assess her for internal damage. At

least she's not pregnant yet if she's so close to heat. Her ribs are bruised, not broken, but her blood has traces of wolfsbane, and her erratic heartbeat tells me it's almost too late. If I don't act fast, the poison will kill her.

Opening the door of the old clinic brings back a rush of shit I'd like to forget. Without really seeing anything, I grab what I need.

The wide protection circle is first. I whisper the old words as I set each crystal. Focusing more of my energy on the moss agate, I call on our connection with nature's magic to stabilize my work and bring balance to the room. The magic vibrates in the air when the clear quartz completes the circle. It will boost the healing spells and help to sustain my energy.

Next, I focus on making a charcoal-based salve infused with herbs and laced with a spell. It should help draw out the wolfsbane.

I return to the kitchen with my supplies and get to work. Blocking the omega's scent is near impossible, and each huff of her sweetness agitates my wolf. Dex is no better. He growls with each soaked bandage I place on her neck. I ignore his bullshit until I've covered the whole area with the thick black tar.

"I need to stabilize her heart. Don't kill me," I warn.

The alpha nods. "Help?"

"Just don't hit me when my magic touches her," I grouse. "Because it's gonna hurt before it gets better."

I don't wait for him to respond, clutching her neck and letting my magic expand. It sends a zapping bolt of power straight to her heart, and the omega's chest rises unnaturally, muscles spasming, before she falls limp in Dex's arms.

Her heartbeat races, then stops on a hiccup.

Fuck.

I try again.

No heartbeat.

I don't have enough power. Not for this. She's a mess, and I'm out of practice.

It didn't even take these assholes twenty minutes in my house before their tragedy struck.

The knowledge that I can't save the omega guts me. Less than an hour in her presence, and I'm already wrecked by my need to protect her. I thought I'd already learned this lesson, but hope is a nasty weed that juts through the cracks and refuses to be stamped out.

Dex grabs hold of my shoulder, his voice dark as he barks, "You're not giving up."

I glare at him.

The asshole purrs, and that burst of power shoots into the space between us. With a resigned sort of desperation, I soak in his magic and funnel it into her. The jolt causes her small body to lift and fall flat.

A tiny murmured thump sounds from her chest. Then another.

I keep my hand in place, allowing Dex's energy to merge with mine and flow through me. The silence and tension bite at my frayed nerves while we wait. Eventually, the little thump of a heartbeat steadies and becomes stronger. I can feel how our

combined energy soaks up the poison and draws it from her blood.

My body takes it on. The dark black lines crawling up my skin prove that my magic is filtering it out. It hurts like a motherfucker, making my insides rock with nausea and my heart pound erratically.

The two of us hold her until I'm almost drained. On unsteady legs, I pull away from the omega and brace myself against the kitchen table. "Get her cleaned up and take her to one of the bedrooms. She needs to rest, and I need to save your littermate."

The stoic wolf is shaking as he carries her down the hall. No doubt he's drained too. Her scent wafts behind the pair, teasing the air with her coming heat. It drives my wolf wild and makes him stupid with the idea of mating.

The full moon tonight will make it worse, but that crisis will have to take a number. I sigh, pushing it from my mind and focusing on Briggs. Wolfsbane is nasty, lethal stuff, but feral bites can be just as bad. Briggs is covered in them, his fur matted with blood.

The energy I need to do this was sapped drawing the poison from the omega. It takes me longer than it should to mix the salve, dress his wounds, and mend the breaks in his leg. By the time I'm finished, I'm sweating, and my magic is totally drained.

With a grunt, I pick up the heavy-ass shifter. I half stumble, using the wall for support as I cart him down the hall. The first few rooms are empty, and I get pissed.

Where the fuck did Dex take her?

My wolf howls in my mind as I realize what he's done. Dex took her to the birthing nest. Lilliana wasn't even mine, but the thought of someone else in her space after what happened makes my wolf see red.

I grit my teeth and force myself to take the stairs at the back of the hall. When I spill into the nest, the sight confuses me.

It's empty.

With a surge of power fueled by rage, I stumble back down the stairs and through the house to my room.

There, in my bed, are the culprits.

And the worst part? My wolf rejoices at seeing them there. He chants on repeat in my mind. Mates. Protect. Home.

No matter what my wolf thinks, that isn't happening. With less care than I should, I settle Briggs on a rug near the foot of the bed.

No. Not the bed. My fucking bed.

"I owe you a life debt," Dex says, his words choked by the emotion in his voice. He grabs hold of my shoulder, drawing my eyes to his. They are full of hope and sincerity. "Thank you?—"

"Thank me by leaving," I snap.

I want no part of this. They came without asking, thrust her here for me to watch them all die. Without another look at the dangerous omega, I flee the cabin.

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Chapter 7

Dex

This is fucking torture. Absolute torture. I woke up with a raging hard-on and a tiny omega curled up on my bare chest. That was more than an hour ago, and the sun was just setting.

Gage's room smelled like the alpha when my wolf insisted that I bring her here. It's saturated with her cinnamon apple now. Her perfume is so strong that it's pushing me toward rut, calling my alpha to the surface.

It feels wrong to even move, though I want nothing more than to wrap my arms around her. But no matter how much I may want it, she isn't my omega. Not yet.

I don't even know her name. All I know is that she's been hurt badly by alphas. Taking advantage of her in this state would make me exactly like them, no matter what my instincts say about her being my mate.

The blond omega nuzzles into my armpit, her nose twitching. She can't help it. Even in her sleep, her body is seeking out an alpha. So near to heat, her wolf needs an alpha's pheromones to ground her.

At least, that's what I think is happening. I don't actually know. I've never spoken to an omega before her. Everything I know about them I learned from Mako.

A tendril of something sweet fills the air, and my cock twitches.

Fuck. This is bad. This is so bad.

I'm pretty sure she's starting to slick.

She hikes her small leg farther up and grinds against my thigh.

Definitely slick. So fucking slick.

What the fuck am I supposed to do? My brother is the lead. He makes the decisions. I trust his judgment and follow. But right now, he's passed out and needs to sleep through healing. I can feel flickers of his pain in the bond we share. That means I'm going to have to figure out what to do on my own.

Too bad my brain can't focus past anything but the feel of her soft skin. Before I can muster some much-needed control, the omega licks my armpit. It sends a shiver through my whole body, and my cock leaks in my jeans.

It's an armpit, but damn if the idea of her wanting to bathe in my scent doesn't make me half feral.

And that's exactly the problem.

"Alpha," she says, her voice thick like syrup. Her lips trail down my chest.

I grit my teeth and yank on the remaining thread of my control. I will never forgive myself if I surrender to the haze of rut. My hands curl under her arms, and I bring her up my chest so that I can see her eyes.

They're hooded, glazed over with the lust of heat. The dark bandages on her neck bring the severity of this moment back into shocking focus. My job is to protect her.

I try my best to explain, hoping I can get through to her. I cup her cheek and make my voice soft. “Hello, sweetheart. My brother, Briggs, and I brought you somewhere safe, but you’re going into heat.”

It doesn’t register. There is no fear, no memory of what brought us here in her expression. Her omega is in charge. She lunges for me, her small mouth sucking along my chin and down my throat while her hand blindly gropes for my cock.

I blow out a shaky breath and sit up, cradling her in my lap. I try to pull a blanket between us, but she’s wily. The moment her hand grabs hold of my cock through my jeans, I freeze. My balls pulse with the need to come.

“Sweet girl, you’re testing all my control,” I warn us both. “I know you don’t understand, but no matter how much the moon tells you that you want me, this wouldn’t be right.”

I pick her up and set her on the bed as gently as I can. She tries to twist herself around me. Her hands and lips are everywhere. Before I can give in to the temptation, I tuck my tail and run.

Her whined, “Alpha,” nearly breaks me, but I force myself not to turn around.

Gage isn’t in the cabin. I’ve searched everywhere in this sprawling pack house. I have to find him and a solution because even if it’s wrong, I don’t know if I can hear her cries of need and not do something about them.

Ignoring the omega’s whine has nearly pushed me to the brink. Every instinct I have says I need to go to her and stuff her full of my knot.

I’m torn. Leaving an omega in heat to fend for herself is fucking cruel, but so is putting her through a heat with a stranger when she’s barely made it from captivity.

Braving the cold, I head outside in only jeans because I'm too chickenshit to retrieve my jacket and boots from the bedroom. My wolf nudges me, snarling at me to go back and care for our mate. Instead, I scan the property. I was only here on assignment once, almost a decade ago, but the isolated place hasn't really changed.

The pack house is in a clearing high in the mountains. Before the end of the month, the ground will be covered in snow, and getting out of here will be impossible.

That's good for the omega. The time here will throw the ferals off her trail, and I doubt the new king even knows that this place exists. Briggs was right to bring us here.

The compound is warded against trespassers, with a wide enough berth to allow wolves space to run in safety. The property has a barn, a greenhouse, and a small smokehouse. It was built to be self-sustaining, relying on solar power. Gage has certainly proven the design.

I pick up the healer's scent on the trail to the greenhouse. It's full of more pain than my brother's, and Gage isn't the one currently laid out fighting feral bites.

The man who saved our asses this morning isn't the same wolf I remember from a decade ago. Briggs and I were only here for a summer, helping to rid the area of ferals while the crew got this place up and running. I didn't get to know Gage that well. That summer, there were more than a dozen wolves, but I remember Gage's energy. He was hopeful then and quick to draw a laugh, even from me. The Gage of then was just as smart and powerful, but he was guided by a desire to change the future that seems missing now. He's only in his late thirties, but he looks haggard.

I don't know the details of what happened here, but it's easy to guess. The compound is deserted except for Gage.

The last decade hasn't been kind to anyone, especially not a wolf with a conscience.

His scent trail leads me through rows of plants. The floral and herbal scents help clear my head of the omega's perfume. When the trail dies, the alpha is nowhere to be found. I double back and catch it again, following the scent through a small path in the forest that leads up to a jutting rock.

I climb up the rock as the dark-haired alpha turns to look at me, blowing a breath of smoke into the evening air.

"What part of 'leave' was unclear?" he asks around a coughing huff. The sweet stench of weed fills the air.

I get it. The world sucks right now, and he's taking his calm where he can. But unfortunately for him, I'm not done wrecking his peace. There is no way we're leaving with the omega until at least after the first snows have cleared. He's stuck with us for now.

I gear myself up to say all I need to. I refuse to get tongue-tied. Not about this. I can find the words for her. "Whatever the fuck happened up here, I'm sorry. But no matter the shit we've seen, there is an omega in there going into heat, and I need your help."

His silver eyes glow. "And how exactly can I help?" He brings the joint to his lips and takes another drag. His movements appear casual and unaffected, but the sorrow in his scent gives him away. "Because I'm sure as shit not down to fuck your mate."

The fact that he's hurting doesn't excuse being a dick.

"Fuck you. You know that's not what I'm asking." He may be a powerful healer, but I'm a hunter and fast for my size. I rip the joint from his hands and toss it into the

woods. “Get your ass up.”

Gage lunges for me, but I fend him off easily, and he tumbles, falling off the rock and into the dirt.

It wasn't life-threatening, but I'm sure that it hurt. He rolls over onto his back, his nose gushing blood as he lets loose an unhinged laugh. That turns into a strangled shout full of outrage and heartache.

I jump down and hold out my hand. “Like it or not, we showed up at your door. Help me help her. She's been through enough.”

He stubbornly shoves my hand away, rolling to the side and pulling himself up. “Coming here was a dick move.”

It was the only move.

I nod in acceptance anyway. Nobody is asking him to like it. This shit is awful. “Blame me all you want, but none of this is on her.”

Gage sighs. “I'll see what I can come up with to carry her through the moon.”

He doesn't bother brushing himself off. He stalks back down the trail, muttering obscenities as he goes.

That's fine. He can cuss me out all he wants as long as he helps her.

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Chapter 8

Gage

The fierce little omega snarls at me before her teeth sink into my arm.

Shit. That stings.

Dex growls at me as if it's my fault his mate is feral. This was his damn idea.

She backs herself against the headboard, her body crouched to strike again. The sight of her naked in my bed does stupid things to my insides, even if she is a violent bed partner.

There's no denying she's beautiful. And wild.

"I know it hurts, sweetheart, but I promise Gage will give you something to help. He's a healer." Dex repeats the same shit he's said twice since we walked back into my bedroom and found the omega ass up in the air, fingers buried in her pussy.

When I first saw her, I almost lost myself to my wolf. The fact that neither of us has caved is some kind of magic because the room is an absolute sea of heat and slick. The air is so sweet and thick I feel as if I'm drowning in her. I don't know how much longer either of us can last.

Reality hasn't seemed to stop Dex from trying though. The giant alpha is doing his best to get her to comply. In my dickish opinion, the time for consent has passed. He

needs to find some way to give her this potion or his knot. The full moon is here, and we're out of time.

Not to mention I'm sick of being bitten. That's the third time she's taken a chunk out of my arm.

"This isn't working. She's too far gone." I step back, shuffling toward the door.

"Wait," Dex barks.

I groan and plaster myself against the wall. "Last chance. Then you're on your own."

"Just wait," he barks again.

The omega looks between the two of us, poised to strike.

Dex doesn't bat an eye. Slowly, so fucking slowly, he takes a seat at the edge of the bed and holds out his hand. The loud rhythmic sound of his purr beats into the room, and its power soothes even me.

The omega moves toward him. She's all wolf, even in her human skin, sniffing the air as her eyes track the two of us. It's slow going, but Dex keeps up his purr until she's practically in his lap. He whispers soft words I can't hear, and she melts for him, a whine of need building in her throat. She latches onto his neck, sucking his skin as she grinds against him.

His big hands find her back, soothing her in long strokes. "That's a good girl. Thank you for coming to me, sweetheart."

She fumbles with his jeans, trying to take him out, desperate for a knot as she sucks along his chest.

Dex doesn't stop her or his purr while he glares at me. Through gritted teeth, he mouths, "Now."

I'm not as quick as the hunter, but I manage to plunge the needle into her neck before she's noticed I've moved.

She roars, clawing Dex as he cages her to his chest. It only takes a minute for the concoction to work, but it's a long fucking minute.

The tiny omega finally stops fighting and collapses against him.

At least the magic worked. Normally, what I would give an omega to suppress heat is an herbal tea, but it's too late to suppress it now. The best I can do is try to manage it. I hodgepodged a completely new potion out of desperation. Hopefully, it's strong enough to dull her pain and make her sleep through the full moon.

The big alpha has tears streaming down his cheeks, but something tells me they aren't from the damage her nails caused.

I pat his shoulder, trying to reassure him. "It was either that or give her your knot. I promise it won't hurt her."

I don't know why I'm even trying to comfort him. He and his brother brought this mess to me. I want nothing to do with omegas, but my heart can't help but soften at the normally grumpy alpha's tenderness toward the little wolf.

Dex doesn't acknowledge my words. He situates the sleeping omega on the bed, kissing her forehead and tucking her in, before he checks on his sleeping brother. I almost wish I could trade places with Briggs. At least if I were half dead, I wouldn't be awake for this shit. I force myself not to think about her or her scent. It's too tempting. If I let myself contemplate the reality of her situation, I'll end up just like

Dex.

“Come on. You can shower while I round up something passable in the kitchen.”

After I forced Dex to at least shower and eat, he returned to his brother and the omega. He’s torturing himself, but the big alpha refuses to leave their sides.

It’s been days of coaxing him out long enough to eat before he goes back to his vigilant watch. Even after three nights, her scent is strong with heat, but she’s sleeping, and her previous wounds are healing. Already her neck looks better, and her pain has lessened with the combined power of my potion and Dex’s steady purr.

Briggs is healing on schedule, but I’m guessing it will be another day or two before he wakes. Probably the same for the omega.

I take one final peek at the three before closing the door. They are a broken, beautiful mess.

Part of me wants to join them. My wolf is compelled in a way he’s never been before. This isn’t the first pack or omega to come to this cabin to hide. I’ve spent over a decade trying to heal omegas and mating magic.

Eight wolf packs. Eight omegas. None of them survived.

The omegas die. The alphas pass soon after. Lilliana was the last. She made it through the birth, but an hour later, everyone in the pack was gone.

She was thought to be the last omega.

Now, another has found her way to my door. No name. Practically feral. Held captive. And just as likely to meet the same end as the others.

My soul is heavy with regret, already weighed down by the eventuality. After a decade of losing packs, I'm no closer to understanding why. It's as though the birth drains an omega of all her magic. By the time it's over, nothing is left. They waste away, and their alphas follow.

In all that time, the only thing I've managed to do is develop a thick skin and a taste for whiskey.

I flee the house, unable to stand her scent any longer. If I don't get myself under control, I'll end up cuddling next to Dex and trying to soothe her with my purr.

Outside, the round, glowing moon lights the dark forest. Coming snow is in the air, and a storm is brewing. Once the storm hits, we'll be here for winter.

It feels as though fate is asking me to fuck around and find out.

Fine. I hear the universe loud and clear. The omega and her pack stay. It doesn't mean I have to like it.

Resigned to the fact that they won't be leaving, I take my wolf's skin. They'll need fresh game when they wake, and I've been living like a dying man for too long.

My wolf is happy to hunt for the omega. He yips and takes off into the forest.

I'm so fucked.

I'm never going to survive this feral omega and her pack. Already, she's blown apart my world.

Chapter 9

Nova

“Easy, sweetheart. I promise we won’t hurt you,” the big alpha says. His voice is raspy and deep, so delicious that it almost calms the terror racing through my chest.

The one behind him grumbles something under his breath, and I hiss.

My back hits the headboard as I scramble away. I flinch when my head bangs into the wood, a shot of pain racing down my skull. Everything is fuzzy and achy.

The room is filled with the scent of my slick and alpha pheromones. I don’t remember how I got here or where here is. I’m fucking sick with the thought that these alphas brought me through my first heat and I can’t remember it.

My hand flies to my neck, checking for a bite, but I feel a sticky goo instead.

The one behind the big alpha drags his hands through his hair, a pinched expression on his face. “Leave them, please. They’re to draw out the wolfsbane.”

Wolfsbane? They gave me wolfsbane?

Reacting to the threat without thought, my wolf takes my skin. She lunges for the dark-haired one, ready to sink in her teeth. Green sparks extend from his fingers, and she hits an invisible wall. She snarls, thrashing against the bitter magic.

“Nope. Bites aren’t really my kink.” His silver eyes shine with amusement, and he laughs as he hops off the bed and retreats to a nearby chair.

Where am I? The room clearly belongs to someone. Maybe another room in the king’s home? Where is the king anyway? My head hurts just trying to think about it.

My wolf doesn’t care about the details. She wants to flee. She darts for the open door and scrambles on the wooden floor. The big one is on my wolf’s tail, and she turns on him, baring her teeth.

“All right, sweetheart. I know you’re scared. I bet it’s confusing.”

She snaps her jaws when he moves closer, but it brings a whiff of his scent. He smells like salted caramelized hazelnuts. Warm and rich, with a hint of sweetness. The scent is like a lightning bolt to my system, jarring my memories loose. This wolf was with me. It’s hazy, but I think he was trying to help me.

A purr sounds from the alpha. The rich vibrations settle my wolf enough that the driving need to fight or flee is temporarily paused.

He kneels and reaches out his hand. “It’s all right. You’re safe. No one will hurt you here.”

My wolf stares at the big man. He’s by far the largest alpha I’ve ever seen, with warped burn scars that mark his chest and arms and a thick, rough claw mark that covers half his face. Veins pop along his muscular forearms, and his features are severe. His dark cropped hair is stark and his jaw too strong. Even his lips scowl behind dark scruff.

Despite his terrifying appearance, he radiates calm. It seems to seep out of his pores along with that mouthwatering scent. The urge to move closer is overwhelming. He

smells so good, like a holiday in a cozy home.

She inches forward.

He doesn't move.

She takes another step, this time nudging his hand and sniffing his wrist. The scent makes her tail wag and her paws dance in place. She darts her tongue to get a taste, but it's not enough. Rubbing against him, she licks anywhere she can get to his salty skin.

A laugh from behind causes her to growl, spinning on the intruder in panic.

At the open door is another wolf in human form. This one is more athletic than big, with a mouth that looks as if he loves to laugh and eyes full of mischief. But those details aren't the ones my wolf focuses on. She fixates on the places where he's covered in glowing silver crescents.

Feral bites.

So many that there's no way he should be standing. The sight makes my insides scream in panic. Not safe. Not safe.

My wolf gives a guttural warning, but before she can take off, he shuts the door. "Sorry, little wolf. No running."

"That's Briggs. I'm Dex. He's my brother," the calm wolf explains.

Her eyes dart between the two of them, body crouched low on her front legs.

"We brought you here—east of the North Pass—after we found you with the king.

You slept through your heat.”

She cocks her head, turning to listen to the one named Dex with the yummy scent and the soothing aura.

“The full moon was four days ago. You were badly injured from the wolfsbane the king used. Gage, the healer, gave you a potion and treated your wounds, but I promise no one here hurt you or took advantage.” Dex holds out his hand again.

The one by the front door drops his jaw, looking at the big alpha with gaping shock I don’t understand.

Dex shrugs.

At the same time, the longer-haired wolf joins us from the hallway. “Well damn.” He shakes his head in bewilderment, eyes on the big alpha before he narrows them on me. “How about we get some food and water in your system, wild child? Maybe then you won’t feel so homicidal.” He claps his hands. “Who wants breakfast?”

The raven-haired alpha is the smallest of the three—and the prettiest. He’s dangerous, heart-throb handsome with a strong nose and longer hair that curls around the tops of his shoulders. He’s also covered in rune tattoos that start at his knuckles and peek out of the neck of his T-shirt.

He breezes by me, and his earthy, herbal scent smells like my grandmother’s garden. It immediately puts my wolf at ease. That quickly, she’s decided he’s trustworthy, at least for now. She thinks the promise of food is too good to pass up. Trotting after him, she follows into an open kitchen.

I try to take back my skin, needing more answers, but she fights me.

Internally, I groan because, honestly, breakfast sounds so much better than going back on the run, even if that would be the smart thing.

The kitchen becomes a whirlwind of activity as the other two wolves join the first at the stove.

Briggs, the one with the bite marks, sets down a huge bowl of water in front of me. “There you go, pretty wolf.”

He’s close enough for me to get his scent. It’s warm and spicy, with sandalwood, pink pepper, and fragrant dark florals like orchids. My wolf nudges closer, and he puts out his hand, letting her sniff his wrist. She takes a satisfying lick that makes him chuckle before she dives on the water, lapping it up until the bowl is dry.

When she’s done, she eyes the three with curiosity. With all of them working together, their scents create an atmosphere of relaxation that makes her sleepy. I don't know if they’re a pack, but they seem to already know what to do. One is mixing, the other is chopping, and the third is doing something on the stove.

My wolf watches as they chat quietly, but eventually the urge to join them is overwhelming. She wants to be closer to them and the scents of food. She weaves between their legs, plopping right down on the rug at the stove.

She’s seriously lost her damn mind.

Every once in a while, Dex holds out a hand to feed my wolf bites of deer sausage from the pan. It’s seriously divine. I haven’t eaten anything so human in a long time.

The stove's heat feels nice, and she keeps one eye open while lazily napping and being hand-fed like a spoiled pup.

This whole thing is so bizarre.

When they bring the dishes to a long wooden pack-style table, she follows but still won't let me shift. I try yanking on the thread of control, but my wolf is too strong. She's spent the last decade in control most of the time, and she doesn't seem to want to relinquish it now.

Dex turns back to me, running a big hand over my ears and scratching between them. It feels so good she lets out a little yip of pleasure, tail wagging.

It's official. My wolf has lost it. The years in solitude in the forest, the fear of being discovered, hiding from the ferals, and my time with the king in his pit... all of it has made me damn near feral. Except instead of trying to protect myself after waking up to total strangers, I'm over here playing Fido the family pet.

For the record, his head scratches feel really, really good.

"It's okay. You can stay a wolf as long as you need. When you're ready, we can talk," Dex says.

That voice of his is criminal, the way it hits deep inside, sending bursts of pleasure and relaxation through my system. He rubs his thumb along my wolf's ear once more before getting up and going back into the kitchen.

Dex returns a moment later with a bowl filled with a breakfast scramble. It's got eggs and meat, but it's the cheese that makes her salivate. Apparently, all it takes for my wolf to roll over and show her belly is a good meal.

My wolf has zero shame, scarfing it down and looking at him for more.

The huge alpha smiles. It transforms his face, softening his features. Even in my wolf

form, it's blinding.

"More, huh?" He chuckles as he scratches her head, the sound making her tail wag again. She nips at his pant leg in impatience, and he laughs. "All right. Give me a minute."

It takes another three bowls before she's satisfied.

Even though my wolf is sleepy and I'm nicely full for what feels like the first time since I left my grandmother's, I don't quite trust it. I need time to process what all this means.

Why am I so drawn to them? Who are these alphas who seem so different from the men in the tents?

They remind me of the wolves from before the world went feral. I don't understand it, but something about them makes me feel almost safe. That's a dangerous delusion to have even if I wish it were true. I'm so fucking tired of being alone, but I don't know if I can risk the alternative.

Except if what they said is true—and it feels true—they helped me through my heat safely. That must count for something. Most wolves aren't so honorable.

My wolf shrugs off my concerns, licking Dex's hand before trotting back down the hall for a nap. Her final thought before she gives in to sleepiness is that she's home.

Chapter 10

Briggs

My newly healed leg aches. I rub along my thigh where the muscle is spasming.

“Stubborn goat. Drink this.” Gage pushes a steaming mug into my hand. The brew is dark and smells strong.

I eye it suspiciously. “I’m good.”

Gage rolls his eyes. “Drink the tea. That’s what you get for not trusting what I told you and forcing a run on a barely healed break.”

He did warn me. When I woke up this morning, my wolf was frantic. Before I’d barely talked to my brother or Gage, I took to the forest. My instincts demanded I do an initial sweep of the perimeter.

It took several hours to scout Gage’s warded territory, but my wolf finally settled once he could smell and see the wards holding. At the boundary line where we entered, ferals have gathered. As long as the wards hold, it won’t be an issue.

It was still freaky as fuck watching those yellow eyes follow my every move, but they’ll get bored once her scent fades. Either way, I’ll feel safer once we lay some traps.

Dex raises a soapy hand out of the sink and points at me. “Drink.” The surprising

softness he used for the omega is gone, and his usual gruffness seeps into his tone.

“What he said.” Gage tips his head toward Dex as he puts a jar of herbs back into a cabinet. “Or you can be an insufferable martyr and live in pain.”

Leaning back against the kitchen island, I sigh. The first sip tastes like battery acid, chicory, and licorice. I grimace through it, gulping the searing liquid to get it over with.

Gage gives me a satisfied lift of his brow and a quirk of his lips. I wouldn’t put it past him to make it taste worse on purpose. Even though we haven’t talked much yet, he clearly isn’t a fan of our arrival.

Tough shit.

It isn’t safe for us to leave. Not with the ferals out there. I won’t risk her, and I’m in no shape to get us out.

It sucks to admit, but I need more recovery time. Dex and I have gotten into a few tough spots over the years, but this attack was different. There were so many bites that I’m covered in scars now. Not to mention this damn leg.

Shifters have enhanced healing, but feral bites are venomous. Something about them seems to attack our magic and make healing from them difficult. That’s why most hunters don’t take them head-on unless they’re one-on-one. I broke my own rule.

Never become prey.

The tea works quickly. Already, some of the pain is ebbing. I’m not used to being patient or needing a healer. The fact that I’m four days out from a fight and still feeling like shit is unheard of. I only woke up a few hours before the omega, and I

already need to sit my ass down.

The urge to return to Gage's room and lie beside the small black wolf is nearly overpowering. Although that may have something to do with her scent.

I knew she smelled good, but I thought it was her heat. The remnants of it linger in the air, and the signature fuck-me scent of slick is enough to make my cock half hard. Underneath that, though, her tart apple and spicy cinnamon call to my wolf.

It's deeper than the need to rut. It's as if she's set a hook into my chest. It must be the fact that she's an omega. I've never spent much time with one, but I can certainly vouch for Mako's old stories now. My wolf wants to protect her and keep her safe just as strongly as I want to take the pretty wolf to bed. It's instinct to want to mate her, but damn if I didn't underestimate how intense the driving need would be even after her heat.

My brother sets the last breakfast dish in the drainer and turns to both of us. "Snow is coming. We need to prepare." He points at me. "And your ass needs to get back in bed."

If I'm affected by the omega, it's nothing compared to Dex. My littermate is loyal to a fault. Steady. An excellent hunter. Good-hearted. When I lost my shit this morning, he let me do what I needed.

Was he a dick about it? No . He just set a pile of clothes at the front door.

Before today, he's never cared to take the lead, always content to follow my ass into whatever shit I've got cooked up. He also barely speaks, even to me. Not after the fire. But in the last two hours, I've heard him use a week's worth of words.

The change in Dex might be welcome if I wasn't so worried he'd get his heart broken

by the sweet-smelling wolf. She isn't ours, no matter what our wolves' instincts are shouting about her being our mate. Maybe she could be, but the fierce thing won't even take her human skin right now. That tells me she's terrified.

"Does someone wanna clue me in on the last few days first? Maybe tell me what the fuck has been happening around here?" My words come out sounding terser than I mean for them to. Everything here since I woke up has felt off kilter, making me irritable. As does the throbbing in my leg.

Gage scoffs. "You're the one who crashed this house party."

Dex looks between us, shaking his head like an elder scolding errant pups. "To the living room."

I won't admit it out loud, but sitting on the buttery leather sofa and getting off my leg improves my mood a hundredfold.

Dex starts a fire and settles in an oversized chair beside the couch. He recounts the last four days with snide interjections from a pacing Gage. I'm still reeling from my littermate's sudden switch from practically mute to downright chatty, but I try to keep it off my face.

If the look Dex is giving me is any indication, I'm not sure I'm successful.

Gage finally cuts the shit and stops pacing, folding himself onto the floor by the coffee table with a notebook he grabs from the bookcase that runs along the back wall.

"Here is what we're looking at." He gives a rundown of the current state of the property. Gage doesn't explain what happened to the other omegas or why his small permanent crew has disappeared.

I don't know much about how Gage was chosen for this place, only that it was an off-the-books mission designed by a few of the elders on the Wolf Council when the mating crisis became apparent. Waves of ferals were attacking the villages, and the elders wanted a neutral place to hide away pregnant omegas.

I'm not even sure the former king knew the location. We were only brought on by the Council to secure the property while they finished the build. They required us to take a blood oath to keep its location hidden. Even with the Council destroyed and this place all but abandoned, it's holding up.

At least the property is. I don't know about Gage. He's different. Jaded. Whatever happened here changed the wolf I knew and made him into something sharp and prickly.

After we get the basics, we make a list of necessary preparations for winter before the storm hits. They're both dicks about my task list, making it clear that I'm expected to recover with the omega. I grumble, but the pain in my leg makes it difficult to argue.

Not that I want to admit it, but they're probably right. Unfortunately, that's gonna put me up close and personal with the omega. If my hard-ass brother is soft for her, I don't know how I'm supposed to manage. Already, I'm drawn to her. But I have to manage. At least one of us needs to keep his head.

"One last thing," Dex says, eyeing Gage. "I know you can magically force her shift, but don't. Let her stay a wolf as long as she needs. The only way she's going to trust us to keep her safe is if we give her space."

He's right. This isn't the first time we've seen a wolf take over after shit goes down. Sometimes, it's too much for the human side. It's easier to process all that's happened as a wolf. We've learned not to push. The danger comes when the wolf won't give control back. It's a fine line. The longer a shifter stays a wolf, the more likely they are

to lose themselves to their animal completely.

That reminder makes me feel like a totally selfish dick. I'm over here worrying about what damage she can do to Dex, but the truth is she's in a dangerous position.

And what put her here is even more horrific, especially for an omega. They're soft-natured, more sensitive to the feelings of others and their environments. There's no telling what kind of damage this situation has done to the omega wolf.

"You won't find me arguing. I want as little to do with her as possible." The healer closes his notebook with too much force and retreats. At the front door, he speaks over his shoulder. "There are extra sets of clothes in the washroom. Don't expect me at dinner."

The alien who has taken over my brother glares at me. "To bed."

I curse him out under my breath the entire way down the hall.

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Chapter 11

Nova

My wolf has decided this is her new den. She's full send on the omega nesting urges, without a care that this isn't actually her place.

I should probably be mortified. Omegas are known for being audacious, but my wolf has taken it to new levels.

When she grabs the sweater folded over the back of a leather chair, I give her a mental push. It was bad enough that she stole the quilt from the bed and dragged it to the corner of the room. At least its scent was predominately Dex's.

After so long of having to watch my every move, it makes sense why my wolf has latched on to him. The big alpha is sweet and makes me feel safe.

But Gage's sweater? Come on.

The healer called me homicidal. Even if he did save my life, he doesn't seem particularly happy about it. His scent at breakfast was full of bitterness. I don't even know him, certainly not enough to trust him.

Or the brothers either. Not even Dex, though it feels as though I can trust him implicitly.

Reason number five thousand why I should make an exit plan instead of building a

den.

This isn't the time to get a crush on my rescuer or make the mistake of being comfortable. Alphas are dangerous. Trusting the first one to be kind to me would be naive.

That doesn't stop my wolf. She carries on as though she doesn't feel me tugging for control. Gage's sweater makes it into the corner, and she uses her snout to nudge it into the pile of bedding she's already worked over with her paws.

Why does he have to smell so good though? His scent was off at breakfast, but this worn sweater smells like working in a garden with the sunshine on my face. It's like catnip to my omega.

I give in to the alpha pheromone buzz, letting my wolf have at it until she's amassed items from all over the room and built a comfy pile. At least, I think it's pretty comfy. It smells delicious and is worn-in soft as if it was already made for me.

Over the years, I've lost the contents of my makeshift nests more times than I can count. My den back in the forest is sparse. I keep a sleeping bag, a kettle, and my backpack. Ferals don't make it easy to hold on to a place for long. I've learned it's better to keep it light.

The only real item I had of value was my grandmother's tea recipe, which was more sentimental than anything. I memorized the recipe when I found a place to stop that first night in the woods. It's a good thing too. The page was lost in year three of hiding. After that, I taught myself not to care, no matter how much it hurt not to have anything permanent.

Unlike me, my wolf isn't satisfied with the nest. Something is missing. On a huff, she goes on the hunt. She doesn't get far. Briggs is leaning against the doorjamb of the

bedroom, watching her with a soft smile.

“Hey there, pretty girl. I like your nest.” Briggs’s voice isn’t as deep as his brother’s. It’s more melodic, as though he’s always one breath away from laughter.

I thought earlier, when I met him, he was mischievous, but I think what I sensed was charm. My wolf is proof. She prances at his praise. There’s no other word for it. Mentally, I face-palm at her eagerness.

When she gets to him, she grabs his pants leg and tugs, giving a little playful growl.

“What do you need, little wolf?” There is something about his mouth. It’s as though he’s hiding a secret about me, something that amuses him. I don’t even know why it’s so alluring, but I’m practically drooling.

My wolf nudges her nose into his crotch.

Someone kill me now.

My inner omega rejoices at the scent, right up there with my wolf, who is currently nuzzling him.

Oh. My. Gods. This is so embarrassing.

Briggs lets loose a throaty laugh, but it doesn’t feel as though he’s laughing at me. The rich sound makes my wolf give a happy yip. She takes one last crotch sniff, then licks his fingers.

“That’s a very naughty way to say hello. I approve.” He takes a knee and holds out his palm.

My wolf leans into him, letting him caress her face.

He swallows roughly. “Do you just need my scent, or do you need me in the nest?”

She licks his nose in answer. That causes him to laugh again as he gives a long pass down the fur of her back. My belly pools with warmth at the sound.

How the heck am I ever supposed to focus on being levelheaded if I’m up close and personal with one of the sexiest specimens of an alpha I’ve ever seen?

There is no hope of not getting a crush.

He tugs his shirt over his head.

Yup, definitely a crush.

My wolf takes the offering between her teeth and carefully places it in the nest next to Dex’s pillow and Gage’s sweater. Satisfied that it’s finally right, she turns back to Briggs and nips for him to follow.

He crawls inside the mound of blankets and pilfered clothes, shifting around to try to get comfortable. When he finally settles, he lets out a heavy sigh. I catch the sharp, burning pain in his scent, and my eyes zero in on his chest. His T-shirt was hiding the majority of his bites. I thought it was a lot before, but this is... There are no words.

My wolf whines, nudging her nose at one of the pale, glowing bites on his arm.

Briggs pulls his arm behind him, cradling his head in his palm. “After we left North Pass, we drove for a while, but to get here, we had to come in on foot. We made it. Barely.”

What he leaves out of the explanation is that my heat drew the wolves. It had to have. I was already perfuming and in the first waves of heat before everything in my memory went fuzzy. Getting me to safety cost him. With this many bites, it must have been bad.

I've been bitten twice by ferals. Both times, I thought I was going to die. I can't imagine the kind of pain he went through.

Did Gage heal him too?

"Come snuggle, pretty wolf. I could use a nap." He lifts his other arm.

My wolf leans in, licking his cheek once before snuggling into his side and licking his armpit.

The alpha lets out a soft chuckle. "Quit that."

Briggs's hand finds her fur, stroking down her side. Back and forth, the alpha sets a slow rhythm. It feels nice, the way his solid warmth next to mine is grounding.

The overall coziness of the room adds to that homey feeling of the nest. Bookshelves loaded with haphazard piles are stuffed in every little nook, making the space feel closed in despite its size. Plants bloom in corners, sometimes growing up the walls or on the shelves. The space is messy and worn, and the wooden furniture is scraped. It's lived in.

Even if my stay here is temporary, it's peaceful.

A light, airy sound comes from my wolf.

Well, damn.

She's purring.

The soft sound causes my brain to reboot. Wolves usually only purr for their mates. Maybe it's because he's injured and she knows he saved me? Whatever the reason, it freaks me the fuck out.

Briggs makes an appreciative sound in his throat. "Thank you, little omega."

His eyes close. It only takes a few minutes for the alpha to fall asleep.

My wolf is content to watch over him in our new den, her purr steady while I try to make sense of the sound.

I decide to go with it. Crotch sniffing aside, my wolf's instincts haven't steered me wrong. Not when it counts. If it turns out that this place isn't what it seems, then I'll fight if I have to, but I'm tired of running.

If it's just for a little while, I want to soak in the peace while it lasts. Maybe I can give some back to these alphas who risked so much to keep me safe.

Chapter 12

Nova

My wolf licks Briggs's face, and he groans, trying to cover himself from another tongue attack.

"All right, I'm up," he mumbles.

She licks him again for good measure. The alpha slept all day while my wolf kept up a steady purr. I'm pretty sure I dozed at one point, but the scents coming from the kitchen are too much to ignore.

My wolf tried to hold out for him. She doesn't want him in pain, and she knows he needs rest, but the lure of another meal is too tempting.

Briggs sits up and scratches her head. "That purr of yours is dangerous. I can see how my brother is hooked." He nuzzles her snout, rubbing himself against her nose to nose. "You're going to wreck me with it, aren't you, pretty girl?"

She loves the affection, but right now, she's too hungry to be patient. She backs out of his embrace and dances in place, giving an urgent yip.

Briggs lets loose a throaty laugh. "All right. You go on. I'm coming right behind you."

She takes off, darting across the room and down the hall. The wooden floor makes it

slippery, and she practically skids into the kitchen, barreling into a pair of tree-trunk thighs.

Dex.

He smells fresh from the outside. She takes this opportunity to molest the big alpha just as she did his littermate, burying her nose between his legs.

And what does the big alpha do? He cups the back of her head in encouragement, petting her ears and acting as though a nose in someone's crotch is a totally normal form of greeting.

“Hello, sweetheart. I was just coming to get you two. Did you have a good nap?”

She pulls back to yip. It's both an answer and a command for him to share whatever smells so good with her.

Dex's lips tug up into an almost smile. “Let me wash up and we can eat.”

My wolf follows him to the sink, then the stove. She dances around him impatiently while he grabs bowls and ladles something from a pot.

Briggs shuffles in, fixes a glass of water, and leans against the sink. “Did you get traps set?”

“Not yet. The generators needed a tune-up, and I brought in supplies from the barn.”

Briggs nods. “I'll help with the traps tomorrow. Don't want to risk the weather before we get a chance to?—”

His brother cuts him off with a growl. “You'll rest. I'll lay traps.” The big alpha takes

the bowls and gives a chin lift for me to follow. “Come on. The living room will make this easier on everyone.”

My wolf trots after him.

“Since when do you call the shots?” Briggs mumbles, trailing behind me.

Dex glares at him over his shoulder. “Since you almost died. Now stop being a pain in the ass and go put your leg up. You can take back top dog once you’re healed.”

Briggs throws his head back and lets out an aggrieved groan. “I think I liked it better when you grunted.”

That pulls a laugh from Dex.

The deep sound races along my wolf’s back and makes her tail wag. She looks between the two brothers and barks.

Dex takes that as a command to get moving. He sets the bowls down by the fire and returns to the kitchen.

Without waiting for the others, she dives into the chunky stew. It’s scalding. She snorts, shaking her head, and some of it goes flying.

My wolf is a bad dinner date.

On the couch, Briggs watches with amusement. “You know, it would probably be easier to join us for dinner without your fur.”

He’s right. The reminder has me yanking for control, but my wolf resists me. I don’t know what her deal is. She’s never refused to let me take my skin.

I'm not going to run.

I know she understands me and feels my tug, but she isn't ready to give up control. She seems to think I'm gonna skip town the moment I shift, and she has decided we're staying.

With a resigned huff, I drop it. I'm too mentally exhausted and hungry to fight her.

Briggs watches me from his position on the couch. "Sucks, doesn't it?" Briggs asks softly. "Not feeling like you have control."

Totally. Although sometimes I wish I didn't always have to make decisions.

My wolf wags her tail for him.

He smiles, and it's a sucker punch to my ovaries. "It's all right that she's in charge now. She's protecting you and keeping you safe. When she trusts us, she'll give you your skin. Won't you, pretty wolf?"

Without thought, she goes to him, licking his wrist. He's spicy and floral, his taste deeply comforting.

Briggs strokes her fur, the firm touch grounding. "You're safe with us. I promise."

My wolf takes another pass along Briggs's arm, rubbing in his scent.

Dex returns from the kitchen. "Look what I found." He holds out a glass of amber liquid to Briggs.

His eyes light up. "Gage might kill you for taking his whiskey."

“He’s got plenty.” Dex shrugs, taking the big armchair across from the fire.

My wolf goes back to her bowl, taking a tentative lick of the stew. Still too hot. She huffs and lies down, eyeing the steaming bowl with longing.

The brothers talk, the hum of their deep voices soothing. Eventually, the stew cools, and she eats through two bowls, making a giant mess. Dex tries to wipe her snout with a towel, but she thinks it’s a game, tugging it from his hand and running through the cabin.

He plays keep-away, stealing it back until he ushers her outside. The sun has already set, and the stars are out. It smells like snow is coming. The air is crisp with pine and that chaotic sense that sizzles on the wind before a storm.

She goes on an exploratory mission with Dex following on her tail. When she smells chickens and cows, she goes nuts, scratching at the barn door.

“No, you don’t.” Dex laughs. “Not in this form.”

My wolf whines but gets distracted again by the greenhouse—or, more accurately, by Gage’s scent by the greenhouse. Dex opens the greenhouse door for her, and she trots in, racing ahead of him in her hunt for her wayward mate.

Oh shit.

I push back against that thought, but she ignores me, zigzagging between rows until she finds the alpha. He’s buried his head in a book, a small light hanging above him and crystals spread to the side. Herbs, too, litter the work surface.

She nudges his thigh. Thankfully, the way he’s tucked into the counter makes a crotch greeting impossible. No doubt she would be three for three.

Gage takes one look at her and frowns. Then he goes back to ignoring her. That pisses her off, and she nips his elbow.

“What did I say about biting, wild child?” Gage catches her nose between two of his spread fingers, locking her in place.

It doesn’t hurt, but it’s uncomfortable. She thrashes and tries to back up. A pulse of electricity zips along her nose. Again, it isn’t painful. It just feels strange.

“You need to learn some manners and boundaries.” Gage’s silver eyes glow, and it feels as though he’s speaking directly to me, not my wolf.

The message is clear: He doesn’t want me here. I don’t know why that hurts as much as it does. I don’t know him, even if my wolf thinks he is her mate.

Clearly, he doesn’t agree.

My stubborn wolf doesn’t back down. I can feel the way she challenges him, and then she does something neither of us expects...

She purrs.

Gage’s eyes widen before he looks away, releasing his hold. His scent turns sour. “Go. Back to the house.”

Dex growls something to Gage, and he responds with heat. I’m too floored by my purring to notice much of anything about why they’re arguing.

A wolf’s purr is infused with our magic. It’s a form of protection, like a little spelled cocoon that creates a sense of home and safety—or pleasure. To purr for someone is more intimate than going to bed with them and is usually only done with mates or

pups.

Purring for Briggs was the first time my wolf had ever done it. He was in pain, and my wolf wanted to comfort and help him rest. That makes sense. After all, it's my fault he's in pain. It's the least I could do.

But Gage? Seriously?

It's embarrassing how much my wolf wants him to like her. He kicks us out, and she purrs? Not cool.

She ignores my rant, curling up at his feet. The purr keeps filling the space between us.

Eventually, Dex bends and gives me a head pat, whispering in my ear, "I'm going to check in on Briggs. The idiot is probably out trying to build traps. When you're sick of this asshole's company, we'll be waiting at the cabin."

"I heard that," Gage grumbles.

"Good." Dex gives a final scratch behind my ears and heads out.

Gage ignores me, going back to his project. My wolf doesn't seem offended, keeping up the soft sound.

Despite my embarrassment, it's nice out here. The greenhouse is warm, and all the plants make the air lush.

"Has anyone ever told you that you're stubborn?" Gage asks eventually.

My wolf's purr is the only answer.

Chapter 13

Dex

The little omega's whimpers wake me. She whines amid her panting, the movements of her chest rising and falling too fast. It isn't pain. As far as I can tell, she's recovered from the wolfsbane and her injuries from her time with the king.

My purr tries to combat her anxiety, but her nest fills with the scent of fear. My hand digs into her fur, and I hold her tightly, speaking softly into her ear, "Wake up, sweet girl. It's only a nightmare."

It takes a few tries, but I feel the moment she's back with me. Her body goes rigid. I pick her up and cuddle her to my chest. She's small, even for an omega wolf. I can only guess what it's been like for her.

Was she on her own? How did she find herself in the Outskirts? How did she survive before now?

The questions are endless. I want to know everything about the fierce omega in my arms, but those must wait. Right now, all she needs is to feel safe so her wolf can settle and give her back her skin.

The vibrations of my purr quiet her shaking. The skin-to-fur contact helps. After a while, she wiggles in my grasp, licking my arm, then my chest. Only she has touched me there intentionally since the fire. The sensation is odd but not unwelcome. I tighten my hold and pull myself off the floor so we don't wake Briggs.

My brother is just as stubborn as the other alpha in this house. I can feel Briggs's pain in the littermate bond, especially when he's asleep and can't try to cloak it. His tough-guy pride will have to take a hit so he can heal. If I have to be an asshole about it, so be it.

I move through the dark house, passing the door where Gage has holed up. He vanished after returning to the house last night with the little wolf on his tail. The curses he let loose when he saw she had turned his bedroom into her nest made me feel slightly guilty, but then I decided he's as lost as she is. Maybe what he needs is to find his way again.

The air outside is cold. I set down the little wolf, who blinks in confusion. "I figure we could get a run in. I bet your wolf would like to get the lay of the land."

A good run might also chase away her nightmares and help her sleep.

I strip and shift.

My wolf shakes out his fur then circles the omega, sniffing. He rubs along her side and her muzzle, scent marking her. Covering her in my wolf's scent is deeply satisfying to my alpha. He's obsessed, licking her snout and ears before she gets tired of it. She gives a little nip and takes off into the circular yard.

At first, we play a simple game of chase. My wolf is huge compared to her small size, but she's fast and agile. She manages to catch my tail multiple times. Once, she even slides under my chest to playfully bite my throat.

She gets bolder, edging farther away until she notices a trail and takes off into the forest. My wolf catches up easily, taking the lead as he runs with her. We make a wide turn, paws pounding over the mossy floor. We move more slowly near the cliffs, but my wolf guides her down the small trail to the river's edge.

The water excites her, and I watch with amusement as she yips in delight. Even though it's freezing, she trots along the bank.

I didn't think it was possible to find a mate, not with the way things are—especially not with the way I am. Seeing her look so free is a gift. Maybe she'll fear me when she returns to her human form, but she isn't afraid of me right now.

No matter how she feels, she's it for me. I knew the first time she curled her hand against my chest the night we found her that I was done for. The pull between us only gets stronger. I don't need a mating rune to know my soul belongs to her.

She's my omega.

While she plays, my wolf hunts for her, overcome with the need to prove he can provide and protect. She splashes me, and I pretend to grumble, splashing her back. Our teasing makes it difficult to focus, but I manage a fish before too long.

I lay the salmon at her feet, bowing my head. She nuzzles me affectionately. The night fills with the heady scent of her perfume as she makes a happy sound, her tail wagging.

She takes her fish to one of the larger rocks on the shore and digs in. My wolf is a bossy fucker, nudging into her space to watch with primal satisfaction as she accepts his gift.

After she's finished, I clean her snout until she gives me an impatient nip.

We lie on the bank, just lazing for a moment. It's nice to be in my wolf's skin without focusing on hunting. It's been ages since I shifted just to be. Being here with her is a good reminder that pain and ferals aren't the only things in the world. The little ball of black fur is like my own personal dawn after the longest night.

My wolf purrs in satisfaction, and her wolf joins mine. The anxiety in my chest settles at the harmony. She may need to be a wolf right now, but I believe she will find her way back. I think she's found her pack here with us in this unlikely place.

I vow to Odin that this won't be her last moment of peace.

Before long, my little wolf wants to play again. She bites at my snout and nips at me to get moving with a cute little growl.

We follow the trail back up the cliff and into the woods. The tree cover makes the forest dark, but she's as familiar with running in the forest as I am. We follow the scent of a hare, and when that loses her interest, she takes back up a game of tag. I let her win once, and she growls at me, nipping at my ankle. She wants to play fair.

She charges too fast in the direction of the wards and the camp of ferals posted at the boundary. I race after her, but it's too late. Her wolf thinks it's a game, and she sprints, pulling ahead of me in the dark forest.

I recognize the moment she reaches the boundary line. A string of haunting howls fills the night.

Fuck. They can smell her and see her, but they won't be able to get through the wards. That won't stop them from trying.

It only takes a few moments to catch up, but it's too long. By the time I skid into the clearing, my little wolf is frozen, tail tucked and body shaking.

Glowing yellow eyes stare back at us from the darkness. The feral wolves snarl, their mouths foaming in madness. Wolf after wolf smashes into the boundary, leaping on one another in their attempts to get to her. Their scents are filled with a sharp, violent lust.

I jump between her and the boundary, my snarling growls warning the wolves on the other side.

They won't ever touch her.

The shift to my human form only takes a second. I scoop her up and turn from the wards, cursing myself for not warning her before we went for the run. My goal was to help her feel relaxed enough to sleep. Now, I've sent her into a panic.

The small wolf in my arms doesn't stop shaking.

"It's all right, sweetheart. They can't get to you. The wards keep them out. I promise even if they fail, I'll never let them touch you. I'll keep you safe." I say the words over and over in reassurance as I race back to the cabin.

Briggs is already rushing out the door when I get to the yard. My panic must have woken him. Great. I was trying to help, but now I've worried them both.

"What happened?" my brother growls, looking us over for injuries. When he finds nothing, his hands go to her fur, trying to soothe her. "What is it?"

"She saw the ferals at the boundary." I force myself to keep my voice gentle when all I really want to do is rage.

"Well, shit," Briggs mutters.

Yeah, I fucked up.

Chapter 14

Briggs

The coffee mug I've been avoiding since I came into the kitchen mocks me from the counter while I clean the breakfast dishes. As magic zips along the mug's looping script, it seems to glow. It's almost like a spark racing along the words "stubborn goat."

No doubt Gage had himself a laugh when he left the healing potion out in my newly personalized mug. Of course, he didn't stay around long enough to see my reaction. He's out of the house before any of us wake. If it weren't for the fact that he keeps making meals, I would swear he'd fled.

I debate pouring the potion down the drain, but I'm afraid that would prove his point. Besides, my body aches enough to make it worth it. With a resigned grimace, I down the black tar and toss the mug into the dishwater.

Dex lumbers in, sipping the last of his coffee, coat already on. He scowls, his expression tight. "I said leave them. Go rest with our little wolf."

"I can do the damn dishes," I snap.

Both the other alphas in this house are on my shit list. My brother spent breakfast arguing with me again about letting me help him finish setting the traps.

Okay, arguing may be a stretch.

Dex simply grunted and growled the word no .

Since when do I need his damn permission?

“Why am I the only one with a magical shit-talking cup?” I ask petulantly.

Dex eyes me dubiously. “That seems obvious.”

I flick him with water. “Exactly. If I’m stubborn, so are you.”

My brother rolls his eyes.

“Better watch yourself. You may be the bigger brother, but I can take you.” I hurl the threat at him, mostly joking. If I’m stuck under house arrest, at least I can give him shit.

“When was the last time you laid me on my ass? Did you have chin hair yet?” Dex goads.

My mouth gapes. “Spring. Last year. After that feral got loose in Hidden Meadows when the trap failed. I seem to recall tackling you to the ground before that feral ripped into your back. Saved your life by kicking your ass.”

Amusement floods the littermate bond, along with a burst of appreciation. “Sounds like I should return the favor.” Dex lifts his brow in challenge.

“No need,” I grumble. I don’t actually wanna get my ass beat today. I’m just frustrated and cranky. “I’m staying here, but I hate feeling useless. The traps need to be set, and it isn’t a one-wolf job.”

That’s partially true, though Dex can manage on his own just fine. But I don’t know

if I can go another day watching our little wolf retreat into herself. It seemed as though we were making progress with her, but ever since she saw the ferals at the border two days ago, she's been scared shitless. She's buried so deep in her wolf I don't know what to do.

I hate that I can't fix it. It makes me feel like the worst kind of alpha as I helplessly watch her drift away.

Dex sighs. "I get it. I still think you need the rest, but that's not why you need to stay. She needs you here." I go to interrupt, but he growls, his voice low. "She doesn't need my big ass looming. Not Gage and his thunderclouds. She needs you."

"Right, I'm clearly the man for the job," I mutter. I've been with her in the nest for the last two days, but I might as well not even be there. She ignores me completely, huddled under her mound of blankets.

At least laying traps is productive. It's a real, solid way to keep her safe.

Dex's expression softens, the alpha receding from his voice. "Let me finish building the traps while you coax our omega out. If Gage has to do it with magic, it's gonna hurt."

My stomach drops. Dex's faith in me is misplaced. I've gotten nowhere with her, and why would I? I'm the laugh-it-off brother, the master of acquaintances and moon partners but never anything serious. My philosophy has always been to live in the moment. That's all we've got. This world gives no guarantees. With her though, I want more. I just don't know how to get it.

What Dex is asking of me? I don't know how to do that. Our little wolf needs an alpha to guide her out of her fur. She has to trust him for that to happen. Dex is who she's been clinging to. He can bring her back. I know it.

“It isn’t that I don’t want to help her,” I admit. “I think I’d do anything for her. But I’m not the wolf she needs. She responds best to your alpha.”

Dex gives me a look as though I’m talking out of my ass before understanding dawns across his grumpy face.

Sometimes, littermate bonds are annoying. I know he’s feeling my jealousy and doubt even though I wish I could hide it.

“What if I can’t do anything more than be the good-time guy?” I ask quietly, busying myself with putting away the last of the dishes.

I can protect her, show her pleasure, but I don’t know how to make a real connection. Not the kind that’s strong enough to ground her and make her feel emotionally safe enough to come back into her human skin.

Dex leans against the counter, his penetrating stare making me nervous. “She’s our mate. You know it whether you want to say it or not. And she needs to be reminded what it’s like to be human. She does need you. And I do too. Charm her back, for both of us.”

Without another word, my brother pats my back gruffly and heads to the door.

Great. Charm her back. Sounds simple.

The little wolf is asleep as she has been since I came back into the nest after breakfast. It isn’t good. She’s sleeping too much. Yesterday, she barely moved at all, refusing to eat.

I need a plan to charm her back, except she’s gotta be awake for it.

“Come on, pretty girl. We need some fresh air,” I say, pulling back the blankets and picking up the delicate furball.

Outside, the afternoon air is crisp. The sky is a swirling mix of greys and blues, overcast and gloomy. The little wolf peeks her head out from under the crook in my arm before huddling back into it.

I set her down at the edge of the courtyard by the tree line, encouraging her to stretch her legs. She plops back down on her butt and looks up at me with vacant silver eyes. If the woman is in there, she’s buried deep, but even her wolf isn’t acting right. It’s as if she’s frozen or something.

“Go on. Sniff out the courtyard. You’re safe.”

The black wolf doesn’t move.

I rub the back of my neck, racking my brain for how to get through to her. My alpha is restless, annoyed that I’m fucking this all up. He pushes against the veil between us, seeking control. Without any other brilliant ideas, I strip and let him have my skin.

He trots over to her and licks her snout before rubbing his scent anywhere he can touch. She just sits there. My wolf bites her tail playfully, trying to tease her.

Still nothing.

He tries running around her in circles, nipping and barking in invitation.

Not a peep.

My wolf isn’t deterred. He brings her little objects from the courtyard and lays them

at her feet. A pretty leaf. A shiny pebble. Each time, he bows and waits for an acknowledgment that doesn't come before licking her snout and darting off again.

None of his gifts work.

He gets bolder, darting into the forest and returning with a hare.

She sits, vacant-eyed, still except for the tremble that runs up her spine every time the wind blows through the courtyard.

Damn. Wolf or man, I'm so bad at this. I force the shift, but my wolf doesn't protest. Instead, he growls in my mind, a clear warning to fix this. I stuff myself back into clothes and scoop up the tiny omega wolf.

"I was trying to play, but that's not what you need, right?" I run my hands through her soft black fur, my purr rattling to life from my chest. "To tell you the truth, I'm not in the mood to play either."

What was my wolf thinking? I sigh in exasperation, stomping the dirt off my boots at the door before bringing her into the living room. I set her down and build a fire, worried by the way her small form trembles even inside the warm cabin. The goal was to coax her out, but all I seem to have done is make her sit in the cold-ass yard all afternoon.

I strip off my coat and boots, leaving them by the front door, before racing to Gage's bathroom and stealing his hairbrush. What the alpha doesn't know won't hurt him. Besides, it's a small payback for that mug.

Folding myself down onto the rug, I join her by the fire. I brush the fur along her back in long swipes until she's soft and poofy. She's stopped shaking, at least.

With both hands, I grab hold of her wolf's face and look into her silver eyes. "Pretty wolf, help me help your human, okay? You're my wolf's mate, which means she's mine, right? I need her just as much. My brother too. So, give her back her skin."

The wolf stares at me.

She can't understand me. Or if she can, she's ignoring me. "Well fuck."

I run my hands idly through her fur and watch the flames dance in the fire. Eventually, I can't stand the silence, so I do what I do best—bullshit. I pretend I'm not carrying on a one-sided conversation.

"What's my favorite place I've traveled?" I ask myself, then I answer myself like a total jackass. "Hmm. That's a tough one. But once in the far Western Territory, Dex and I stayed in a treehouse that was cool as fuck. The elders put the pups in the trees during..."

I keep telling her stupid stories about Dex and me traveling, about the land and some of the places we've visited, asking myself questions that I pretend she prompts. I don't mention the ferals or the dying villages, only the good times with silly pups and teasing elders. I exaggerate my commentary, playing up my brother's scowling and my antics, making us both look ridiculous in the hopes that I can pull a laugh from the woman buried under the fur.

The little wolf purrs, and the room's scents finally mellow. I don't know how long we sit there, but the light from the living room windows fades into a dusty twilight.

"What have you seen, little omega? I bet you have stories."

Tired of hearing myself bullshit, I drag myself off the floor and head to the bookshelves that line the living room's back wall. My leg is hurting again, and I could

use some backup. I'm exhausted, and I haven't done shit but make it worse.

These bookshelves are mostly full of old-ass wolf histories, gardening books, and manuals. Still, I remember seeing some fiction titles in Gage's bedroom. I head that way, out of ideas and about ready to throw in the towel. I can huddle with her under the blankets. We can mope together.

To my surprise, the little black wolf follows me. She nudges my leg, nipping at my jeans impatiently.

"You like books? You want me to read to you?" I ask, my heart racing at the way she finally looks alive.

She yips when I brush past a classic shifter tale about the first wolves and their battles with raiding forest trolls.

I get comfortable in her nest, and my little wolf follows. She circles a spot several times before she finds the right one, then she snuggles down, looking at me expectantly.

After the prologue, she looks just as interested, with the smallest spark back in her eye.

"You want me to keep going?"

She snaps her jaws in what I think is an enthusiastic "duh."

I chuckle at the reminder of her sass. There she is. Let's see if I can push my luck.

"Then you eat, I'll read. That's the deal."

The little wolf huffs but gets up, trotting toward the kitchen.

Not wanting to miss the opportunity, I race behind her. It doesn't take long to put together leftovers from breakfast. I set them down next to a big bowl of water and hop on the counter.

I clear my throat and open the book. "Chapter One: The Invasion of the Trolls."

Chapter 15

Dex

For the past week, the little wolf hasn't left the nest often, and during the night, her nightmares return. She stays close to mine or my brother's side when she goes out for bathroom breaks or to the greenhouse. Briggs holds camp with her, the two of them cuddled up under her mound of blankets while Gage and I prepare for the coming of winter.

Briggs is guiding her back to herself, helping settle her wolf in a way only my good-natured brother can. Each day I can feel her human side getting stronger, see more of her personality shining through. Even if she's nervous outside and still sleeping fitfully, she's eating more and acting playful in the cabin.

I know my brother has doubts about his ability to connect with her, brushing it off as bullshit. He's wrong. It's deeper than that. Briggs has a kind of magic about him that draws people in. It's as though he sees them and lets them be whoever they are. I know because he does it with me, never pushing me to be anything other than who I am.

Our little wolf is benefitting from his easy peace, just as I knew she would. From the way her wolf is responding to the three of us, she may be all our mates, but she needs Briggs right now.

Really, they're good for each other. Briggs mellows her out with his easiness, and she helps alleviate his pain with her sweet purr. When I peek in on them in the

afternoons, I often catch my brother reading one of Gage's many books to her aloud while she cuddles on his lap. Once, I caught a glimpse of them dancing. She circled around him, shaking her little tail while he laughed and sang along to one of Gage's records.

The three of us sleep in her nest and have meals together in the morning and evening before I leave them to finish preparations. The snow could come any time now, but this afternoon, I finally finished laying the feral traps. Gage reinforced them with strengthening magic, just in case the ferals breach the wards.

The sullen healer doesn't join us for dinners even though he cooks. Food's always out and ready when I return from the chores, but the alpha is never anywhere in sight.

My little wolf won't have it though. After dinner, she'll yip at me until I take her to the greenhouse. She stays with Gage until the snarky alpha shuffles in later, the pretty black wolf following him.

I'm sure tonight will be no exception. I carry the tray of our dinner dishes back into the kitchen while Briggs sets up a game of chess in the living room. He speaks softly to her while I do the dishes. The normalcy fills me with something I don't even know how to name, but I'm greedy for more of it.

The circumstances that brought us here suck, but this is the longest my littermate and I have stayed in one place since we were here that summer. Even with prepping for the storm and a possible attack, I like it—probably too much.

I need to remember this isn't our pack home. When winter lifts, if Gage doesn't want us to stay, I guess Briggs and I will need to find somewhere else. My gut tells me he's pack and we're her mates, but I can't force that truth on Gage any more than I can on her. Only time will tell, I guess. No matter where we end up, I can only hope it's as quiet as this.

By the time I finish in the kitchen, my little wolf is primly sitting by the door, waiting for my escort.

“All right, let’s go.”

She dances onto the porch, eagerly letting off little growls to get me to hurry. I give her a head pat, amused by how excited she is to visit Gage. I don’t personally see the appeal.

She licks my hand, trotting beside me across the yard of the compound. Inside the greenhouse, she heads straight toward Gage, who is busy tending to his plants. The healer doesn’t even bother to look up.

“The snow will start tonight,” he says.

I nod, feeling that same gut instinct. “Don’t stay long.”

I know she needs this time with him even if I don’t understand it. I want to knock him in the jaw for the way he’s been treating her, but it isn’t my battle.

She licks my hand and curls up with the aloof alpha.

I begrudgingly leave her with him, heading back to Briggs and our nightly game of chess.

The house and small territory are prepared. Now, all we have to do is hunker down and make it through the coming winter storm.

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Chapter 16

Gage

The omega huffs at me, prancing impatiently and glancing at the door. I can practically see the woman inside telling me about myself.

As if I don't already know.

The first storm has arrived, and the snow is already sticking to the ground. It isn't dangerous yet, but the howling wind outside makes her nervous.

I grind the mix until it's got a powdery consistency, then pour the contents of the bowl into a pouch. I grow what I use for healing and spell work. For the last few days, I've been restoring my reserves. With an omega in the house and ferals at the border, I need to be prepared.

The stubborn omega nips at the hem of my jeans. The black wolf with that little star of white on her forehead is pretty, even when she's close to taking a chunk out of my leg. I want to glare at her, but she's too damn cute. I settle for a lifted brow.

"Nobody said you have to stay, little star," I remind her.

She growls at me before she curls back up on the pillows I stacked under the counter.

Stubborn .

She's been my shadow in the evenings while I work at the table tucked into the back of the greenhouse. For the last several nights, it's been the same: Dex brings her. I work while she cozies up by my feet. She purrs me into a stupor better than any buzz I've ever chased. I pretend I'm not affected by her. She calls me on my shit by refusing to leave.

If I'm keeping score, the omega has me by a long shot. Maybe it's futile to resist her, but giving in seems like a recipe for shattering the remaining scraps of my heart.

Alphas are drawn to omegas, but I thought my time as a healer had made me immune. I've spent my life around them and never been drawn to one like I am with this little wolf. It isn't only her scent—though that's basically a shot of pure lust chased by a desire to claim her neck.

What's fascinating about her is how she seems to persist in a world like ours. She's a fighter. Despite her size, designation, and fate, she's still here. And even with all that, beneath the wildness, her natural inclination is to be sweet. The fact that she's been purring for me is proof. It's as astounding as it is undeserved.

I wish I could give her safety and a home. She needs mates who can protect her so she doesn't always have to fight, but I've proven I can't be that guy for her. My track record is zero for eight. Those aren't odds I want to bet on for her.

I can hardly live with myself after the ones I've lost. If she were mine and I failed her? Fuck. I'm barely hanging on as it is. There is no way I could survive. Not losing her.

I was coping just fine until she arrived. Even if it wasn't living, it was close enough. Now, all I see is how I can lose her and them... and all the ways I'll never be enough.

I finish in my workshop, cleaning up the space and organizing the reserves into

crates. It's gonna take two crates to get this all back inside, but I won't be able to make it out here easily until after the storm has cleared and we've shoveled the courtyard.

By the time everything is loaded, the snow is really coming down. I shift the crates to one hand and latch onto her fur with the other. I may not want the connection between us, but that doesn't stop my protective instincts.

Dex is waiting for us on the porch with the look of a man about to deliver a punishment.

"Sorry I kept her out past curfew." My tone is just mocking enough to goad Dex.

His eyes heat, and the look he gives me is difficult to decipher, but the result is all alpha. He doesn't speak, but he doesn't have to.

I roll my eyes. "She's fine. It's snow. No need to get your claws out for a walk in the yard."

The little wolf nuzzles his crotch, distracting him long enough for me to dart inside.

I refuse to open the clinic, so I head to the kitchen. There isn't enough room in the storm-stocked pantry, and I curse like a motherfucker as I shove shit onto shelves.

"What did those canned vegetables do to you?" Briggs pokes his head into the pantry.

"They're on top of me." I give up and leave the final crate on the floor. My hands find my hips, and I glare at him. "Like everything else in this house."

The damn alpha doesn't take the hint, his mouth pulling into a smug grin as he crowds himself into the doorway. "I seem to recall you like it when others are on

top.”

There it is. There was no way he wasn't gonna bring that up.

It was once during the full moon, but I would be lying if I said I haven't thought about that night or him many times... or about how he's the one to show up at my door with an omega who smells as if she could be mine— ours .

It's common for alphas to satiate their ruts together during a full moon. Packs are typically polycules. The alpha mates are often lovers, joined together as partners in caring for their omega. My younger self couldn't wait to find my mates and pack.

I'm not my younger self, and I hate that he brought her to me now.

“I like my solitude and my own hand just fine,” I grumble.

He steps toward me, and I back into the shelf, the glass jars clanging at the force. With one arm, he cages me, and I hate that I like the way it feels. Briggs is as handsome as he was a decade ago, and the light in his eyes is just as bright.

“I think you're a liar.” He brushes his lips against my ear as he whispers, “But when you're ready to face the truth, there's room for you in our bed.”

For a moment, I almost cave. His scent spikes with a floral spice that erodes all my brain cells. His breath on my neck makes me shiver. It would be so easy to let him pull me with him, to join her nest and see how good we could be as a pack.

It would be explosive.

That little reminder brings reality crashing back down.

“It’s my bed,” I growl, pushing him away. “But since y’all commandeered it, I’ll keep sleeping in another room. Alone.” I duck under his arm and out of the pantry in another hasty retreat.

“What was it you said about me being stubborn?” Briggs calls.

I haul ass to my new room, ignoring the fact that the three of them are everywhere I look. The urge to slam the door is strong, but instead I lean against it and light the joint from my pocket.

Here’s to hoping the scent will drown them out.

I stare at the bare white bedroom. It feels as if I’m looking at ghosts. There’s only a bed and empty furniture, but the memory of the former alpha who lived here lies atop the hollowness. I can almost smell the stench and see the mess. Darell’s feet were worse than running across a skunk, and the security guard left his socks everywhere.

He turned on a full moon and attacked the omega he’d been guarding for months.

After a few drags, I abandon staring at the storm outside the window and strip for bed. It isn’t that late, but the storm makes me restless. I try to get comfortable, but it’s impossible.

The deep sounds of Briggs and Dex talking and the little wolf’s barks and yips filter in from the hallway. It’s stupid how I listen for every word when I could just be out there. I wrap a pillow around my head to block it out, hating how it feels as if my only company is ghosts.

I’m lonely. Soul-tired, feel-it-in-my-bones lonely .

But what the fuck is the alternative? No matter how much I wish things were

different, they aren't. How am I supposed to let myself fall for her knowing she can only ever be mine temporarily? Or let myself get close to these men, devote myself to our omega and form a pack, knowing it will all be ripped apart?

I lie there in the dark, feeling sorry for myself and the world until the three of them go to bed. My eyes close, but my mind races. It's been like this since they arrived. The nights are long when they're spent half wishing for and half dreading the dawn.

The storm doesn't help. I feel as though I can hear magic in the wind. It's angry, rattling the bones of the cabin.

My door creaks open, and I lift the pillow. In the doorway stands the omega. She's naked except for a sheet wrapped around her, and every bit of her is a woman, not a wolf. The light from the hallway leaks in, making her silhouette glow with hazy light.

She's so fucking beautiful.

I swallow around the lump in my throat.

Chapter 17

Nova

“What are you doing here?” Gage asks.

He’s lying in bed, shrouded by shadows and an air of mystery. With his inky hair and tattooed runes, he looks as if he’s made of darkness.

It’s fitting.

Gage’s pain clings to him like an ill-fitted jacket. A storm rages inside him, as angry and loud as the storm outside. It’s what made my wolf give back my skin. The need to find him pushed me from the comfort of the two alphas in my cozy nest and led me straight to his door.

Because the storm that lives inside Gage? It lives in me too.

“Why are you so sad?” The question spills from my lips before I can filter my words. Maybe I should be embarrassed by how much my wolf has been clinging to Gage or how desperate I look showing up at his door, but I can’t muster it. I’m driven by the pounding desire to know him.

“Why are you ?” he mockingly thrusts the question back at me, daring me to answer.

I take the bait, the truth blurting out in a rush. “Because I’m trying my best to be strong, but it feels like it’s never enough.”

He sucks in a breath, seeming surprised by my honesty.

I'm right there with him. Why did I give him something real when he lives behind a sardonic mask?

I did though, and I can't take it back. I don't even know if I want to. Behind that sarcastic, indifferent front is a scent that can't lie. That's the Gage I want to know.

Those nights in his greenhouse garden, just the quiet while he worked, were a balm to my soul—his too. The sharp, biting stench of grief eased into his mellow, sunshine-infused garden. When we're together, I feel less lonely—and I think he does too.

So, I give him another reason. "And I'm tired of losing people. Myself most of all."

It's scary how far gone I was in my wolf after seeing the ferals at the wards. I was handling everything relatively okay all things considered, then they triggered an avalanche. It was as if I disappeared into a corner of my mind and couldn't find a way out. Everything—the king, my heat, the ferals, this fucked world—came crashing down, reminding me that nowhere and nothing is safe. I'm tired, so damn tired of fighting all the time, and I just gave up.

Briggs brought light into the dark corners of my mind. He lured me back into myself with his relentless voice and never-ending banter until I was sharing my wolf's eyes again. Even that wasn't enough to push me into human skin, not completely. But tonight, when I awoke, I felt a desperate urge to go to Gage, and my wolf didn't fight me. She receded into the recesses of my mind, giving me back my human skin, and urged me to go to him.

I don't ever want to be that lost again. I don't want Gage to be lost either.

Those haunting eyes of his spear me in place. I can see the conflict within him as he

studies me, looking for something. After a moment, he seems to make a decision, and the scorn he wears slips off. “Same, little star. Same.”

“Why do you call me that? You said the same to my wolf.” He’s said it many times, but each time makes my stomach swoop.

He raises himself onto his side, resting his head in his palm. The move causes the white sheet to dip to his hip, exposing more of his fascinating tattoos. I have an overwhelming urge to lick them.

“I don’t know your name, but your wolf has a little swirl of white right in the center above your eyes. It looks like a little star.” He says the last part with a softness that makes me shiver.

I lick my lips, my throat dry. “My name is Nova.”

“How very fitting.” He chuckles, but it’s a melancholy sound. “Nova—a little star that burns brightly for a short time.” The way Gage looks at me as he says it—as if that knowledge is a kind of torture—makes my chest ache.

I want to go to him, but I pull the sheet tighter around me instead. It’s clear he doesn’t want me to join him, and I’m not as bold as my wolf. I settle for asking my question again. “Why are you sad? The truth.”

“I told you the truth,” he grumbles, looking away.

Bullshit.

I may not be willing to crawl into his lap like my wolf, but I gave him the truth, and I want the same. I raise my brow. “You didn’t tell me anything. You agreed with me.”

He sits up, gritting out the words through a half growl, chest practically heaving. “I want you in this bed, and I want you to leave and never come back.” His nostrils flare, and his fists clench. “Is that what you wanted to hear? How much I hate that I want you?”

The rejection hits my chest like a crack of rolling thunder. I force myself to breathe through the whine building in my throat at the harshness of his words. Instead, I look at the man my wolf is so sure is one of her mates.

He looks as wrecked as I feel, his alpha barely contained and his face hard lines of bitterness and pain. When our eyes meet, the air sparks with the connection between us. Those silver eyes of his hold anger but heat too—so much that it feels as if all the air has been sucked from the room. Beneath that is a loneliness that tugs me to him despite all his gnashing teeth.

I let that truth settle me and help me see past the sting of his statement. Couldn't his words be my truth too?

Ever since I woke up here after the full moon, a part of me has wanted to flee and never look back. At first, it was the terror of an omega on the run, but these alphas aren't like the men in the tents or the king. Being with them feels like a fairy tale. Even with the ferals lurking at the border, I feel more peace than I have in a long time. I'm scared that if I let myself become too comfortable here, I'll be devastated when I lose it.

I've lost everything else. It's stupid to think I could keep them or this place.

I think my wolf refused to give back my skin even after I found my way back because she wanted to give me time to settle and realize I could make something here. She's right—these men could be my pack and this place my home.

Is it worth having if it can't last?

My wolf nudges me toward Gage, making her answer clear.

I bridge the distance between us and sit on the edge of the bed. Gage gave me a truth. Even though his truth was a response to one I'd already given him, I'll give him another.

"I'm afraid this is too good to be true. That if you pinch me or kiss me, I'll wake up and realize I'm back with the king and this was all a dream," I admit.

"No, this nightmare is very real." He leans closer, his thumb brushing along my cheek.

"Nightmare?" I wince.

"Do you want me to kiss you and prove it?"

I look away from the intensity of his gaze, all my boldness having already been spent.

"Is that a yes?" He grabs my neck, cupping my chin until all I can see is his devastatingly handsome face.

His small touch makes my entire body come alive in anticipation. It makes my skin hot, and at the same time, it sends a grounding burst of calm through my body.

"Tell me, beautiful." His thumb brushes along my jaw.

My head lifts in a jerky nod.

That one gesture releases his alpha. His herb-and-sunshine scent floods the space

between us, then he's on me. My stomach fills with butterflies, but the kiss I'm expecting doesn't come.

Instead, he whispers in my ear, his breath feathering along my neck, "Do you know why this is a nightmare, little star?"

His lips land at the spot right beneath my ear, making my heart race. I can't answer him or think of anything but his scent and warm weight.

"Your beauty is going to be the death of me. One taste will never be enough." His words are a gritted-out truth so raw that I swear I stop breathing.

Gage plants kisses along my neck until his soft lips find mine. The kiss is intoxicatingly slow, as though I'm discovering my body for the first time. I don't know what to do, but Gage takes over and lets me sink into the sensation until I'm opening for him. His hand curls around my hip, and he pulls me closer until I'm straddling his lap. Every part of my body feels alive, and my core aches.

He pulls back when I'm so breathless I'm drowning in him. "This nightmare is our reality, and yet I can't say no to you."

He growls, taking my lips again in a bruising kiss that I feel down to my toes.

"I don't want you to," I pant into his mouth. My body is on fire, desperately chasing a need I don't fully understand. It hurts, but it feels good, and I can't stop rubbing against him.

"Easy, star. I've got you," he promises.

What's wild is that I believe him.

Chapter 18

Gage

The little omega on my lap is hot to the touch, and her eyes are glazed, almost as if she's in heat. Her scent, too, spikes with need. She rocks against me, her nose buried in my neck as she takes deep inhales.

Reality hits me like a gut punch.

She's been around her mates for over two weeks now, and she didn't have a successful heat. The circumstances made that a necessity, but I didn't think those actions through.

Stupid, selfish fucking wolf. As a healer, I should have known better.

It's rare for scent-matched wolves to last longer than a few days without succumbing to the urge to bite-bond, especially if an omega is in heat. Her body will try its best to correct that and prepare for the next full moon to ensure she isn't rejected. Not to mention her omega's got to be unsettled by the fear of our circumstances. She'll need her alphas to ground her and convince her body that she's safe and wanted.

And I'm the asshole who has been avoiding her.

My hesitance has already cost her. No wonder the little wolf stubbornly followed me around and clung to the brothers when she wasn't trailing me.

I need to get my shit together. Whether I planned for it or not, my omega is here, and she needs all her pack if we have any fucking chance of keeping her safe.

Nova's tongue pokes out, licking along my chest and drawing my focus.

My hands find her hips, stilling her. "Eyes on me, little star."

She's quick to follow my command, eager like her wolf. Those wide eyes gut me, tugging on every protective instinct I have.

"Have you ever been touched before?"

"No," she whispers at the same time she rolls her hips. "But I want you to." She bites her lip, the scent of dark cinnamon filling the air as she slicks.

It's paradise, and unlike last time, I'm allowing myself to give in to my desire to find out how sweet she tastes.

"You want me to make you feel good?"

A moan slips free, and Nova squeezes her legs around my hips, rubbing against me through the sheets. The friction is delicious, but I need to focus.

"Is that a yes? Let me hear you say it," I grit the words.

She sucks in a sharp breath, her body trembling. "Touch me, please."

Fuck, she's sweet. Too sweet to resist.

My mouth finds her neck, sucking along the light freckles and new scars until I get to the tangled sheet. I kiss my way south until I can circle her nipples with my tongue.

The fabric of the sheet dampens and the tips pebble, leaving two perfect targets. When I suck one, she cries out, her nails raking down my back. She's so responsive it's unreal. Each little touch makes her whimper and moan.

"That's right, wild child. Give me your sounds. Don't hold back."

The dark cinnamon of her perfume floats between us, blasting away my ability to think. I cage her in with my hands, lowering her to the bed. For a moment, I get lost in her hungry kisses, gently cupping her neck and swallowing her sounds.

Measured tugs of the wrapped sheet reveal soft skin a few slow inches at a time. She's beautiful but so tiny it feels as if she might break. Amid the dusting of freckles scattered across her skin is a bite mark on her hip and another high on her ribs. I kiss the crescent scars and venture back to the scars on her neck, paying reverence to the places on her body that bear witness to her strength.

She shivers at my light touch, her fingers threading through the hair at my nape. "Gage," she begs, back arching.

The way she says my name with such need almost sends me to the edge. I want to rip off the sheet covering my lap and bury myself inside her until she's begging for my knot. Yanking a tighter leash on my alpha wolf, I force myself to go slow. After everything, Nova is trusting me to make her feel good.

She spreads her knees, giving me a teasing glance of her pink pussy. My dick twitches at the sight, eager to spread her open and fill her with my cum.

That ain't happening.

This is for her pleasure, to take the edge off. It doesn't stop me from picturing how she would feel all around me, her pussy squeezing and working my cock.

I caress her skin, first cupping her small tits, then plucking her nipples until she's chanting my name. One swipe of my thumb along her wet slit makes my alpha rumble deep in my chest. "You're soaked for me, little star."

My thumb teases her swollen clit and traces her opening before going back to playing with her nipples. I make the slow path again and again, watching pleasure ripple across her delicate face and memorizing her moans.

Nova lifts her hips, her teeth scraping her lip. "Alpha."

Her plea annihilates the rest of my patience. I circle her entrance and dip a finger inside. Her pussy spasms, sucking me in as the little omega shatters beneath me.

She came from just the tip of my finger. Damn, that's hot.

"That's a good omega, coming for me so pretty," I praise her, letting my alpha's satisfaction bleed into my tone.

I sink farther inside, using my thumb to stroke her clit. She's so fucking tight my knot aches at the thought of how stretched I'll make her.

She grinds against me, each movement sending her higher and higher. I watch, mesmerized by the way my finger sinks into her glistening pussy. Without thought, my other hand takes a long stroke of my cock, the feel of the rough sheet adding to the spike of pleasure.

Her silver eyes track the movement at the same time her pussy clamps down. Her lips part, and she clutches my arm, coming for a second time with a choked moan.

"So beautiful." I curl myself over her, slotting my mouth atop hers in a messy twist of tongues.

She clings to me with everything she has as she sucks in lungfuls of my scent. I tease along her neck, teeth nipping enough to mimic the bite.

My wolf doesn't think we should mimic anything. As he has since she arrived, he wants to sink his teeth into her pretty neck while he stuffs her full of cum. The idea is as terrifying as it is hot.

Curling a second finger inside her, I grind the heel of my hand against her clit, making her wail. She rides my fingers, making these delicious moans as she gets closer and closer to another release.

I watch up close as her orgasm finally crests, burning through her. The pleasure makes her eyes shine and her breath hitch.

"So good," she pants.

"Yes, you are. You're so eager for me, such a sweet little omega." My fingers tease her edges, stretching her open as I work her through her peak.

This time, her sweet apples waft into the mix, softening the sharp spice of her cinnamon. She's gone through the frenzy for now, but if my hunch is correct, this won't be the last of it.

I roll to my side and curl my arm over her hip, tucking her against me. For long moments, I hold her, letting those little tremors of bliss rock through her.

When I feel her stir, I lift her chin and find her eyes. The fire has been banked as I suspected. "You did beautifully for me, Nova."

The wild child gives me a dopey grin. "Smells like sunshine." She takes a deep huff, nuzzling into the crook of my neck. Her tongue pokes out, giving me a tentative lick.

“You’re the cure for loneliness.”

She’s adorable. The hormone frenzy has her talking out of turn without making sense, but that doesn’t stop my heart from stuttering at her words. I kiss her forehead, threading my fingers through her short hair.

She’s floating right now on a sea of orgasms and my alpha pheromones. That’s good. It will ground her and make her feel a little steadier.

I’ve been a stubborn ass, pushing her away when she needed me. She deserves better, but I’m what she’s got. It will probably end in disaster. Nothing about tonight changes our circumstances. But what my selfish, fucked-up brain didn’t comprehend was that I would be her disaster if I pushed her away.

My wolf purrs for her, a sound of hope I don’t feel. The affection in the gesture, on the other hand, I fully get. Nova is so damn brave. She marched in here when she knew I was likely to be an ass, and she pushed for the truth. Her spirit is so bright that it’s impossible not to feel her warmth. I was a fool to think I could refuse my mate our fate.

With slow strokes, I caress her back, holding her as I whisper words of praise. I tell her how beautiful she is, how strong. I admit that I’m an insufferable pigheaded twat and she’s perfect.

The specifics of my words don’t register, but our wolves purr in harmony. Her breaths grow long and deep, puffing against my neck.

Sleep doesn’t come for me, but in those moments, the storm outside seems to quiet, and the world fills with a blinding sense of peace.

Chapter 19

Nova

Every part of my body feels like a marshmallow. My insides are gooey and warm, my brain floating on the currents of Gage's lulling purr.

Total bliss. Sign me up to be kissed and touched by this man every day because, holy shit, that was mind-blowing.

I know omega wolves are known for being sensual and needing alphas' physical touch to balance out their systems. Experiencing it is something else entirely.

It's startling to see the difference these alphas make. I don't think I'd realized how run down I'd gotten—or how soothing being around a scent match could be.

Gage's rough palm squeezes my hip. "You awake over there, little star?"

I burrow into the hair by his shoulder, hiding myself in his dark waves. "Maybe."

He hums, the sound overly amused. "It's only been a few hours. I'm sure you could use some more sleep."

Following his advice, I drift into the bliss of being held and the delicious soreness between my legs. I think I doze, but before long, my brain returns to being an angry beehive swirling with questions. Gage was real with me last night, and I understand him a little better now, but so much is still unclear.

Something happened to him, and he's not ready to tell me. The fact that he's afraid of the connection between us is kind of reassuring. I'm right there with him. I want these men to be my pack, but I'm scared of the future and freaked out about the fact that I don't know what I'm doing.

How the heck do I go from living alone to having mates? My human side feels out of practice. I'm not sure where that leaves me after last night.

When the curiosities become too much to contain, I let one pop out. "When my heat came, what did you give me?"

Of all the spokes on the question wheel whirling in my brain, I've surprised even myself with that one.

Gage freezes beneath me. Apparently, he's as confused by the trajectory of my thoughts as I am.

After an uncomfortable moment of silence, he clears his throat. "It wasn't a traditional potion used for heat. I made it in the thick of the moment, but the gist was a sleeping potion mixed with a blocker meant to dull your pain and senses."

I'm grateful he gave it to me. Having my first heat so soon after being rescued from the Alpha King and not knowing my heat companions would have been awful.

Okay, that's not entirely true. It wouldn't have been awful in the way it would have been if I had spent my heat with the king and his wolves. The brothers would have been good to me and made sure I didn't suffer. Maybe Gage too.

Except I don't think it would have mattered. I would have been devastated if it had happened at all. Even knowing that, the rational part of me can't seem to completely win over my omega, who worries about why they didn't want me.

“Why didn’t you—” I can’t even finish the words.

“Spend your heat buried inside you?” The lilt to Gage’s voice is light and teasing, pushing back against some of the anxiety that seems to be rushing in from all sides.

“Yes,” I whisper. I feel the heat burn across my cheeks even though I’m hidden from his gaze.

Gage gives a throaty chuckle. “Believe me, there was no being around you without wanting to. It took everything I had not to join you when I first saw you in the bed. You were presenting, and it was the hottest thing I’d ever seen.”

My omega preens at his words even though they make my face burn. “But then, why the potion?”

“You couldn’t consent,” he explains as his hold on my hip tightens. “But don’t go thinking me gallant. That was all Dex.”

“What do you mean?” I peek my head out from my hiding place to study him. Even in half darkness, he’s strikingly handsome.

He cups my face, his thumb brushing my cheek. “Dex is your mate. I can see the bond already forming between you two. He was torn up by being unable to help you through your heat. He stayed by your side the entire time, even though it was agony for his wolf. But he insisted on the potion, wouldn’t hear a word about bringing you through it naturally.”

“Why?” I barely manage the word, my throat choked by a cocktail of mixed emotions.

“He said people had taken enough from you and refused to let your heat be another.”

Gage's thumb strokes under my eye, and it takes me a moment to realize it's because I'm crying. "Dex was right, you know."

I owe Dex and Briggs my life. They brought me here, saved me from the king and ferals, took care of me. Gage too, even though he tries to downplay it and pretend he didn't have any part in this. What they've given me shouldn't be more than basic human decency, except in this feral world, it's anything but typical.

"They don't make wolves like the brothers much anymore."

"That's because they're old," Gage teases.

He's back to hiding behind a joke. I find I like it, so I tease him back.

"They're your age," I remind him. I rest my head on his chest, tracing the black ink of the runes.

"Like I said, old."

They haven't even reached the age when wolves stop aging, which means they're younger than fifty. Most of the elders are gone now, so I guess age is relative. Living like we do, twenty feels like the new one hundred.

"How old are we talking?" I get bolder with my exploration, brushing past his nipple.

Gage's breath stutters, and his fingers dig into the curve of my ass. "I'm thirty-seven. Dex and Briggs are thirty-four, give or take."

I twist his nipple. "Yeah, you're right. That's super old."

He yelps, his big palm swatting my thigh. "No biting. No titty twisters. Or else

they're fair game for me too."

"I make no promises," I say with a laugh, wiggling out of his hold. I shield my boobs from his wandering hands, but he lands a pinch on my ass that smarts.

It devolves from there into a tumble in the sheets, each of us landing at least a nip. When his lips cover mine, I surrender without thought. The kiss is passionate and reassuring. I let myself get lost in it until my stomach interrupts with a growl.

"Come on. Let's get you a snack." Gage smacks a kiss on my cheek and rolls off the bed.

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Chapter 20

Nova

Since coming to this cabin, I swear all I do is eat and nap. It isn't easy for a small wolf alone in the forest to hunt, at least not enough that I ever felt satiated. I get why I'm hungry, but just being able to eat feels weird.

Gage hops into jeans and grabs his T-shirt from the chair in the corner. "Arms up, little star."

He pulls his T-shirt over my head, and my omega instincts give a happy little dance. It's worn and smells of his earthy garden scent. I tug up the collar, sniffing like a lunatic as I follow him through the dark house. Outside, the storm still rages, and the windows in the living room let in the eerie white glow. It's late, or maybe early, and the others are still asleep.

Gage flips on the light in the kitchen and pulls ingredients from the pantry. He lifts his chin. "Sit. I'll bake."

I climb up on the counter by the stove, watching as he works at the kitchen island. He makes a dough and adds herbs and dried flowers.

"What are you making?"

"Lavender biscuits." He rolls the mixture into a large ball and plops it on a floured surface.

I don't know why, but watching his tattooed hands pound and work that ball of dough is seriously hot. My throat turns dry, and I look away before I start perfuming. Gage is dangerous to my ability to function. Earlier, I made sounds for him I didn't know were possible. It's kind of embarrassing how needy I was.

He doesn't mind my awkwardness, quietly working beside me. He cuts the biscuits and sets them in a baking tin with practiced ease. The steady hum of his work, mixed with his earthy scent, reminds me of being in his workshop and how peaceful the quiet was.

Gage puts the tray in the oven and sets a pan atop the stove before grabbing more ingredients from the fridge. "Tell me how you wound up with the king."

The healer doesn't look at me when he asks the question, and I'm grateful. It isn't enough to get me talking though. I collect the dishes he's amassed, cleaning up behind him like I did with my grandmother when I was younger.

With my hands occupied in soapy water, I finally answer him. "Like you, my grandmother was a healer. She gave me a recipe to suppress my heat. When I went to the city looking for herbs I needed, I got caught by an alpha guardsman."

Behind me, the sounds of Gage's cooking continue. "Did you live with her before? Is that how you stayed hidden?"

Thinking of my grandmother is always bittersweet. I know she would have liked these men. She wanted a pack for me, and that knowledge gives me courage.

He listens quietly while I tell him about my time in the forest and my village before that. Saying the words out loud to Gage, recounting how I survived—the constant travel, never sleeping through the night, braving the city in disguise—hurts. It's as if a part of me had numbed out what happened and now I feel all of it.

I don't know why talking to him is so easy, but the words flow out of my mouth, probably more than I've said to another in years. I share what my grandmother did to save my mother. Telling him what Grandmother believed about our magic, about who I am, feels safe. No matter what Gage thinks about being mates, he takes his role as a healer seriously.

Gage turns off the stove and pulls me into a hug. It's exactly what I needed, and I let myself give in to the urge to suck in his scent. I sink into his strong arms, burying myself against his chest. It's silly to be upset about something that happened so long ago and someone I thought I'd already grieved, but emotions don't make rational sense, so I let the tears come.

His rough voice vibrates from his chest, the sound sending warmth through me. "I'm happy you had her. She was smart to tell you about the magic and prepare you for the forest. I'm sorry for all you've had to do to survive. You've found your mates now. There isn't a need to run anymore." Gage rocks us gently side to side. "They're strong alphas, and you already have the seed-bonds of a pack. I bet that brings her peace."

"The brothers?" I mumble against his chest just to be clear. He didn't exactly include himself.

"Yes, the brothers. They're the best hunters I've seen. They will give you a fighting chance." His hand rubs gentle and soothing circles along my back.

"You can really see the bond forming?" I ask with a sniffle.

My grandmother always said healers could read auras but not manipulate them. That's how she knew the bonds were dying. She used to see the energy bonds between mates when she worked as a healer before the ferals. Then, the bonds between wolves started to break.

“The ties are established. If you nourish the connections, they will grow,” he confirms.

“What about you?” My entire face flames, but I push through. “Do you still want me to leave and never come back?”

I wince at how insecure I sound, but he’s been all over the place, and I want to know where we stand.

Those silver eyes of his don’t do much to reassure me. He pulls away to check on the biscuits in the oven, which are done. He sets the tray on the stovetop by the other pan and turns back to me. “Part of me will probably always worry about the end. I don’t think that just goes away. But I’m yours if you’ll have me.”

“What does that mean?” I ask around the giant lump in my throat. All of Gage’s answers sound like maybes.

“It means he’s done being a stubborn ass and is ready to help build this pack,” Dex growls from behind me.

“Basically,” Gage mumbles.

The delicious, toe-curling deepness of Dex’s voice makes me freeze. I’m pretty sure my ovaries just exploded. When I can think around the heat crawling in my veins, I finally turn to face him.

Seeing him in my human skin makes me nervous. He’s rugged, all stark features and thick muscles. Underneath his intimidatingly masculine appearance is my slay-the-monsters-for-me gentle giant. I’m already in love with him—except we’ve never actually really met. How the fuck do you greet a man you’ve crotch-sniffed and want to climb like a tree without looking like a psycho?

Whatever he sees in my expression doesn't reassure him. Dex's shoulders slump, and he backs out of the room. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't mean to scare you."

My wolf nudges me forward, but I'm already moving.

"I'm not afraid of you." I walk straight into his arms, hugging him tightly until he curls himself around me.

"I knew you would find your way back," Dex murmurs.

"You did that. Thank you." I plant a kiss on his chest, letting myself get lost in the rich scent of candied hazelnuts.

"I never want you to be afraid of me. I promise I will do everything I can to keep you safe," he says.

"I know, alpha." When I hold up my arms, he takes the hint, lifting me off my feet. I wrap myself around him. "But right now, I don't want a hunter. I want my mate to kiss me."

He swallows roughly, eyes wide. "Are you sure?"

"Don't tell me you're afraid of an omega," Gage teases from the kitchen.

"Fuck off," Dex growls. "Like you haven't been hiding from our little wolf."

The sound Dex makes low in his throat doesn't help the situation, and I take matters into my own hands, cupping the big alpha's rough jaw.

"I'm sure," I promise him before stealing a kiss.

Dex seems to wake up and take control the moment our lips touch. His big paws squeeze my ass, his lips demanding. It's a kiss of ownership, an acknowledgment that we already belong to each other. It makes my perfume swell and Dex's purr stutter to life in his chest.

He backs me into the wall, his big body caging me in the most delicious way. "What a welcome back, gorgeous. Why don't we get you fed before I lose control and make you breakfast?"

Chapter 21

Briggs

“ Why the heck is everyone up at the ass crack of dawn?” I ask, yawning as I groggily stumble into the kitchen.

I do a double-take at the little blond omega sitting in my brother’s lap. Relief floods my system. Our little wolf came back into her skin.

She’s breathtaking. The contrast to the last time I saw her human form, limp and in pain, makes the sight even more startling. Her pixie cut emphasizes her silver eyes and heart-shaped face. Beyond her beauty, she has an innate light that seems to make her skin glow.

“Well, damn, pretty wolf, look at you!”

The small wolf gives me a shy smile, and my heart melts into a puddle on the floor. She holds out a dainty hand, the borrowed navy T-shirt she’s wearing slipping off her shoulder to reveal adorable freckles that match the patch across her nose and cheeks. “I’m Nova. And you’re Briggs.”

“Oh, no, you don’t.” I cross the dining area and sweep her into a hug, twirling her around until she giggles. She clings to my neck, and I stop spinning, waiting for her to look up at me. “We’re past formality, don’t you think?”

Her pink tongue darts out and licks her lips, a smile curling at the edges. She nods,

and I take that as permission, claiming her mouth with a soft kiss. She's sweet, a little shy, and absolutely perfect. She also tastes so fucking good, her warm scent deepening into something so darkly delicious that I want to lick every inch of her mouth and suck my way across her skin.

My alpha agrees. He thinks I should take it further, carry the delicious-scented omega back to the nest, and get to know one another by sinking my teeth into her neck.

Before I can take it too far, I pull away and kiss her forehead.

She just shifted back. There will be time. At least, I hope there's time.

Nova clings to me, snuggling into my chest with a soft sigh. "You smell good."

I chuckle. "Right back at you, pretty girl."

My brother gets up and helps Gage in the kitchen. On his way past, he gives us one of his rare smiles.

"Thank you," he mouths.

Gratitude fills our littermate bond, and it mixes with the warmth of having her here. For those few moments, while she holds on to me, the world has never felt more right.

Gage walks past with something that smells delicious, and Dex follows a moment later with a tray of mugs.

"One of those better have coffee."

Nova looks up at me. "Sorry. I woke up starving, and that seems to have gotten

everyone else up.”

“No sweat, gorgeous. I’ll wake up early for you any day.”

Her cheeks turn pink, and she scrunches her eyes closed. It’s seriously the cutest embarrassed pout I’ve ever seen.

“You don’t have to be shy with me. I’ve known you for weeks now, right? It’s just us.” I slide my palm to her lower back, guiding her past the pack table and into the cabin’s cozy living room. The large cabin was made to house multiple packs, but the place is all Gage. Everything is dark wood, worn leather, soft quilts, and an explosion of books.

Nova breaks away from me, plopping herself down in Dex’s lap. I don’t know if I’ll ever get over how my brother is with her. The fact that she goes to him so easily fills me with gratitude. Not many people ever dare to look past his scars.

She reaches for a basket of biscuits in the center of the coffee table. On the first bite, she makes this sexy, throaty sound, wiggling on Dex’s lap. “Bread is so good.”

The room of alphas has gone still, all three of us watching the way she eats that damn biscuit. I doubt she even knows the effect it’s having, but my dick is highly aware.

She licks the dripping honey butter off her finger, slipping it out of her mouth with a pop, and three pained groans ring around the room.

Nova snaps her head up, looking between us before her eyes hit the floor. She mumbles, her scent souring. “I’m sorry. It’s been a long time since I had something like this. I think I forgot how to human.”

“Don’t apologize,” Dex growls, lifting her chin so she meets his eyes. “You did

nothing wrong.” A look passes between them, and she gives him a grateful smile.

“It’s a very naughty way to eat a biscuit. I very much approve,” I tease.

She looks my way, and I wiggle my eyebrows suggestively. That makes her laugh as she buries herself in Dex’s neck.

“I’m glad you like them. We can make them whenever you want.” Gage goes back to lighting the fire as if him being pleasant isn’t totally out of left field.

I settle in beside Dex and Nova on the large L-shaped couch. When the healer folds himself into the overstuffed chair to join us, I’m shocked all over again.

As we eat, we talk a little about the storm but nothing heavy. Whatever happened before I woke up has changed the dynamic, as has Nova’s shift to human form.

When the little omega falls asleep in Dex’s lap, we leave the dishes and return to her nest. Gage lingers at the doorway, watching as Dex gets her settled, but he turns to leave the moment she’s tucked in.

“Or you could stay? This is your room, after all,” I say, pointedly eyeing him. The Gage I knew didn’t back down from a challenge.

Gage’s eyes bulge. “This is hardly mine anymore.”

“It’s ours. Hers, for her pack. That includes you. Now, get your ass in here and make good on the promise I overheard earlier,” Dex growls. His alpha backs up his words, and I blink in shock at the way my wolf heeds his call.

I’m moving to the nest before I know I’m doing it, Gage on my tail.

My eyes fly open, my body as stiff as a board. The overpowering sweetness of candied apples dripping in spicy cinnamon cream saturates the nest. The mouthwatering scent pulls a tortured growl from my wolf.

“Holy shit. Why does it smell like she’s in heat?” The words come out on a strangled groan as I throw back my head and take another whiff. My cock hardens, and my alpha steps to the surface. It’s like her scent from the Jeep on the way here.

“Don’t wake her,” Dex grunts, his voice just as strained.

Her scent is so intense I leash my alpha with a chokehold, afraid to move in case I snap.

This scent-matching shit is wild.

Gage pops his head up on the far side of the nest. “It’s a hormone spike. It creates a frenzy.”

“What?” Dex asks at the same time I ask, “Like a heat?”

The healer sighs, sitting up and rubbing his hand through his dark waves before scratching his jaw with a yawn. “It’s sort of like a mini-heat. She didn’t have a successful heat her first time, and with her scent matches here, it’s pushing her body to correct that and initiate a bond by the next moon.”

“How do we fix it?” Dex says, lowering his voice as he looks at the sleeping omega on his chest.

Gage shrugs. “There’s a spell I could use, but it would be better if her omega settles naturally. From what she told me, she was on her own and on the run for a long time before she had to visit the city where she was captured. Omegas don’t do well alone.

That's probably compounding her response."

My wolf snarls, pissed off all over again at how we found her. My brother doesn't fare better. Dex stiffens at the reminder, a rumble thundering from his chest.

Gage puts his hands up in surrender. "It's not good, but it's something we can fix. Alpha biology makes us the best cure. We just need to make sure she gets plenty of alpha pheromones, scent marking, and lots of cuddling. Making her a proper nest wouldn't hurt."

Dex clears his throat. "By alpha pheromones... do you mean?—"

"A knot?" I finish for him, my throat on fire. The visual that accompanies the word nearly takes me down.

Gage nods. "Many. And cum. Hers. Yours."

I did not need to know that fact.

My littermate asks him a fucking follow-up question, and Gage keeps talking about the magical properties of alpha jizz.

I tap out. If I hear Gage say one more word, I'm not sure I can keep myself from pulling out my dick right here. I try thinking of rotting garbage, rancid meat, or sad puppies—anything to make me stop picturing the way Nova would look riding my cock, mouth open on a moan. Her scent wraps around me, making it impossible to think of anything but her and sex.

"How the fuck are you not affected?" I grumble. I'm over here mouth breathing and trying not to come in my pants, and they're carrying on a full-blown conversation.

Gage cuts his eyes at me. “I’ve had a hard-on since she arrived.”

I did not need that visual either . I grit my teeth, debating whether I can gather the courage to leave this nest.

Nova makes the decision for me. Our little omega curls in on herself, whimpering in pain.

That cry snaps my wolf out of his stupor, and my chest vibrates with my purr. Mine kickstarts Gage’s, and the alpha’s eyes widen in surprise. It’s almost funny how this tiny little wolf wraps us around her finger.

Dex cradles her close. “Wake up, sweetheart.”

Nova makes another awful-needy whine that’s half pain, and I can’t take it.

“Gage?” I growl while Dex speaks softly in her ear.

Nova sits up, throwing her arms around my brother. She tucks her nose into his neck, taking in deep huffs. “It hurts.”

“I know, sweetheart. You’ve been so brave on your own,” Dex says softly, caressing her head.

“We’re here now, and we’ll take care of you. How about I run you a bath?” I ask.

She wraps herself tighter around Dex.

“We’ll go with you? Does that work?” I promise. “Whatever you need.”

Nova gives a small nod of her head. “I’m sorry—I-I’m so needy. I don’t?—”

“Stop it right there. No more apologizing for things you can’t control,” Dex warns.

Nova peeks up at him, her bottom lip wobbling.

“Don’t let this grumpy wolf fool you. That’s just his way of reminding you that this isn’t your fault. Besides, you can be as needy as you want, pretty girl,” I reassure her. At the same time, I telegraph for my brother to chill out before he freaks her out.

Gage finally speaks up. “This is part of the bonding frenzy. Follow your instincts. It’s your body’s way of solidifying your pack. But I think if you can wait for the bonding until the full moon, it will strengthen the magic.”

“Okay,” she whispers. I can almost taste the apology she wants to give.

I hate that she thinks any of this is on her. We need to make it clear that we want her here. Protecting her, loving her, and building a pack with her will be an honor. She never has to worry about being too needy—not with me and definitely not with my brother. The jury is out on Gage.

Dex carries her to the bathroom while I sprint ahead and start filling the tub. Gage comes in behind us, rooting around in the cabinets. He hands me a pile of bubble bath, salts, and oils and heads for the door.

“I’ll be back. I need to double-check some things. Give her whatever she wants in the meantime,” he calls over his shoulder.

Like there was any other option.

Chapter 22

Dex

“ A ll right, sweet girl, I’m gonna set you down so you can get undressed,” I explain, trying to keep my voice soft for her.

Nova’s nails dig into my neck, and she shakes her head.

Briggs throws me a questioning look over his shoulder as he shuts off the tap.

“What is it, sweetheart?” I ask gently.

She mumbles into my neck, her arms tightening their hold. “Don’t let go.”

My heart trips over itself. I hate that she’s suffering, but the fact that she turns to me for comfort settles my alpha. I want her to rely on me, to trust me to protect her.

“Never, sweet girl.” My words come out choked and raw sounding. The grit betrays the way her words affect me. “There is nothing I wouldn’t do for you. You’re stuck with me.”

Nova gasps into my neck before peeking out to look at me. “Promise?”

“Yeah, sweetheart, I do.” I kiss her forehead. “Now, let’s get you in the bath. I bet that’s gonna make you feel better.”

Briggs eyes me and the tub, shrugging. “You’ll probably fit.”

Like the rest of the cabin's bedrooms, Gage’s is set up like a pack suite, with a large bathroom and an oversized tub. This one is big, but it’ll be a tight squeeze.

“Is that what you want? Me in the bath?” I ask her, rubbing my palm along her back. She’s still too tense, and her scent is sharp, cinnamon coating my tongue.

Nova gives a little nod. “Briggs too.”

I eye the little ball of omega in my arms, wondering how the fuck I’m supposed to do this with her clinging to me. Does she want us to stay clothed? The extra barrier is probably a good thing. I don’t need to scare her or pressure her into something she’s not ready for.

I have zero finesse. Though I’d do anything for this woman, I don’t exactly have much experience in... anything that’s soft.

My brother’s lips quirk in amusement. “Come here. Let me help you while Dex gets situated,” Briggs offers, reaching for her.

He may get a kick out of the fact that I have zero game, but my brother would never let me down. That eases some of my nervousness. I can do this with Briggs next to me, showing me how to care for her.

I kiss the top of her head and squeeze her hip. “I’m right here. Just gonna make sure my big ass gets in first so you don’t get squished or fall.”

Nova unclenches her tight hold, diving for my brother’s open arms.

“Clothes off?” he asks as he sets her feet on the tile.

Her eyes flash with heat, and she licks her lips, giving a shaky nod.

My dick jumps in my sweats, and my heart races. I'm already worked up, and she isn't even touching me.

I watch in fascination as my brother slowly tugs up her T-shirt to expose a small patch of hair and miles of soft-looking skin. When he reveals her small breasts, I can't help but think about sucking on one of those rosy nipples.

I've been rock-hard since she started perfuming, and seeing her beautiful body makes my knot ache. I strip off my sweats, trying my best to ignore my leaking cock.

Nova's eyes widen, and her throat bobs. I'm not a small wolf, and she's tiny. Fear ripples across her face. Before I can freak her out, I hastily climb into the tub, burying myself in the bubbly water. We'll go at her pace, no matter what Gage says about what her body needs. I never want her afraid of me.

Briggs sweeps Nova off her feet, and she lets out a surprised eek. He gently lowers her into the steaming water, settling her on the side opposite me. To my surprise, she wiggles around until she's settled between my legs, her back resting against my chest.

There's no way she can't feel my cock digging into her back, but there isn't a trace of fear in her scent. I swallow around the lump in my throat, hoping I don't fuck this up.

"This is gonna make a mess." Briggs eyes the tub dubiously as he strips.

Nova giggles at his expression, the sweet peals of laughter making my pulse trip. That's a sound I want more of.

Briggs is right about the mess. Little waves of water spill onto the tile floor as he jostles his way into the tub and sits opposite the two of us. There is barely enough

room, all three sets of our legs sandwiched together.

When we finally have ourselves sorted, Briggs lathers up a washcloth and pulls one of her legs to his chest. As my brother washes her calf in smooth circles, I watch the little iridescent bubbles slide down her skin. He teases his way up her leg, and her knee drops in invitation.

My body is practically vibrating with tension. Everything about this woman is sexy, and my body is wound too tight.

Briggs is cool under pressure though. Instead of taking the tease of her spread legs, he switches to washing her other side. It's fucking torture watching him lather her skin, her pretty breasts heaving in anticipation.

The atmosphere makes it even more erotic. Gage's bathroom is like a secret garden, vines and foliage running along the wooden rafters. Together with the steaming bubbly water and our combined scents, it creates a kind of paradise. My alpha purrs at the rightness of having her between the two of us, of taking care of her as we're meant to.

I wrap my arms around her waist, pulling her back against me and nuzzling into her neck. Nova's scent spikes, her sharp cinnamon pluming into the air.

She whimpers, squirming on my lap. "Please. It aches."

"Do you want us to touch you, omega? Is that what you need?" Briggs asks. His voice is deeper than usual and full of the same need I'm feeling.

"Yes," she admits, but it sounds like an apology.

"Don't you dare feel sorry for wanting our touch. Do you feel how hard I am? How

much I want you?” I murmur in her ear, my palm brushing along her hip.

“Relax and let us give you what you need,” Briggs purrs.

Nova surrenders at his command, her shoulders dropping. She melts into me as I kiss along her neck, and my brother continues his lathering exploration. He places her foot on his pec and kisses her calf, handing the washcloth off to me.

I take my time, massaging her arms first before moving to her stomach. I use the cloth to lather my hands, abandoning the barrier. I cup her pretty tits, and my thumbs brush her nipples each time I make another pass, Nova grinding her ass against me.

This is fucking nirvana. Her skin is so soft, and she smells so damn good. I can’t get enough of the feel of her in my arms.

A ripple across the surface brings my eyes back to Briggs. He leans in, hands moving subtly under the water. I can’t see what he’s doing beneath the bubbles, but Nova lets out the sweetest swallowed moan.

“Our omega is perfect, brother,” Briggs grits out. His arm moves beneath the water, teasing between her legs. “She’s so fucking soft and sweet.”

Whatever he’s doing is driving her crazy. I want to see how he’s taking our mate apart, but the water only gives me a hint at what’s beneath.

Nova shimmies on my lap, pushing her breasts into my hands. Her scent is heady around us, the sweet apples joining her cinnamon.

“You like being sandwiched between two of your alphas, don’t you, little wolf?” Briggs asks.

Nova mewls as I drizzle water across her chest, letting the suds drip down her nipples before I roll them between my fingers. Her sweet sounds have my cock aching to come. I'm too amped up, and she's too fucking gorgeous. Briggs's arm pumps in and out below the water, and Nova spirals higher and higher, her moans rippling between us.

"Don't stop," she begs.

"Be a good girl and let me watch my brother make you come," I growl.

She says our names on a jerk of her hips at the same time I pinch her nipples.

"That's it, come for your alphas," Briggs commands.

Her body trembles as she throws her head back on a moan, chest heaving. I hold her tightly, whispering how beautiful she is. When she's finished riding out the little tremors, she twists in my arms, taking my lips in a desperate kiss.

I cup her chin, kissing her deeply until she sinks into my lead. She moans into my mouth, and I swallow her sounds until we're both breathless.

"You need more, don't you, my sweet omega?" I ask.

Glazed silver eyes burn with lust, and Nova dips her chin. "Please."

I brush my thumb along the blush blooming on her cheek. "You beg so pretty, baby girl. How could I ever say no to you?"

Briggs wraps his arms around her from behind, his hands swallowing her tits as he sucks along her neck. "Lean over the ledge for me."

I help her get to her knees between my spread legs, her chest draping over my shoulder as she hangs onto the porcelain ledge. That puts her sweet ass in my face. I bite the round flesh, my hands tugging on her cheeks. Her pink pussy winks at me, and I can't resist the urge to feel how wet she is.

The edges of my fingers skirt along her slit, the slick making the glide smooth. A growl of hunger rises from my chest. I twist around her, burying myself between her cheeks and flicking my tongue along her dripping opening.

She's sweet cinnamon and sugar. I lose myself in the taste of her, spearing her with my tongue. I spread her cheeks, taking a long lick before pulling back to stare at her sweet little pussy. She's dripping for me, and the sight makes my alpha roar with primal satisfaction.

Nova wiggles her ass, wanting me back between her legs.

I'm torn. I want to lick her until she comes on my tongue, and I want to watch my fingers disappear into her sweet heat.

She wiggles her ass in impatience and whimpers. "More."

Chapter 23

Nova

“We can give you more.” Briggs wraps a hand around my waist and scoops me into his arms, throwing me over his shoulder.

A surprised huff slips out of me, then a giggle as he climbs from the tub. We're a dripping mess, sloshing bath water onto the floor. Briggs doesn't seem to care.

“Dry her off at least. It's freezing. Don't let her catch a cold,” Dex grumbles. He follows his brother in a mad dash, hastily grabbing towels.

“Chill, big guy. She's burning hot. Aren't you, baby?” Briggs teases, smacking my upper thigh playfully.

I half giggle, half moan. I want him to do it again, harder.

An itch under my skin makes me restless and puts my omega on edge. My head is full of cotton, making it hard to think beyond the heat in my belly. I'm so slick that the jostling on his shoulder makes my legs rub together in the most delicious way. Add that to the way Briggs's skin is brushing against my hard nipples with every step, and I'm halfway to an orgasm already.

Briggs doesn't heed Dex's warning, flopping me straight into my nest's plush mound of blankets. He cages me in, resting his weight on his arms as he hovers over me, a lopsided smile on his handsome face. He looks boyish with his chestnut hair falling

into his eyes. He's also every bit an alpha—strong shoulders bunched with muscle, a light smattering of hair on his defined chest, and silver glowing eyes that flash with his wolf.

I bury myself near his neck and take a whiff of his scent. "Alpha," I moan.

There's no stopping how needy I sound. He smells too good. My body craves him—them .

"Yes, omega. I'm yours."

I latch on to the closest skin, licking the scrape of his jaw and down his throat. He tastes like a forest under a glowing moon, floral and dark. Briggs moans but pulls away, his eyes seeking mine.

"You say stop, we stop. But whatever you need, we're here for, okay?" He searches my face.

I try to blink away the fog, but the clouds are heavy now, swirling in his nighttime forest. "Yes, alpha."

"Shit, you're dangerous, little wolf. So fucking perfect and sweet." He punctuates his words with a kiss that sends me straight to the stars.

Briggs's weight above me is satisfying, and I latch on, desperate for the warmth of his skin. He kisses me until I'm drunk on him, whimpering into his mouth with slick trailing down my legs. He breaks away on a growl so sexy it feels as if the sound is a direct pinch to my nipples.

"You're taking all my control, making it impossible not to get lost in you." He kisses my nose and rolls off me.

I whine at the loss until I see Dex. His massive form should be frightening, the way he hovers, dark and formidable, at the edge of the nest. Everything about him screams power, from his massive thighs to his bulging arms and thick chest. The scars make him look like a man who has lived through darkness and conquered it, but to me, he looks like the picture of safety.

He's also seriously hot. Dex's sharp features are zeroed in on me, a hunter watching his prey. One of his massive hands is lightly circling the head of his thick cock.

I whimper, wondering what he tastes like and how I'm ever going to take his knot. He's huge. Like, "Is it gonna fit?" huge.

I have zero experience.

His shoulders slump, and I recognize the tell. He's worried he's frightening me. He's so damn gentle with me my heart can barely take it. Dex has got an alpha dick, but he's my mate, and I'm an omega. I was made for this. He doesn't need to feel self-conscious.

I lick my lips, my eyes zeroing in on that big cock of his. It looks huge. It's thick, veiny, and an angry red at the tip. I can do this. A surge of slick spurs me on, my core aching with emptiness. "Come here, alpha. I need you."

The words could sound desperate, and maybe they are, but I don't care. I give him the truth because Dex deserves to know how much I need him. I've only known him briefly, but he's already become my rock.

Something flashes across Dex's face, and a small smile tugs at his lips. "Anything you need, sweet girl. Always."

"All right, big guy, kneel," Briggs directs as he crawls up behind me. He tugs me

between his legs, pulling me against his chest, whispering in my ear, “We’re gonna let Dex feast on you, teach him how to get you to go off on his tongue.”

My thighs squeeze together at the idea of Briggs guiding the two of us.

Dex glares at his brother.

Briggs chuckles, the sound tickling my neck. “Nova doesn’t mind that she’ll be your first. Do you?”

“I like it.” Omegas are possessive by nature, and knowing I’ll get Dex’s firsts has my wolf purring.

“That’s our greedy girl.” Briggs’s big hands slowly glide up my stomach and brush along the underside of my breasts, teasing without giving me what I want. “Hook your legs over mine. Show him how needy you are for your alphas.”

His command makes me fidget, that flaring ache between my legs ramping up.

Briggs’s hands lock around my chest, his warm breath in my ear. “Put that pretty pussy on display for my brother, baby.”

A whimper tumbles out, liquid heat racing through me. I spread my knees, looping my feet around his calves. Briggs’s hand travels lower on my belly, teasing but not touching. I squirm, slick and on edge.

Dex looks like a man starved, his eyes locked on me and his muscles tensed to pounce. His brother’s hand creeps lower, teasing with the lightest touch. Briggs dips a single finger inside, his thumb brushing my clit before he retreats. He holds out his glistening finger for Dex before Briggs sucks it into his mouth. I stop breathing.

My pussy clenches in need, and a whine builds in my throat at the sound of Briggs's moan. "Come show her how good a student you want to be."

Dex flicks off Briggs, grumbling as he kneels between my legs. He leans in, his eyes soft. "You're so beautiful, Nova. Let me worship you."

My brain stops braining. How do I even compute that? Before I manage to respond, Dex's mouth is on mine. For all his shyness and worry, he's a force of nature once he lets loose. He devours my mouth and makes me feel completely his with every twist of his tongue.

Dex trails kisses down my chest before sucking a nipple with perfect pressure. My back bows, and I bury my hands in his short hair, trying to find a way to hang on. When he's turned me into a panting mess, he finally settles between my legs. It sends a thrill up my spine to see this strong alpha with his face between my thighs, looking at me as if I'm the answer to every prayer.

"Look how wet she is for us." Briggs says, his voice husky in my ear. He collars my throat with his hand, his teeth grazing my skin.

"Sooooo fucking wet," Dex groans.

Briggs sucks the lobe of my ear before murmuring, "And she tastes so sweet."

Dex makes this low rumbling sound of agreement, licking his lips. "She does. I'm never gonna get enough."

There's something so dirty about the way the two are talking around me, about me, that turns me into a slick mess. Dex's big body hovers over me, and the hard, insistent press of Briggs's cock against my ass emphasizes the way I'm sandwiched between them. Their focus makes me want to squeeze my thighs together, except I'm

held in place, my legs pressed against Briggs's, waiting for whatever they have in store for me.

Without thought, my hips rock, desperate for Dex's mouth. Words tumble out in a needy string, cries for him to touch me, please, to fill me already, to let me come.

"Fuck. The way you beg makes me so damn hard." Briggs adds a solid arm around my ribs, holding me in place. "Taste her, slow and easy around that pretty clit. Show her how sweet she is."

Dex pins my thighs open, squeezing with his big hands so close to where I need him. Despite the almost-feral hunger in his eyes, he doesn't bury himself like I expect. No. My sweet alpha follows Briggs's command, circling my clit in careful teasing movements. Each slow swivel of his tongue makes my fists clench.

It's perfect. It's not enough.

Briggs matches his brother's slow pace, drawing achingly slow trails around my nipples. They circle and tease, never giving me enough to send me over the edge. My pussy feels empty, my body supercharged to detonate if they would just give me a little more. Their slow, synchronized strokes put me in a trance until I can't do anything but moan and beg. I find Briggs's thigh, clinging to him as I watch Dex mouth my pussy.

Nothing about my frantic whining seems to spur them on. I grab Dex's short hair, yanking him closer so I can grind all over his face. That move unmuzzles his alpha. He sucks my clit and slides two fingers into me, fucking me in short, fast strokes.

"He can't get enough of your taste, baby." Briggs moans. "Come for him, drench his face in slick."

I mewl at Briggs's words, my orgasm building until I'm so close I could cry. I fist Dex's hair, rocking my hips while he sucks my clit and hits that sweet spot with his blunt fingers. My body freezes and shatters in an orgasm so big that I feel it in my toes.

Dex growls, lapping up my slick with needy grunts.

"Please, alpha!"

Even as the bliss rolls through me, it isn't enough. My omega whines, desperate for something more. Dex freezes, and I know he's about to come. I scramble out of Briggs's hold, diving for my big alpha.

Mine.

Before they even register what I'm after, my tongue sweeps over Dex's glistening cock. He's sweet and a little smoky, the dark flavor rich and heady. I get a tight grip on the base of his cock, tonguing his slit while I rub along his knot. I'm all eagerness and no skill, but Dex doesn't seem to mind.

"Oh, shit—that's—oh gods." His fingers thread through my short hair. "Nova, sweet girl." His hoarse growl lights me up inside, then his cum floods my mouth.

I lick and suck, practically high from the taste of Dex on my tongue. It's what my omega wanted, needed. I take deep pulls, stretching wide around his fat head, a purr already vibrating in my chest at his scent and taste.

Briggs drapes himself over me, the slick head of his cock tunneling between my cheeks. "So beautifully eager. I can't hold back. You've got me too worked up."

He takes a shuddering breath, cum spilling onto my ass. I make a noise deep in my

throat, and he blankets my body, his fingers locked between us, rubbing his scent into my skin.

Dex's deep voice keeps up a steady stream of praise, and I bask in the alpha pheromones, too far gone to do anything but float.

Gage curses from the door. "Well, that's a new kink unlocked."

Briggs calls something to him, and it makes the healer laugh. I'm too far gone to track their conversation, floating in the afterglow.

After a while, my men move. I'm pliant, barely aware of being cuddled between the three of them. Sleep doesn't come, but I'm not awake. It's a river of calm, my heart beating slowly and my thoughts sluggish.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I have questions about what Gage said. I'm out of heat, but it's as if it still races in my blood. Those thoughts get lost in the slow, lapping vibrations of three alpha purrs.

I can worry more about that— later.

Chapter 24

Nova

My everything shower was a serious need and so wildly indulgent that I almost feel guilty. My body aches deliciously from how Dex and Briggs worked me over this morning. With the conditioner, loofah, body scrub, and razor combo, I'm a new wolf.

Honestly, a girl could get used to this.

I wrap the big fluffy towel closer around me before sampling the collection of herbal scented lotions Gage has on the bathroom counter. My mind replays little vignettes from earlier. I picture the look on Dex's face when he dove between my legs. That one gets replaced by the memory of Briggs's hands on me in the tub. Already, I'm slick and itchy skinned again, but I can't seem to stop.

This must be what Gage was saying about the instincts to bond. My omega wolf knows I've met my matches, and she is eager to be claimed, but I don't think it's that simple. We haven't even really spelled out what our plans are. How can we even make plans with the world as it is?

Maybe we can hide away in this cabin forever.

I sigh. A girl can dream.

The mirror is fogged over from the steam of my shower, and I wipe the glass until my face is visible. All my newfound sexiness is dampened by the reflection staring back

at me. I barely recognize myself. My life in the forest seems to be etched into my skin. It's there in the deep bruising under my eyes, the uneven short hair, the ugly scars on my neck, and the way my collarbone protrudes. I knew those things existed, but they didn't really register.

I open the towel and study my body, trying to become familiar with this new reflection. I map the scars and lean in to see the faintly glowing bite on my hip. It's haunting—like looking at a sister I never knew. We share features. We're clearly related. But this version stacks up into someone entirely new.

“They're beautiful proof.” Gage's melodic tenor startles me, and I catch his eyes in the mirror.

I lift my brow at him in question. Nothing about me feels beautiful right now.

He leans against the open bathroom door, a stack of clothes in his hands. “Those scars prove you're a survivor.”

His explanation makes me feel better and worse. He's right. I've done what I had to in order to survive. My body is living proof of that strength. It also paints in stark reality that the old Nova is gone. I'm struck with a wave of grief for that village girl I lost.

I pull my towel back around myself, done with the self-pity. “Are those clothes for me?”

Gage gives me an understanding smile but lets the subject drop. “They are. Why don't you get dressed? I want to show you something.”

He crosses the bathroom and sets the pile of clothes on the counter before he guides me back in front of the mirror with a hand on the small of my back.

He bends down, whispering in my ear, "I meant it. You're beautiful."

He sucks along my neck by my ear, and my head tilts to the side, giving him access. His tattooed hand cups my neck, and his gaze travels across my face. The wolf in him is at the surface, his gaze swallowed in darkness.

My thoughts get trampled by a wave of heat that hits my center.

His other hand skirts between the ends of the towel, and he cups between my legs. "Everything about you is a fascinating combination of strength and sweetness."

He makes a slow pass along my center, and I feel myself getting slick.

"It makes me desperate for you," he growls.

A whimper tumbles out, and I shift my hips, needing him to touch me and ease the ache between my legs.

His lips curl into a ruthless smile as he gives a singular teasing swirl around my clit. "Especially when you smell so eager."

I suck in the heady scent of his pheromones and let them travel straight to my head. He smells so damn good I want to bathe in him.

"Sadly, filling this sweet pussy isn't on the agenda this morning." As quickly as his hand is where I want it, it's gone. He squeezes my hip, kissing my forehead before pulling away. "Now get dressed."

An almost whine tumbles out, and I stare at the retreating alpha. "You're serious?"

His throaty chuckle makes me pout. He turns at the door, his eyes filled with humor.

“Come on. I think you’re going to like this.”

“More than an orgasm?” I huff. My neediness has made me bold. I can’t seem to care. I feel robbed.

Why do I like his teasing so much?

He shrugs. “Maybe not, but I wouldn’t rule it out.”

I obsess over his cryptic message as I hurry through getting dressed. He’s left me a sweater that smells like Dex’s sweet hazelnuts, a pair of fuzzy socks, and soft thermal leggings that still have a tag on them. Being in human clothes feels a little strange, and Dex’s sweater is so big it’s a dress, but the fabrics are cozy, and the smell of Dex helps settle my nerves.

I tiptoe past the sleeping brothers and find Gage waiting for me in the hallway. He weaves through the living room, and I trail behind him. “Where are we going?”

The weak morning light is obscured by the storm. It’s barely enough to see by, but Gage takes my hand, leading me up the stairs. “It’s easier to explain in person, I think.”

I’ve explored the house in my wolf form. The second story is full of empty bedrooms, each of them big enough for a pack. Despite my curiosity about them, Gage doesn’t linger. We take the stairs to the third floor, passing what looks like a nest. It’s bare, like all the other rooms, but it feels heavy with sadness. I turn away from it, the hair on my neck rising.

“This way.” Gage clears his throat and squeezes my hand, quickly pulling me down the hallway and away from the unsettling nest. Down another shorter hallway, we end at a door. Gage steps back, gesturing for me to go ahead. “Feel free to grab anything

that calls to your omega. You can claim one of the pack suites when you're done, and the guys can help me get it all sorted."

I have zero clue what he's talking about, but his expression is filled with equal parts hesitance and hope.

He licks his lips. "Go on. I promise it's good."

Curious, I step inside.

The room isn't what I was expecting. I don't know what I thought would be behind the wooden door, but this isn't it.

"What is this place?" I throw a questioning glance at Gage.

"It's the attic." He stuffs his hands in his pants pockets without any more explanation, as if that's adequate reason for why this attic is stuffed wall to wall with... I can't even take it all in.

My eyes feel as if they're about to bug out of my head. "Okay, Mr. Cryptic, I need more than it's the attic."

There are piles of furs, stacks of fabrics and pillows, and overflowing chests of sheets, blankets, and quilts. Eager to roll around in the piles, my omega wolf pushes me to explore. The instinct to dive in headfirst wars with my curiosity about why this is here.

"This place was given to me in exchange for being the groundskeeper and healer. It was built as a safe harbor before our people were at war, back when we thought we could change the tide."

The hollow sound of Gage's voice rips my eyes away from the treasure trove. He looks like I must have when I saw myself in the mirror—haunted and stuck somewhere in the past.

“Who did you harbor?” I ask, though I think I've already guessed the answer.

Gage takes his time answering, looking past me without seeing. “Pregnant omegas and their packs. The attic was built as a place for storage for when an omega arrived. It's got everything needed to build a proper nest.”

How often has he said that to an omega standing where I am? An irrational surge of jealousy travels through my heart. I don't have any right to his past, but that doesn't seem to matter.

“Is this—” The question dies on my lips. I can't ask, but I also can't take their things, even if it would be impractical not to.

Gage makes a pained sound. “No. Never.”

“What happened to them?” I almost whisper the words, afraid of what he might say and equally afraid he won't confide in me.

He balls his fists, shooting off tiny green sparks. “All of them came here bonded. None of them survived. Maybe we can spare ourselves the details.”

The sadness and grief in his scent knock me in the chest. I know what happened to my kind. My grandmother was a healer, just like Gage, and I saw the toll it took on her. My jealousy feels stupid and immature in the stark light of reality. “Just one question and then I'll leave it.”

He gives me a sharp nod.

“How many did you try to heal here, Gage?”

The turn of his head doesn't save him. His pain is as clear in his voice as it would be in his eyes. “Eight omegas. Eight packs.”

No wonder he's the way he is. How could you survive losing so many without taking on some of their sadness? My heart hurts for this healer who has seen so much death. Tears threaten to spill, but I instinctively know they'll make it harder for him.

Gage takes one step, then another, until I'm in his arms. Against his stronghold, my tears don't stand a chance. They breach the dam.

“Don't cry for me, star,” he murmurs.

I can't help it. Thinking about him trying to save them annihilates me. This is why he fears our future—he's seen it play out.

I hug him back, pulling him to me as though if I just hold on, we can slay our demons together. All the odds are stacked against us, but here in this moment, I wish I could promise him I'll be his lucky number nine, that I'm the survivor he thinks I am.

The promise won't leave my lips because I can't lie. Not to him or about this.

He hums, rocking me in his arms, his voice thick with emotion. “I know, little star. I know.”

That storm crackles between us; this time, it's full of rain. Gage purrs for me while I cry for both of us. I don't know how long we stand there hanging on, but eventually, the tears let up. The wood beneath my feet turns solid again. Even though nothing has changed, it hurts a little less when we hold the pain between the two of us.

Gage wipes under my eye with his knuckle and kisses my nose. “I can’t promise you the future, but let me give you this. You deserve a home and a nest. Let’s see if we can find some things together.”

“I like my nest,” I say through a watery smile.

Gage’s lips quirk up. “Humor me.” He spins me around, caging me in from behind and covering my eyes. “Your omega needs to settle. A real den will allow you to solidify bonds with your mates. Listen to your instincts.”

“And if my instincts say we should spend all day in bed?” I ask, trying to bring back some lightness after so much heaviness between us.

“Then I guess you should listen.” With a steady hand, Gage leads me around the room.

He keeps one hand over my eyes, telling me in rough rasps against my neck to touch. He guides my hand through soft silk and warm fur, each time asking me what I like. Next, he asks about colors and textures. He teases me with feathers along my arm or soft cotton that he drapes around me. It’s a tour of touch. My omega purrs through it. I get lost in the experience, the sadness from our earlier conversation fading.

His hands roam my skin, and his scent dampens the outside world. It mixes with Dex’s sweater, and I swear I get hints of Briggs. My wolf loves the combination, and I feel my legs getting slick the longer I think about being in my nest, surrounded by their scents.

The makeshift blindfold melts away, and he whispers in my ear, “Now, be a good little omega and tell Dex and Briggs which room you want to claim for your nest. They can deliver your favorites.”

I turn in surprise to see the two wolves standing near the door, their arms overflowing with piles of bedding. How long have they been here?

Both wolves are looking at me with an overwhelming combination of adoration and lust.

“To my nest, of course.”

Gage laughs, a truly joyous sound. “Are you sure? We can build you one of your own.”

“I’m sure.” I lunge for him, and he catches me easily. His hands slide along my hips as I plant kisses on his scruffy jaw. “Thank you for sharing this with me. All of it.”

He kisses my temple and sets me back down. “Come on, let’s build you a proper nest.”

Chapter 25

Dex

Being in her nest feels strange. Not bad. It's really, really good actually, but it's almost like working together to build her nest made all of this more real. The others seem to feel the weight of it too.

We rearranged Gage's room until it truly became Nova's. Seeing our fierce little omega boss her alphas around made me snicker. She had us move the bed out of the room and replace it with two king mattresses that she promptly made into a comfy nest. At least this new nest won't murder my back.

The room's essence is the same, but it feels as though it really belongs to the pack now. That's not the only thing that's new and incredibly right.

Nova leans into my side, burying herself under my arm and rubbing her cheek against my chest. She's seeking my scent. Mine. Even in her human skin, she wants me.

I'm not sure what the fuck to do with that except bask in it and pull her closer. "Do you like it, sweetheart?"

"I love it." Her sigh turns into a sweet purr.

Briggs finishes hanging a strand of little twinkling lights and plugs them in, filling the bedroom with a soft glow. "All done."

Gage clambers into the room, a stack of bins in his hands. Besides the attic, there's a storage room filled with clothes by the laundry. He's brought old clothes for Briggs and me to go through and a bag of things he found for Nova. "I'm gonna make dinner."

"You want help?" Nova's muffled voice makes me grin.

"You guys work on these first." The healer doesn't wait for an answer, setting the bins down and shuffling to the door.

"All right, pretty girl," Briggs calls. "Come pick which ones you want me to scent."

I toss a pillow at him, but he catches it easily.

Nova laughs at us, untangling herself from my side and folding herself down into the nest. "Give me." She makes grabby hands.

Briggs and I rummage through the piles, letting her select which ones she wants us to adopt. Most of the stuff is too small for me, but some of it will work. Given the circumstances, we don't exactly get to be picky.

Nova is so fucking cute in the way she rubs the fabric against her cheek before deciding what stays and what goes. It doesn't take long to get it sorted and put away, with a small pile left out for each alpha to scent mark.

We join Gage in the kitchen, where he's taking chocolate muffins out of the oven. He puts Briggs and me to work chopping vegetables to add to his roast and instructs Nova to sit at the island. She protests momentarily but gives in with an eye roll at my growled, "Sit."

"You're all ridiculous," she huffs.

Briggs points a carrot in her direction. “Let us pamper you where we can.”

“Fine. If you insist.” She gives him a soft smile, and my heart splutters as though it was meant for me.

I love that she’s both of ours. My brother and I have shared everything our whole lives, so it makes sense that we would share our omega.

“We do,” I grumble, which makes her turn that soft smile my way.

Nova picks little bites of carrots from our pile, tossing each into her mouth with a crunch. There’s something so satisfying about hearing her happy little sounds while she snacks and we work around her. That deep sense of home settles in, and I find myself smiling for no real reason.

“So, you guys are littermates. Briggs has told me stories about your travels as hunters, but I want to know how you met Gage.” Nova eyes the three of us.

Gage takes the muffins from the tin and sets them on a cooling rack. Nova reaches for one, but the healer tsks her away. “Careful. I made them for you because they have a base made with some extras that you need after so long on a wolf diet, but don’t eat too many at once. The herbs will help with your muscles and cramping, but too much will probably make you feel a little wonky.”

“You made her pot brownies, didn’t you?” Briggs asks, sounding affronted. “Where’s my stash?”

Gage smirks at my brother. “I’ll make you your own batch.”

“Great. Just what we need,” I tease.

Nova steals a muffin with a shrug. "I'm used to living with a healer and eating their concoctions. I'm not worried." Nova makes a go-on motion. "Tell me about how you met."

I get lost in the moan she makes around her first bite, and it takes a head shake and a dick adjustment to remind me of her original question. "We came here when the place was being built."

"They secured the area for me," Gage adds. "They spent a summer here."

"And how did you get assigned this place?" she asks.

Gage busies himself at the stove, taking a moment. "My fathers were the pack alphas for the Eastern Forest before they passed with my mother the winter I turned eighteen. I didn't want to be pack alpha, even though I was the oldest. I had a magical touch, and healing was where my wolf felt drawn. I went to live with my mother's brother, a traveling healer, while my brother took leadership of the pack. My uncle trained me, and we worked together for a while before he passed. A few years later, I was approached by a group of elders."

"The Council?" Briggs interrupts.

"Yes and no. They were elder healers and a few Wolf Council members who had joined forces. It was their plan to build this place and keep it secret. We planned for two years before we finally got everything together that summer you two came here."

"It was a good summer. Full of brownies," my brother says wistfully, his eyes on the healer.

I'm wondering, not for the first time, if something more didn't happen between the two of them that summer. Nova gives me a secret smile; I think she sees it too.

“What about before you guys came here? Before you were hunters?” she asks me.

“I don’t remember much. Nothing about our village or our family pack.” I finish peeling potatoes and bring the bowl over to Gage.

Briggs picks up where I left off. “We grew up in the tents of the Outskirts, living there until we were sixteen. That’s when Mako found us.”

“Who is Mako?” Nova rests her chin in her hands, watching us as she snacks.

“He was an elder who kicked our asses until we stopped being little shits,” I admit, thinking of the grizzled alpha.

My brother raises his brow at me in question, and I nod. He can tell her, but I don’t have to watch. I avoid their eyes by cleaning up my mess and taking the peelings to the compost bin.

“We were punks hustling in this underground fighting ring. There was never enough food, and the fights got us extra rations. This one night, the king’s guard raided a fight, snatching up kids for work detail. The chaos started a fire, who knows how, and I got trapped with this other kid we knew. Dex could have gotten out, but he had to be a hero.” Briggs’s words are teasing, but I feel his gratitude in our bond.

The feeling makes me uncomfortable and exposed. I couldn’t leave him there. What was I going to do? He’s my brother. We look out for each other.

Nova’s gaze lands on me. “You got him out?”

The attention feels like pinpricks on my scars. I swallow thickly. “And then ran right into Mako, who chewed my ass out all the way to the healer. After that, he took us to his home, and we never left until he helped us get our first hunting gig with the

Council a few years later.”

Briggs squeezes my shoulder. “Yeah, Mako was an old-school hard-ass, but he straightened us right out. He passed away a few years back, but without him, I don’t know that we would have made it.”

Nova opens her arms, waiting for me. The moment I lift her, she wraps herself around me. Maybe I don’t mind being in the spotlight if it’s her light shining on me.

“That must have been so painful, but I’m so grateful for him and for you,” she whispers. She buries herself in my neck, gently petting along my chest where the worst of my scars live.

I swallow around the boulder in my throat, leaning in to scent mark her hair. I don’t know if I’ll ever get over how right it feels to have her in my arms.

My brother joins our hug, curling himself around her back. “Get in the pack pile, Gage.”

Nova giggles against my chest. “Yeah, Gage!”

The healer runs his hand through his hair, looking embarrassed. I glare at him. If I can survive being the center of attention, he can deal. He blows out a long huff.

“Death by cuddles,” he grouses, throwing his arms into the mix.

“It’s not a bad way to go,” I remind him, folding him into my arms too. He’s a shit, but he’s ours, and at the end of the day, he’s not so bad.

“Yeah, yeah,” he mumbles.

That sets Nova off, or maybe it was the muffins. She giggles hysterically until we can't help but join her.

Chapter 26

Briggs

Nova places the last rune tile in the sequence and raises her hand in victory, pumping her fists and wiggling around. After finishing her dance, she hovers over the coffee table, counting her matches.

She's so fucking cute. Adorable. Sexy as fuck. It makes it difficult to keep my hands to myself. I want to crawl over and take a bite out of the ass she keeps shaking my way.

We're camped out in the living room by the fire, dinner dishes spread around us as the storm still howls outside. It's day three of being snowed in, but the cabin is toasty.

Even losing epically isn't enough to dampen the fun of watching Nova go toe to toe with Gage. They're kicking our asses at Cauldron, a traditional shifter game that requires matching rune tiles in specific patterns to earn points. Dex and I didn't learn the runes as kids, and it shows in our weak-ass gameplay.

"That would be two spells and a jinx," she declares proudly.

Dex scribbles on the pad beside him before giving Nova a dopey grin. "That puts you back in the lead."

"Not so fast." Gage makes an over-the-top villainous laugh as he places his next tiles. He piggybacks off her last move, then the damn genius adds an additional sequence

connected to the first, doubling the points.

Nova throws back her head. “I thought I had you that time.”

Gage leans across the coffee table and scrapes his teeth along her neck. “Admit defeat and give me my prize now.”

She shivers but leans in, whispering loud enough for all of us to hear, “Never.” Her eyes catch mine, and they’re full of teasing mischief.

Dex chuckles. “Give him shit, sweetheart.”

I pat my leg. “Come sit with me, and I’ll give you a prize win or lose.”

Her eyes flare with heat, and she crawls my way, no doubt giving Gage and Dex a peek of her ass beneath that sweater.

“What kind of prize?” she asks, leaning over me and stealing a kiss. It’s playful and hungry.

“The kind where you come.” I pinch her nipple, and she moans into my mouth.

As Gage warned, her omega instincts are riding her hard, making it so she needs her alphas’ touch. Over the last few days, while we’ve been riding out the storm in the cabin, she’s spent at least half of it sucking down our scents and coming on our fingers. We’ve talked, cooked together, watched a few movies, and played games, but we’ve never made it far into any of those activities before her perfume swelled.

I swear I’ve walked in on my brother and Nova in the kitchen half a dozen times, her spread out on the table while he feasts between her legs. He’s damn near obsessed with eating her out, and she’s loving it.

He proves my point by scooting closer and palming her ass, his big hands spreading her cheeks. “You can’t put this pretty pussy in my face and expect me not to do something about it, sweet girl.”

“Why do you think I did it, alpha?” she says with false innocence.

Her playfulness makes me salivate. I’m so gone for her.

Her cinnamon apple scent thickens, and I can almost taste her slick in the air. I kiss my way down her neck, then mouth a hard nipple, sucking the peak before moving to the other. Nova gasps into my neck. I tease the edge of her sweater, drawing little circles on her soft skin.

“Please,” she whines.

“Please what?” I ask. “Do you want to torture Gage, make him watch me give you your prize?”

She makes this breathy noise I take as agreement.

“That’s my naughty girl.” I give her nipples a good tug, and she whimpers, sucking along my neck.

My eyes find Gage’s. They’re filled with equal parts fuck-off vibes and pure jealousy, but I happen to like riling up the alpha. I give Gage my best shit-eating grin and nod toward the chair by the fire that will give him the best or worst view, depending on his view of edging. “Take the chair and keep your hands off.”

“Not happening,” Gage growls. He complies anyway, and that sweetens the deal.

“Knot,” Nova begs. Her voice is desperate, and her pitch is too high.

That's new . We've been going at her pace, and she's been satisfied with mouths and hands. My dick jumps, cheering on her request.

Dex growls, burying his face between her legs. That sends Nova into a fresh wave of need. She tightly clutches my sweater, her glazed silver eyes finding mine. They say please and alpha enough to crumble my remaining control.

I cradle her cheek. "We've got you, baby. Let Dex make you come so you're nice and slick and ready for me."

She gives a stuttering breath, her eyes rolling back at whatever Dex is doing. I hold on to her shoulders to keep her steady, whispering praise in her ear. At the same time, my brother pushes her higher and higher toward climax.

Gage's eyes feel hot on the three of us, his hand slowly making its way to his lap to run along the outline of his bulge.

"I said hands off, Gage. That meant your cock too," I warn.

"What are you going to do about it?" The handsome wolf smirks. His hand still strokes the outline of his cock, and his eyes flash with a challenge from his alpha.

"If I didn't have our pretty omega in my lap, I might stuff that smug mouth of yours full."

"Oh, shit." Nova throws a glance at Gage over her shoulder. "That's a hot visual we should make happen."

"Eyes on the one pleasuring you, baby girl." Dex smacks her ass and growls, stuffing her with his fingers. He pumps into her slowly while he holds her gaze, and I tease her perky tits. The longer he draws it out, the more desperate Nova becomes.

“Please, alpha. Make me come,” she whines, rocking her hips.

Dex smacks her ass again and dives on her, eating her pussy as though it’s his life’s mission. She half collapses against me, letting loose these horny sounds until she freezes and comes on a soundless scream.

It doesn’t take her long before she’s taking deep huffs of my scent and sucking along my neck. “Knot.”

I fumble with my sweats, but Nova isn’t having the delay. It’s chaos as she paws at my lap, her hands and mouth impeding my progress.

“Come here, sweetheart. Breathe for a minute.” Dex takes our squirming omega from my arms, and she latches on like an octopus, wrapping herself around him and sucking his neck.

I’m just as eager, moving to the end of the couch while I strip. I can’t help but take my cock in hand, giving it a stroke to try to take off some of the edge. I’m always hard and fucking ready when she’s around, but the thought of giving her my knot has made me damn near wild.

My brother passes a whimpering Nova to me, and I pull her back against my chest, wrapping my arm around her middle. Her knees fall open and she rubs her wet pussy along my hard shaft, soaking my aching dick.

“Gods, I can smell how much you need it, baby.” I squeeze her hip, trailing kisses along her neck as Dex sucks on her nipples. “You’re gonna look so pretty stuffed full of my cock.”

I know some of this is from the hormone fog. She’s in a frenzy, but I want this to be good for her, for her to feel how much we want to cherish her and please her.

I hold my cock steady, rubbing it through her slick center, teasing the crown against her clit. She grips Dex's head for dear life, begging and rocking on my lap.

"You ready, pretty girl?" I notch my cock at her entrance, hovering.

"Past ready. Give it to me," she begs, turning her head for a sloppy kiss.

I ease my way inside as she pants into my mouth, our lips sliding against one another. She's tight but slick, and those first few inches feel like fucking paradise. "Mmm, you feel so good."

She clamps down around me at my words. I curse on a tentative thrust of my hips. With a hard but careful push, I nudge through the resistance. For a moment, Nova tenses in pain, her scent spiking.

"That's it, gorgeous, you're taking me so well. Just a little more." I circle her clit with my finger, teasing her until her muscles relax and she's back to rocking against me.

I slide farther into her tight heat, gripping her hips to keep her steady with each thrust. It's so fucking good—her scent, the feel of her body welcoming me home, her sweet pussy sucking me in on each thrust of my hips. I can't hold back. I pump into her with quick strokes, holding her to me.

Nova chants a string of yes and more. She stretches around me as my knot teases against her opening, pulling her wider with each glide.

Nova whines, and Dex grips her throat, holding her gaze while I hit that spot deep inside that makes her fucking gush. Her pussy spasms around my cock. Dex swallows her moans as she comes for me. A rush of slick floods my knot, and on a final thrust, I lock myself inside.

She goes wild then, rocking on my knot and fumbling for Dex. She barely gets him out before she's sucking him down, moaning as she takes us both.

"Fuck, sweet girl. Easy. I don't want to hurt you," Dex grits through clenched teeth as he grips her head.

I know the feeling. This little omega wrecks me.

Gage moans, and from the corner of my eye, I see the alpha stiffen, cum pooling on his fist.

The sight, combined with the pressure on my knot, sends me over the edge. My cum floods her pussy, and my alpha purrs in satisfaction as he imagines breeding her. He's already demanding I fill her during her heat so we can put a baby in her.

Nova whimpers, and Gage seems to understand the unspoken command. He gets up, dick in hand, and joins Dex.

"Take it, star. It's all for you," Gage says softly, feeding her his length.

She licks him clean, nuzzling his cock as she twists her small hand around Dex's length. It makes her clamp down on me again, and another spurt of cum fills her plugged pussy.

"So perfect. So beautiful. The perfect mate." My words slur together without making much damn sense.

I can't think or focus. It's too good. I've never knotted someone before, and it's taking everything I have not to sink my teeth into her neck. My fangs drop, and I grit through the instinct, loving and hating the torture.

Dex stutters above us, and Nova mewls, thrusting out her chest as he marks her tits. My dick makes a valiant effort to come again when she rubs the mess into her skin and sucks her finger.

“Fuck, little star. I’ll never be able to have game night again without getting hard,” Gage curses.

The healer is on to something. I’ve lost count of the number of times my record for “this is the hottest thing ever” has been broken in the last few days.

Nova nuzzles into my neck, content to rock on my knot. The others clean up, shuffling around us. I close my eyes, holding her close. My hands brush over her hair, soothing her as our hearts slow together.

"You're perfect, love. I'm the luckiest wolf in the world that you're mine," I whisper.

Nova slurs something that sounds like “love you.”

My heart trips over itself. Even if she’s saying it in a knot-induced stupor, I want it to be true.

Moments later, her soft purr flutters around me. Outside, the storm bellows, and the lights flicker twice before going out. Dex and Gage let out twin curses, but the backup generator doesn’t kick on.

“I thought you said it was fixed,” Gage grumbles, following Dex toward the door.

“I did. But the damn thing is older than dirt. So is your solar grid.”

Gage shrugs. “That’s what magic is for.”

“How’s that working out for you now?”

They stomp about in the entry by the door, bundling up to face the storm.

“I’d say pretty decent. All things considered.”

My brother glares at him before turning to give me a look that says he’d much rather be in my position. “When I get back, you’d better be in the nest. If I’m going outside, I want Nova snuggles to look forward to,” Dex mutters.

I give him a mocking salute and drag a blanket from the back of the couch to cover Nova. Content, I run my fingers through her hair and listen to the steady beat of two hearts.

I don’t know how the fuck I managed to carve out a slice of paradise in this fucked-up world, but I know I’ll protect this peace with everything I am.

Chapter 27

Nova

The thump of boots on the wood motivates me to wash the remaining dishes at double speed. They've finally let me take on some of the household chores, but I'm going stir-crazy. It's been eight days of off-and-on winter storms with the power working sporadically.

The guys go out and check on the compound's buildings during each lull, shoveling enough to keep the courtyard clear, but they have yet to let me help. While it's been fucking awesome to be snowed in with my pack, I'm used to spending my time in the forest. All the time inside is making me antsy.

"We'll be back this afternoon, sweetheart," Dex calls. "If you need anything, Gage is in the greenhouse."

Briggs tacks on, his voice playfully singing, "Don't get into too much trouble."

Neither of my alphas comes into the kitchen to give me a kiss goodbye—probably because this is their second attempt at leaving for the day. The first ended up with me spread out on the dining room table, Briggs between my legs and Dex in my mouth.

I huff at the sound of the closing door, well on my way to a full-on omega pout. My instincts don't care that they're trying to be practical; I want at least a goodbye kiss if I'm stuck inside again.

With dripping hands, I shove my fuzzy socks into my new boots and quickly lace them. I grab one of Gage's coats, wrapping it around me and taking a whiff before I race out the front door to try to catch the brothers. The outside air hits with a blast of ice, making my lungs burn.

I speed up, my body coming alive at the crisp white world of new snow. My wolf wants out, scratching at the surface. I ignore her for now, chasing my alphas.

They're already halfway across the shoveled courtyard between the buildings on Gage's property. Their strides are wide and commanding, telegraphing that they're hunters on the prowl. It's probably twisted how sexy I find their lethal look.

I whine at their retreating forms, wanting them close. "Wait. I'm coming with you. I could help."

Dex and Briggs turn at the sound of my voice. The pause lets me catch up, and I stop before them, a little breathless. Dex's eyes flash with his alpha, the silver almost appearing to glow. I swallow around the lump in my throat, not liking his expression.

My big alpha shakes his head. "I'm sure you could, but I don't want to risk it. This is the first time the weather has held long enough to check the perimeter. We don't know exactly what we're gonna find."

I cross my arms defiantly. "Which is why I should go with you. The ferals at the border freaked me out the first time, but now I know they're there. I'll be fine. I've dealt with worse."

Dex clenches his jaw, the muscles under his skin jumping. "Baby girl, you're not dealing with worse on my watch. You stay here."

Fuck me. His words have me pulled in two different directions. I'm mad as hell and

equally ready to climb him. The power of his deep voice hits my core like a dam breaking, and slick pools between my legs. The space between us fills with my perfume.

Briggs takes a deep breath, his eyes closing as if in pain. “You’re killing me, pretty wolf.”

“I never want to say no to you, but I’m not budging on this. Your safety is too important.” Dex traces his knuckle down my cheek.

I open my mouth to protest.

Dex’s growl cuts me off. “Don’t fight me on this, or you’ll end up over my knee.”

That absolutely did not help the slick situation between my legs.

“I don’t think that’s the deterrent you think it is, big guy.” Briggs chuckles. He leans in, the two brothers so close that they’re caging me between them now. “You’d like that a little too much, wouldn’t you, pretty girl?”

Dex’s snarl is my only warning, then I’m ass up over his shoulder.

“You want a spanking, you can have one, but you’re not going on the perimeter check.” He swats my ass through my thermal leggings, his hand so big it grazes my pussy.

Holy cow. Growly Dex is seriously hot.

He stomps across the courtyard, each step crunching in time with his heavy palm across my ass. Slick gushes. I should be mortified, but it just makes me more desperate. I’m pretty sure I whine and beg. All I really know is that I need him.

A door opens, and the lush scent of the greenhouse greets me. Dex pops my ass again, and my pussy flutters, empty and aching.

He sets me on wobbly feet. “Be a good girl and stay with Gage until I get back, and I promise I’ll give you what you want.”

I latch onto Dex’s arm and look up and up. I bite my lip and pinch my legs together, frustrated, horny, and a little dazed. “What I want is your knot.”

Dex has done everything he can think of to give me pleasure—except that. The big alpha loves to make me come on his tongue, but he’s been holding out on me.

His throat bobs.

I rub my hand along the outline of his bulge, and his dick jumps.

“You don’t know what you’re asking for,” he says hoarsely. He thinks I’m afraid of taking him, that I can’t handle his alpha.

“Yes, I do. I want you to show me who I belong to.”

Dex curses, then I’m pressed against a bed of herbs, his hand cupping my pussy as he devours my mouth. “You better watch that pretty little mouth, or you’re gonna get the filthy things you’re begging me for, sweet girl.”

I wrap my legs around his back, arching into his kiss. It’s full of restrained power even now. I bite his lip, trying to goad him into giving me what I want. The deep rumble from his chest makes my nipples ache, my perfume a waterfall all around us.

A surge of heat zaps me, the little bolt like a shot of pure sex up my spine. I’m frozen, caught on the edge, panting.

“What do we have here?” Gage tsks. He directs another burst of his tingling magic right at my nipples.

It sends a shock wave straight to my clit, and I whimper.

Gage laughs. “Naughty, naughty, Nova. Look how you made Dex lose control.” His smirking face appears over Dex’s shoulder. “He’s an accomplice in the murder of my sage plants.”

Dex’s cheeks burn, the alpha receding from his eyes. He blinks owlshly, taking in the mess we’ve made.

I kiss Dex’s cheek before whispering in his ear, “Everything about it was hot, and I still want my reward. Later.”

Dex scoops me off the table, pulling me in for a squeeze and kissing my cheek before he mumbles an apology as he hurries past Gage, eyes downcast.

I turn on my menace of a mate. “You shouldn’t tease him. He’s sensitive.”

Gage rolls his eyes. “He’s the size of a bear with the personality to match.”

My body is keyed up, my core so slick these pants are ruined, and my temper is near the edge. I growl at him. “I’m serious. He’s shy.”

He gives me an amused smile that quirks into something mischievous. “I know. That makes it even better.”

I groan. “You’re hopeless.”

“Probably.” Gage shrugs. “Now go set those poor plants to rights.” He follows the

command with a jolt of green that zaps my nipples. I shiver, and the alpha's boisterous laugh booms. "This is going to be a fun afternoon."

Turning to fix the rumpled bed of sage, I try to play it cool. Secretly, I want to whine about how the two alphas are leaving me wet and needy.

The worst part is how much I like it.

Chapter 28

Nova

After teasing me with his magic touches until I was practically cursing his name, Gage backs off. He's switched to giving me tasks in the front part of the garden where he grows food. Every once in a while, he'll give me a little love zap that brings my awareness and slick surging back, but I think he wants to keep me waiting for Dex without pushing me over.

Mission accomplished. I'm a lust bomb set to go off.

My body is taut, waiting for Gage's magical caresses. They feel like a shock to my nipples and a buzz to my clit. I'm practically vibrating with anticipation.

The minutes tick by, and the jolt doesn't come. Instead, the scent of lush earth, florals, and herbs surrounds me in a warm cocoon. It's Gage's scent, magnified by the blooming greenhouse. After a while, it dulls that burn in my core to a low, simmering ache, making my head a little floaty. I hum while I work, and Gage purrs, the sound soothing.

When I've gathered what's there to harvest, I lean against one of the gardening tables and watch Gage. He looks more tense than usual. It's especially noticeable because, for the last week, he's been relaxed, slowly letting down his guard.

He's working at the back of the greenhouse in what I like to think of as his office. It's got a high-top wooden slab shoved against the wall and my makeshift wolf's nest

tucked underneath. He isn't using the table today but is working with crystals on the cleared floor. He hesitates at the large, iridescent moonstone in his hand before looking back at an old page of a grimoire.

"Use it."

"Do you know what that's for?" Gage looks up, his brow raised.

"A moonstone is for abundance. It's a part of the spell." I nod in the direction of the circle made from chalk runes on the floor. "You're making a moon circle for the full moon. That's why you said to wait to bond?"

Gage has told me to follow all my omega-bonding instincts except that one. This must be why.

Gage sighs in exasperation, but he's clearly impressed. "I take it back. Your grandmother was a nuisance."

"She knew someone would need to keep you honest," I tease.

"Guilty," he says with a devilish laugh.

He goes back to studying the book, and I watch again, puzzling him over.

"Now I'm curious what you're up to." I don't remember all my grandmother's spells, but this is one I watched her set each month. The circle is made with crystals and a strengthening spell to help awaken mating bonds. It's like a blessing for a pack.

It makes sense that Gage is setting the circle now. The next full moon and my heat are less than a week away. Omega wolves have a heat every full moon until they bond or become pregnant, which can only happen during a heat, and my wolf is

riding the need for both hard. The fact that he was focused on the moonstone is what has me so puzzled.

Gage looks up from the book, his expression more subdued. “This upcoming moon is a Blue Moon, which brings a unique surge in magic. I’m hoping a moon circle can harness that extra power.”

“You think the Blue Moon could strengthen a bond? Like, heal the magic?” I ask, excitement creeping into my tone.

“Maybe.” Gage’s eyes shutter, some of that spark of his dimming. “Don’t go getting your hopes up, little star.”

I cross the greenhouse to join him outside the circle. “Why the moonstone?”

Gage looks at his book. “When I was studying to be a healer with my uncle, we trained for a few months with an elder named Julian. That’s where I first learned about the power of the Blue Moon and how to use it to enhance a spell. I was debating whether to switch the moonstone from the original spell with a protection crystal or if it’s a necessary element that helps strengthen bonds.”

I stare at my tense mate, trying to find his tell. His scent is sour, and he won’t meet my eyes. Why wouldn’t he want abundance in our mating? What am I not getting?

“Abundance is for—” Saying it aloud makes it click into place. Abundance is for fertility. The reality of that hits me like a sucker punch to the gut. Oh, Gage. “You’re worried about me getting pregnant during this heat?”

“Yes, wild child,” he says, his voice hollow. “Moonstones are used to enhance fertility. With the strength of a Blue Moon...”

I grab his forearm, trying to keep us both from spiraling. “Do you agree with my grandmother about why the magic might be broken?”

Gage spears me with the intensity in his eyes, weighing the stone in his hand. “Yes. The bonds aren’t strong enough to hold packs together. I think without the extra magical connection from the mating runes, pregnancy and birth drain an omega’s magic.”

I hold his gaze, letting that sink in. I’ve had all the pieces from listening to my grandmother, but he’s the one who has made the connections clearer in my mind and put it all into focus. “That tracks with my grandma’s explanation that the usurper’s betrayal broke our magic. The Alpha King didn’t just take the throne in the challenge—he came after my grandmother, the pack’s omega.”

Gage’s eyes widen. “The story I heard when I was younger was that she died giving birth to your mother. Healers consider your mother’s death the first of the omega sickness.” He stares at me, and it’s as if I can see his mind working to sort through the puzzle pieces. “But that’s not right. You’re saying it was the Alpha King who killed her, not the birth?”

“Yes,” I nod, trying to gather my thoughts to explain what I think this all means. “Omegas are supposed to be sacred, their role in packs protected. Maybe killing the omega queen triggered wolves’ bonds to break as punishment?”

Gage looks away from me, visibly shaken. “I don’t know, little star. That changes things... I just don’t know how.”

I tug on his chin, drawing him back to me, trying to find the light for both of us. “Except my mother didn’t actually die. Not then. My grandmother saved her. Maybe that means something?”

Gage gives me a brittle smile. “True.” He pulls me closer, and the two of us are quiet as we process. After a few moments, he speaks again, and I already know from the sound of his voice that whatever he’s concluded confirms his fears. “Even if your grandmother is right about why we lost the magic, that doesn’t change the fact that I don’t know how to bring the runes back. I only know that I don’t ever want what’s happened in the past to happen to you.”

I give him a sad smile, my insides twisting at the reminder of what we both know. “How do you propose we do that?”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to puzzle out,” he admits in a huff, running a hand through his hair.

“Aren’t you the one who said I need to follow my instincts?” I challenge.

Gage studies me. “Truth. Do you want pups, Nova?”

I study my alpha right back. Gage has tried so hard to right a wrong he never made. Knowing how much he’s had to pay—how much we’ve all paid—cracks a piece of me. How much more can we take?

“In a world that isn’t like ours, where kids grow up safe, I’d love to have babies with you and a home like this.”

Gage’s eyes mirror my sorrow. “But that isn’t our world.”

I crawl into his lap, burying my face in his neck. “No, it’s not. But even I know that birth control potions don’t work with scent matches in heat.”

“Doesn’t hurt to try. If it could save your life?—”

I cut him off with a hand to his chest. “Truth.” I look up, finding his eyes. “Do you want a bond with me, Gage?”

Gage cups my face, pressing his forehead to mine and breathing me in. “I want everything with you. That isn’t the problem.”

I wrap my arms around his neck, pulling him closer. “Then bet on abundance with me, Gage. Use the moonstone and the original spell, the way it was intended. We can’t predict what will happen, but we can face it together.”

Gage’s expression is tortured. “How can you have hope after all you’ve seen?”

I trace his cheek, nose, and eyebrow, learning the lines of his face. “What’s the alternative?” I tuck his head against my chest, my purr rumbling to life. “You know, you guys are the ones who reminded me what it’s like to hope for something better.”

“Us?” He chuckles. “That sounds dangerous.”

“Oh, it is. But I’ve decided to roll with it even though I’m scared.”

“That’s because you’re brave as hell, wild child.”

“You make me feel brave,” I whisper, “like I can do more than just survive.”

I sit in his lap on the floor for a long time, the two of us breathing in each other. The sound of his purr settles into my soul. He kisses my forehead, wrapping me in his arms and holding me tightly. I nudge my nose into his throat, soaking up his soothing herbal scent. His cheek rubs along my hair, and the scent marking is so full of the comfort of belonging that I can’t help the warmth that spreads in my chest.

I try to explain it to him, choosing my words carefully. “I’m afraid, Gage. I won’t lie

or pretend the worst couldn't happen. But I think this world could use more love, not less. That's why."

"All right, little star."

He rubs my back, and I let myself float in the connection between us, shoring up my resolve that this is the path forward. I trust my grandmother's wisdom and my wolf. My instincts tell me I need to bond with them during this heat. If anyone can help strengthen our magic, it's Gage. I'll have to have faith in his plan for the both of us.

"We're back!" Briggs's shouted greeting startles me, and I yelp.

Gage's muffled chuckle sounds near my neck.

"And it smells like you two have been up to no good."

My cheeks heat. The greenhouse probably smells like my perfume. In my defense, Gage teased me for hours, and since our intense conversation, he's been purring for me.

"The perimeter is clear, and the wards are holding. It looks like the storms forced the ferals off," Dex's voice joins Briggs's. "You ready to come back to the house with me, sweetheart?"

Gage gives me a squeeze and whispers in my ear, "Go to him. We can talk more later." I hesitate, looking him over, but he shakes his head. "Go. I'm good."

"Will you finish setting the circle with the moonstone?"

He swallows thickly. "I'm thinking about it."

Chapter 29

Nova

D ex's hand travels up my side, his sudsy touch smooth. He leans down to murmur in my ear, "Why did your scent in the greenhouse have as much fear as lust, little wolf?"

Of course my sweet alpha thinks he's the cause. He's wrong every time.

I try to turn to face him, but his arm locks around my chest.

"Tell me," he demands softly.

"It had nothing to do with you, you silly wolf." I squirm until he relents, letting me climb him and latch my arms around his neck. "I promise."

Dex's muscles relax the slightest fraction, one of his strong arms looping across my hip to support my weight. He pushes the wet hair on my forehead to the side, and the gesture is so gentle it makes my insides ache. "What happened?"

"We talked about the upcoming full moon and my heat," I say, trying to be nonchalant. Dex has a tendency to go full alpha whenever he thinks I need protecting.

"And that made you afraid?" His eyebrows furrow.

I scrunch my face and blow out a breath, struggling to say the right words. "Sort of. It's... a long story..."

“Then I guess you better start talking.” He sets me down, urging me back under the spray.

The scent of vanilla fills the shower. Dex lathers my hair, and the circular motion on my scalp is so delicious that I purr.

“Anytime, baby girl.” Dex chuckles. The sound is husky enough to rekindle my banked desire. His palm squeezes the back of my neck. “I can smell what you want, but first, talk to me.”

I sigh. “Fine. You keep up the massage.”

That makes my surly alpha smile into my neck. “Of course.”

He makes good on his promise as I recount my conversation with Gage. Dex washes me gently while I talk, making these rumbling sounds that let me know he’s listening.

When I’m boneless from his attention and finished with my story, he turns me to face him. “No matter what you decide, sweetheart, I’m all in. Whenever you give the go-ahead, I’ll mark you as mine.” His finger traces over my neck, goosebumps following in its wake. “But if you want my opinion, I say we honor the old ways as much as possible.”

“I agree.” I give him a saucy grin. “And I guess that means you’re going to hunt me down and breed me before your pack.”

He growls, the sound full of his alpha. “Don’t tempt me, little wolf.”

“I would never,” I say innocently.

Dex hesitates, then spears me with the look of an alpha hunter. His voice is gritty, his

eyes serious. “I want to breed you, Nova. I won’t pretend I don’t. My wolf is practically rabid with the idea. But deep down, breeding you is about marking you. I don’t care if you ever have my pups, but you will take my knot and know you’re mine.”

I splutter, nodding like a horny puppet because my ovaries are currently in control of all brain functions.

“I want to be yours.” It’s a weird feeling, being so melty while also being so turned on that I have to close my legs to ease the ache. I distract myself by lathering some of Gage’s special herbal blend on a cloth, giving Dex a stern glare when he protests. “It’s my turn.”

Getting my hands on Dex does nothing but ratchet up the ache. His body is made of sharp slabs of muscle I want to get lost in. I gently wash his scarred arm and chest, and he closes his eyes as though he’s in pain. The skin is thicker here, jagged and puckered.

“Does it hurt?”

“Not for a long time, but staying still while you explore is its own brand of pain,” he says gruffly.

“Then I guess you’re going to suffer,” I tease as I move my hands lower, brushing over his cock.

I take my time, circling back over each area, learning his body. It’s a hunter’s body, powerful and worn but so damn beautiful, especially so because this big man has the softest heart. I let the water wash away the soap, then I lean in to get closer to his sweet, warm caramelized hazelnut scent.

Dex gives a hoarse growl into my ear. “Sweet girl?—”

“I know what I want. And you’re going to let me have it. Isn’t that what you said, alpha? Wasn’t I a good girl?” I make another slow pass along his hard length.

My alpha hisses as I sink to my knees, taking him in both hands. I watch as his big cock slides through my grip. I swirl my tongue around him and suck the head, tonguing his slit. He hovers over me, his thigh muscles strained as I open my mouth and take him deeper.

Just the tip is a stretch, but I suck eagerly, taking as much as I can before retreating and sucking him in again.

“This will be over too soon,” he curses.

The water shuts off as I apply suction, then he’s pulling me up by my armpits. His mouth presses over mine, hard and dominant. I sink into the kiss, wanting more.

Dex rips away from my lips before I’m ready. “You make me lose all control.”

“I want you to lose control,” I tell him truthfully. I can tell from the set of his shoulders he doesn’t hear me. Biting my lip, I eye the door. “You’ve kept me waiting, Dex. It’s your turn to chase.”

Before he knows what I’m doing, I leap out the shower door and scramble from the bathroom.

“Nova.”

Dex growling my name as though he’s about to toss me over his knee is the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard. He hates it when he thinks I’m not properly dressed for this

cold cabin. Oops .

“Do something about it, alpha,” I goad him, racing out of the bedroom.

The thunder of his footsteps causes a scream to bubble from my throat, the sound laced with giddy excitement.

“Little wolf, you better run because when I find you, you’ll be mine.”

That’s what I’m after, alpha.

Dex makes me feel like an omega, as though it’s safe to let him take control. I want Dex to let his alpha loose. I crave cementing the physical connection between us. He can give me what I need if he lets himself.

I drip on the floor as I run down the hallway, looking over my shoulder. My nipples pebble in the cold air. Slick slides down my legs, and my perfume is like a beacon, billowing around me. I skid into the living room, looking at my options.

Dex’s thundering footsteps are on my tail. “I can smell you, little wolf.”

His hand darts along my side, and I hop over the couch. The shriek I let out is all omega as I tumble back to my feet. I dart to the landing and twist gracelessly up the stairs, knocking the shit out of my side. I look over my shoulder, and the thundering alpha isn’t far behind. His eyes glow silver with his wolf, and my omega wants to bare her neck.

“Looks like you’re about to get exactly what you’ve been asking for,” he growls, lunging for me.

I slip from his grasp and scramble on the stairs, crawling on my hands and knees.

His big body cages me in, his heavy weight pressing me into the wood.

I squirm, and his teeth scrape my neck.

“Stay very still.” He sounds as if shards of glass are stuck in his throat, and I know I’m dealing with his alpha now.

My core clenches. “Make me.”

Chapter 30

Dex

“Is that what you want, little omega? For me to take what’s mine?” I pin her in place beneath me, a hand gripping the back of her neck.

She perfumes in answer, her apple and cinnamon tickling my nose and making my cock jerk.

My free hand finds her dripping slit, and I tease her with the tips of my fingers. The feel of her slickness makes me growl, the words torn from my chest. “Is this all for me, sweet girl? Did you like our game of chase?”

“Yesss! Alpha, please,” she begs.

My body vibrates with the need to claim her and sink my teeth into her neck. I settle for tasting her. Looping a hand around her waist, I pull her to her knees before settling her on the stair above and burying my face between her legs.

She goes wild as I flick my tongue into her weeping pussy. She tastes so fucking sweet I can’t get enough. I’m desperate, sucking and licking up her honey until she’s riding my face.

“Alpha,” she whimpers.

I growl into her flesh, suck her clit, and give her three blunt fingers. She wails,

pushing her little ass against me as she clamps down in a fresh wave of slick.

Before she's recovered from her orgasm, I'm on top of her. I run my forehead along her shoulder and back, smothering her in my scent. I want her coated in me, leaking my cum, totally mine. The temptation is too much, and I can't hold back. I notch my cock at her entrance and thrust. Nova moans, trying to arch into it. My wolf snarls, and I squeeze her neck, keeping her in place.

"Be still for me, sweet girl." My alpha is too on edge. He's already at the surface and fighting for the last of my control.

She's wet and warm, so fucking tight that I'm barely breaching her. I pull out my slick cock, nearly leaving her before pushing in deeper this time. On each new thrust, she stretches perfectly around me, taking more of my length until I'm buried almost to the knot.

Her body welcomes my alpha, and that knowledge unlocks the last of my hesitation. My alpha takes the reins, and power surges through me. She's held on my cock as I scoop her up and take the remaining stairs into the first bedroom. It's empty but furnished. I set Nova on the bed with a pop on her ass.

When I speak, I barely recognize my own deep sound. "Present for me and ask for what you want."

Nova crawls to the center of the bed. She gives me a teasing glance, licking her lips before she goes to her chest and wiggles her ass in the air. It's a red flag to a bull.

I'm on her before she's finished teasing me with that sweet display. Nova pushes back against me, her voice breathy. "Give me your knot."

"Why do you want it, baby girl?" I slip inside her tight hole and slam my hips until

I'm buried. My knot nudges her entrance, heavy at the base of my shaft with the need to expand.

Nova squirms until I let loose my hold on her neck. She looks at me over her shoulder, her omega shining back at me in her big silver eyes. "You're mine. My alpha. My mate."

My nostrils flare, my wolf chuffing in agreement. I lick along her neck, suck her skin, and nip her shoulder. I roll my hips on deep thrusts, stretching her open a little more each time.

"That's right, sweet girl. I'm going to trap you on my knot, fill you with my cum, and mark you as mine."

Nova wails, a sound of pure need that feeds my inner beast. On my next thrust, I grind deep, edging my knot farther inside her tight heat. Her muscles tighten, pushing me out. I work her pussy open, stretching her until she's sucking my knot in a little more each time.

The squeezing pressure makes me want to ram my knot inside and lock my teeth in her neck. I force myself to go slow, nudging my knot against her slick resistance again and again. "That's it, take a little more."

"Oh gods," Nova whimpers. "It's too much. I can't."

I rock my hips, punctuating my words with a growl. "Yes, you can. You're going to take all of me."

My alpha is desperate to breed her. "Mark her as ours," my wolf snarls.

The thought of Nova happy and healthy, safe with her pack, makes my cock jerk

inside her. The swelling of the heavy weight of my knot against her opening is so intense my vision blackens at the edges. I reach around and find her swollen clit, circling and teasing in time with my hips.

“Come on my cock and let your alpha in. Let me claim what belongs to me.”

She mewls, shaking beneath me as her body tightens and relaxes as she rides out an orgasm. Her perfume is so thick I might drown in her.

“Shh, sweet girl. It’s all right. You were made for me,” I promise.

I push through the last of her resistance, stretching her fully around me as my knot locks inside. It expands, stretching until she’s finally mine. My fangs drop, but I force myself to keep from taking that last mark of possession.

“You’re such a good girl for me.” I slur the words, drunk on the connection between us. “Look how you were made to take me. I’m stretching this sweet little pussy, making it all mine.”

“Yes, Dex.” Nova comes again at my words, her pussy milking my cock.

I rock into her, my knot teasing her entrance until I’m filling her with my cum.

My wolf snarls, fighting me, desperate to bite. I squeeze her hips and take a bite out of the closest thing that isn’t my mate. The lone pillow feathers around us as I tear it in two. It’s barely enough. My claws rake along her ass as I pump the last of my seed into her on a strangled roar.

Beneath me, Nova is shaking and making sounds that could drive a wolf to madness. I suck in her scent and try to ease my racing heart. My hips create a slow, rocking rhythm that makes Nova seem to float. Her pussy flutters around me, keeping me on

edge while she mutters nonsense.

When my claws and fangs finally retract, I caress down her delicate spine and suck along her neck. “You smell so good coated in my scent, sweetheart.”

I loop my arms around her and turn us to the side. She nudges back until she’s tucked against my chest, her head on my arm. Nova purrs this sweet humming sound.

“More pets,” she slurs. Her eyes lazily open, and an orgasm-drunk grin bursts across her face.

I kiss her freckles and her nose. “Anything you want.” My hands caress the soft skin of her belly and thighs until my omega is snuggle-drunk, her eyes full of clouds.

“I’m pretty sure I’m knocked up from your dirty talk.” She lets loose a giddy string of giggles.

My cheeks heat, but my wolf prances smugly in my mind. As if my alpha needs any more incentive to be a brute.

“It wasn’t too much?” I ask. My fingers find the spot where we’re locked, and I massage her opening, rubbing along her slick lips.

Nova squeezes my knot, her legs shaking as she moans. I rock my hips, gently tugging at her entrance.

“Not too much. So good—” Her words cut off when I pinch her clit, and the room swells with her scent.

“Good,” I growl, my cock spurting more cum. “Because I think we’ll be here for a while.”

Nova gives a sultry laugh that's almost a moan. "Bring it on, alpha."

I reach for her lips, getting lost in her again as we chase another high.

And another.

And another.

We crest again and again until we're spent.

My first knot lasts more than two hours. When it finally deflates, I pull out, tucking my sleeping mate into my chest. I can hear the guys downstairs, smell the scent of dinner in the air. I don't move, content to stay with her like this forever.

Chapter 31

Gage

I finish the last words of the spell, and a swell of magic locks into place. Clearing my mind, I focus on my intentions for this moon.

Give us the power to bring Nova safely through her heat and the strength to protect her through our bond.

I let those words flow through me, imagining them coming to fruition. Doubts try to creep in, but I push them away and focus on an image of her with three bite marks on her neck.

Awareness slowly returns, and I realize I'm not alone. Atop Nova's sweet cinnamon and apples is a darker floral laced with spicy pepper, more potent than anything growing in my greenhouse.

Briggs. The pushy fucker.

"Hands off the goods. I've already had one brother-related plant mishap today," I grumble.

Briggs chuckles but pulls his hand away from the lavender.

"Why are you here? I figured you'd be right behind Dex."

“Nope. They need some time together.” Briggs moves closer, looking at the plants and touching everything on my worktable. “You should get a new hiding spot if you don’t want to be found.”

“I didn’t realize I needed to hide in my own home.” I don’t know why this alpha makes me feel so on edge, but his presence puts me on the defensive and makes me feel a little like cornered prey.

“You don’t.” Briggs returns an opaque healing crystal to the table and holds his hand out to me. “You look like you could use a break. Come with me. I have a surprise.”

“I’m not?—”

He pulls me off the floor in one smooth move, spins me around, and presses me against my worktable, the wood digging into my hip. “If you wanna be difficult, be difficult. But hear me out—maybe you could let me take care of you my way? My way has got a lot less angst and a lot more orgasms.”

Briggs’s lips hover close to my ear, making my hair tickle my neck. That, combined with the scent of his arousal, makes my head swim.

“What?” I ask stupidly.

“We’re mates, you idiot. We’re hers, but I’m yours too.”

I gape at him over my shoulder, doing my best impersonation of a trout. Who is this man?

A decade ago, Briggs was the center of attention. Charming. Flirty. Easygoing. While Dex stood on the sidelines, silent—a bit creepily, if I’m honest—Briggs was the opposite, making friends with everyone. This older version of Briggs is still like that,

but he's more serious and more caring. It's surprising how much I like it.

He curls himself along my back, letting me feel his erection as he softly kisses my neck. "You don't have to fight so hard. I'm not your enemy."

My body seems to let go of an invisible weight, and I sigh. "All right, show me the surprise."

Briggs plants a kiss on my neck and lets loose a little whoop. He grabs my hand, pulling me along through the greenhouse. "Excellent. I knew you would see it my way."

"That's because you make the alternative impossible," I huff.

He gives me one of his endearing lopsided smiles. "I know. Isn't it great?"

"Great isn't the word I would use." I shake my head, but I'm secretly amused.

He chatters about the perimeter check and the ferals taking off because of the storm while I follow him through the dim afternoon cold and into the barn. My amusement dies when we bypass the animals and head toward the loft. I'm surprised all over again when he has me climb up first, and I see he's made a little camp with a thick blanket and a load of snacks on a tray.

This wasn't our place or anything. Our time together up here was driven by the moon. We had been circling each other all summer, and when I found him working in the barn, shirtless and sweaty, I didn't think. The first time was hard and fast against the wall, but we managed to make it to the loft and ride out the night. Two days later, the brothers left on their next mission.

Whether or not we realized it then, Briggs is showing me that I mean something to

him now. I don't know how to meet these new expectations or really know how to be her mate or his, but I can do the pleasure part of his plan.

Briggs crawls into the loft and settles on the blanket, leaning against a hay bale and spreading his arms in a ta-da gesture. I kneel between his legs, hovering over him. I dip under the neck of his flannel shirt, sucking along his collarbone.

Briggs's fingers thread through my hair, and my dick wakes up. He tugs, drawing my eyes to his. "Not so fast. Talk to me."

His eyes tell me he isn't backing down.

I don't either. "I thought your plan was heavy on the orgasms?"

The stare-off continues, Briggs searching my face for something.

It's too much. I roll off him and stare at the sloped wooden beams of the barn roof.

Briggs pins me down, hovering over me as he continues studying me. "Fine, don't talk. I will." His eyes flash with his wolf. "You were right to do what she said."

"How do you know?" I scoff. "We are talking about the same thing, right?"

Briggs huffs, the sound almost a laugh. "I'm not an idiot. I know a moon circle when I see one."

My eyebrow lifts in surprise.

"Don't act so shocked." He cups my cheek, brushing soft lips against mine. "I still say I'm glad you did it."

He goads me with his lips, teasing me until I give in to his softness. We didn't kiss before, at least not like this. It was all fire. There's heat this time too, but it's warm and soft, not burning up with the rut of the moon. For a moment, I lose the thread of our conversation under the sensation of his lips exploring mine. I lift my hips and drag him closer with my hands, desperate to shut off my brain.

The infuriating alpha gives a singular roll of his hips, his hard cock nudging along mine before he pulls away. He leans his weight on his arms, and a smug grin crosses his lips.

"You know you were right," Briggs says.

"Definitely." I lift my brow. "What was I right about? Orgasms?"

Briggs's hair falls into his eyes, and he gives me a rueful smile. "That... and giving her anything she wants."

The weight of his meaning reverberates around me, and the heat in my veins turns to ice. I look away, but the stubborn wolf keeps talking.

"It's her call. Whatever she wants or needs, we back it. But bonding her this moon? That's right."

"She could die. Birth kills omegas. Her heat all but guarantees?—"

Briggs cuts me off, his voice harder than I've ever heard. "Living always comes with risks. She deserves the world anyway. And we're gonna give it to her."

The vibrations of his voice spread through me, making my muscles unlock and my cock stand at attention. My brain-to-mouth filter fails spectacularly. "You're kinda sexy when you're growly like that."

His eyebrows shoot up mockingly. “Ohhhh. We’re acknowledging that you’re attracted to me, are we? I thought you were gonna leave my mate declaration just out there in ruins.”

I smile, but it’s half-hearted. “She’s mine. You’re mine. Isn’t that what you said? What is there to discuss?” My words are as bitter as my attitude, but I can’t seem to stop the vitriol in the sound.

“Jeez, were you always this emotionally stunted?” Briggs groans, clutching his chest as though I’ve wounded him.

I sober, looking him square in the eyes. A minute passes, maybe an eternity. “No.”

He brushes his finger along my brow, smoothing out the crease that seems to permanently live there. “Hey, I didn’t mean?—”

“It’s the truth.” My shoulders tense.

It isn’t Briggs’s fault. It’s certainly not Nova’s. They’re wonderful. But I’m too bitter. Broken. It’s a stark contrast to their light, which somehow makes it worse.

I thought I had a handle on this, but the reality of setting that moon circle and all it will bring makes me want to hit something. It’s as if someone took my greatest wish—taking care of my omega with a pack—and twisted it into something dark.

Briggs rolls off me, settling on his side and cradling his head in his palm. “I’m here to listen if you want to talk about it. I want you to trust me enough to let me understand so I can help give you what you need.”

“What’s there to say?” I face his gaze and let him see all of it. Then he’ll know—I’m not worth it. They need better than me. They need someone who can keep her safe

and give her the future she deserves. “I failed, and I’m trying my best not to fail her too, but the odds aren’t great.”

“You didn’t fail,” Briggs says softly.

I look away from his understanding gaze, staring unseeing at the hay. “Tell that to the omegas who came before Nova.”

Briggs leans over my chest, getting right into my space. “I’m telling it to you because you’re the one who needs to hear it. This isn’t your fault any more than what’s happening to omegas is hers.”

A frustrated growl builds in my chest. “It doesn’t matter who is to blame. It doesn’t change the fact that we need to bond her, but the same bond she needs won’t be strong enough to sustain her”—I clench my jaw, the words bitter on my tongue—“or that I don’t know how to fix it.”

“Bullshit,” Briggs growls. “We’re here when all the odds say we shouldn’t be. So, fuck whatever the odds are. We’re gonna beat them. But that means we need you. All in.”

I laugh at his delusions, but it’s humorless. “You always were cocky.”

“It’s not cocky if it’s true,” he says softly, none of his usual teasing in his tone.

I study him and realize he means it. “How do you know? You have a gift of sight that I don’t know about?”

“No, smartass.” Briggs sits up, beating his chest over his heart with his fist. “I feel it. In here.” His eyes flash a spark of silver before he dives for me again, pinning my wrists and bringing them over my head. “Just like I know that you’re gonna love

having my hands on you.”

“Oh yeah?” I buck against his hold, testing his restraints. The alpha gives me a cocky grin when I don’t budge. “Prove it.”

“I did promise orgasms, and I’m a man of my word,” he teases.

His mouth collides with mine, nipping until I let him in. It’s a kiss that forces me to surrender, and I sink into it. The constant buzz in my brain finally settles as we trade kisses, our tongues tangling.

He lets go of my wrists to tackle my pants, pulling out my hard cock. The first stroke makes me buck into his hand. “Please tell me you thought of lube.”

“Sort of.” Briggs laughs as he slides down between my legs. His tongue darts out to lick my crown, then he’s sucking me in.

It’s so good I rock into the tunnel of his mouth, my hands flying to his hair. My horny meter has been dialed up past ten for days. My omega and alpha mates have been driving me crazy with want that I barely let myself have. I’ve been hiding out along the perimeter, watching but not really joining.

Briggs takes me deep only to retreat and do it again, sucking me as he squeezes my knot. I’m not going to last long. My body is already aching to come.

Briggs growls, pulling himself off my cock. “Stop holding back.”

He renews his efforts, the suction so fucking good that I can’t keep from thrusting my hips. I hit the back of his throat and slide into that tight space, my orgasm already traveling down my spine. I go off on a shout, ropes of cum filling his mouth as I cry out his name. He keeps going, swallowing me and sucking until I’m drained, chest

heaving.

Briggs kisses my spent cock, and my heart stutters at the intimate gesture. His hands slide under my sweater, and he kisses my chest. The alpha says something, but I'm too far gone to know what.

"Can't think. You sucked my brains out through my dick."

"Good. Less thinking. More feeling," Briggs says into my skin.

He half lies across me, cuddling. I'm sure I should probably return the favor, but I can't seem to move. Briggs stays with me through it, purring quietly.

After a while, he sits up, pulling me with him. "Come on, we'll take the snacks back to the house and munch on them while we make dinner."

In a daze, I follow him. The moment we walk in the cabin door, we're hit by an explosion of Nova's perfume and alpha musk.

"Damn," I moan, my spent cock already trying to get hard. "Whatever they got up to was fucking hot. I can tell."

Briggs shrugs. "'Bout time." He looks at me when he says it, and my cheeks heat.

He teases me like that all through making dinner. Briggs makes all this seem easier, like he'll make sure I don't fuck it up too badly. Maybe the brothers are strong enough for all of us.

We follow the sex-scent trail, bringing dinner to the second floor. In the first bedroom, we find Nova sleeping on Dex's chest. Briggs sets the tray on the nightstand while I run back downstairs and grab some blankets.

Soft voices greet my return. Nova squeals, leaping for me from the edge of the bed. The blankets fall, and I'm carrying my squirming omega instead.

She inhales deeply, a dazed smile on her face. "The two of you together smells so fucking delicious," she squeals, covering my cheek in kisses.

Behind us, Dex teases his brother, and Briggs gives it back.

Nova leans in, her sweet voice soft and full of affection. "See? More love, not less, right?"

"Right, little star." I take her lips, giving her a soft kiss.

She pulls back, her expression questioning.

"I set the circle," I promise.

"Good." She studies me, her eyes full of an emotion I'm not sure I'm brave enough to name. "Truth?"

I nod, my throat tight.

"I believe my best chance is with you."

My forehead falls to hers. "Same, little star."

Dex grunts, but I'm pretty sure it's an agreement.

"See? Like I said." Briggs smirks. "It's settled."

I flick him off.

He throws his head back with a throaty laugh. “Anytime.”

Nova kisses my cheek. “Come snuggle for a minute before we eat.” She tugs on my ear, and I roll my eyes at how relentless the three of them are.

“All right, all right,” I grumble.

Nova clings to my neck as I carry her back to bed. Briggs scoops up the blankets while she snuggles into Dex’s side, holding out her hand for me. I crawl beside her, and she wiggles around until she’s lying across us. Briggs folds himself in behind me, draping himself along my back.

It’s perfect. I close my eyes, allow myself to feel the rightness of pack, and let that bolster my resolve.

“You know you love it,” Briggs murmurs, trailing a kiss along my neck.

Damn alpha—he’s right.

Chapter 32

Nova

Gage moans, the sound heart wrenching enough to drag me from sleep. I slip out from under Dex's arm and crawl over Briggs until I can burrow into the space between him and Gage. My alpha makes another pain-filled sound, and Briggs sits up behind me.

"Nightmare?" he asks.

I nod, brushing my hands along the crease in Gage's brow. My purr hums to life, and Briggs matches it, but the harmony does little to calm Gage. He whimpers and thrashes, and before I understand what's happening, Dex has me cradled to his chest.

"Careful, sweetheart. Let Briggs wake him up." Dex pulls me closer, but I twist in his hold until I can watch.

Briggs gently shakes Gage's shoulder.

Gage startles awake with a gasp, his eyes wide. "The wards." Just as quickly, he's moving, stumbling from the bed and down the hall as he shouts, "My dream. The ferals got through the wards."

Briggs and Dex share a look, then the two alphas turn those flashing silver eyes on me.

“Stay with Dex, pretty girl. He’ll keep you safe.” Briggs kisses my forehead before turning on fast feet, calling for Gage to wait.

I scramble from Dex’s hold, desperate to help them, but Dex is on me before I’ve reached the door. I fight against him, half lost to my wolf, but he’s a mountain of alpha. The fight doesn’t drain out of me but turns into a rushing river instead.

“Easy, sweetheart,” Dex says, holding me tightly against his chest.

“Let me go! I can help!” I beat my palm against him, sobbing.

It’s stupid. I can fight. I don’t want to be separated from them, scared out of my mind they won’t come back.

Dex doesn’t let up, using his purr to try to ground me. His scent swells, and my muscles unlock, some of the blinding panic receding.

It’s unfair. I want to be mad.

“I know you can fight. But out there, with the full moon only days away, your scent will be bait, and no one is using you as bait.” Dex’s alpha is in his voice. Somehow, the tone is both gentle and unyielding.

I deflate, knowing he’s right. I could get them hurt like I did Briggs when they brought me here. The heat of embarrassment mixes with new tears. I’m mad and ashamed of my own selfishness. Here I am freaking out and making it worse when two of my mates are out there battling who knows what.

“Aww, sweetheart, you’re eating me up with those tears,” Dex says, voice tense.

“I’m—I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m like this.” I try to stop the tears, but they

keep coming.

“No more apologizing,” he growls, tugging my chin until I meet his eyes. “It’s all right to be scared, but Briggs is a strong hunter, and Gage is powerful.” Dex brushes his rough thumb along my cheek and kisses my forehead. “Can I put you down, or am I carrying you?”

I take a deep breath and pull myself together. “I’m good.” It’s a total lie, but I need it to be true.

Dex nods. “Go to the nest while I lock down the cabin.”

“Go.” I swallow around a rising whine and bite my lip. My wolf snarls, wanting control, but I fight her.

I can do this.

I return to my nest and bury myself under the covers, trying to shut out the world. I chant on repeat that the guys will be okay. The nest smells like my pack, and that makes it both better and worse. I listen for sounds, but Dex is quiet and the night is still. My heart races, my wolf on full alert.

Reality slows. Every second takes an eternity.

By the time Dex makes it back to me, loaded dart gun in hand, I’m shaking. I peek out from under the covers, and Dex’s face falls. “Oh, sweetheart.”

I should be used to this. I am used to this.

I don’t understand why being in danger is hitting me so hard. I’ve let myself get too comfortable, let myself forget how unsafe the world is. Or maybe it’s that I’ve only

had to worry about myself for so long and I can't stand the thought of any of them getting hurt.

Dex scoops me up, settling me against his chest. "It's all right, sweet girl. I promise."

I bury my nose in his neck, letting that deeply comforting scent soothe my frayed nerves.

"They're okay. My littermate bond would let me know if there was trouble." He keeps up a steady stream of chatter, trying to reassure me.

Time keeps wobbling, speeding up and slowing down. I'm barely aware of Dex moving us, of his words. I suck in his scent and try to hang on.

They're going to be okay. They're coming back.

Cold wind whips in from the open front door. I hear Briggs's melodic voice, followed by Gage's gruff sound. Dex carries me from the nest, and I scramble from his arms, leaping for them, hands everywhere, checking that they're all right. They're naked from their shift and freezing, but unharmed. I suck in their scents, sandwiching myself between them. It keeps the whine from spilling from my throat.

A blanket wraps around us, then another. Dex's deep voice sounds. "The ferals?"

I cling to Briggs, the vibrations of his voice soothing. "The woods are clear. No ferals. It doesn't look like they've been back. Still no tracks or new scents near the wards."

"But the dream?" I ask, stupid tears of relief falling down my cheeks.

Everyone is quiet.

I peek out from my hiding spot and twist to see Gage. “What happened?”

He pulls away from our embrace, pacing in the entryway.

Dex looks between the two of them. “Well?”

Gage runs his fingers through his hair, the movement agitated. His dark gaze spears me. “I’m sorry I freaked you out. I was wrong,” he admits, face twisted. “It must have been a nightmare.”

Briggs shakes his head in defiance. “There weren’t any ferals, but the dream was a good warning. The wards on the west side of the territory were flickering and needed recharging.”

Gage chuckles. “Yeah, let’s go with that. Not that I fucked up.”

“You fixed them? Nothing got in?” Dex growls.

Briggs pats his brother on the back. “We’re all good. Nothing but a magic battery issue.” His stomach growls. “Let’s eat because that run made me ravenous.” Briggs holds out his blanket-clad arm and tucks me into his side. “If there was ever a time for brownies and hot chocolate, it’s now.”

“You guys go snuggle with Nova. I’ll get something together,” Dex grumbles, moving toward the kitchen.

I kiss Briggs’s cheek but duck from his hold, racing back to throw myself at Gage.

“Sorry, little star. I’m so sorry,” he says over and over.

I hug his middle, breathing him in, so thankful he’s all right. “You have nothing to be

sorry for. We're all on edge." I jump into his arms so he's forced to catch me.

Gage takes a deep breath, nuzzling into my neck. Even though we don't share a bite bond, I can feel all the things he doesn't say. He's scared. He doesn't want to lose me.

I purr, letting him hear the reassurance in the sound. It says, "I see you. I'm scared too, but we're okay."

Please, let us be okay.

Chapter 33

Nova

C ramps have settled in, and they suck hardcore. Everything sort of aches. I feel bloated and hungry simultaneously in some cruel twist of fate. I put down the book I'm reading, flopping back onto the couch.

The sex-haze part of this pre-heat was fun. Let's get back to that.

Plus, I'm needy and not in a fun way. I want snuggles and another batch of Gage's muffins for these cramps.

Briggs sent me inside after I milked Milkshake. He could tell that the scents in the barn were making me queasy. The others are out on their evening perimeter check, but they left about an hour ago and it takes at least two.

A draft carries in from the newly open door, and I scramble from the couch, flinging myself into Briggs's arms. He picks me up, letting me nuzzle into his neck and get a hit of his rich orchid and dark forest.

"I was miserable!" I practically whine, completely giving in to my omega instincts to be a needy-ass bitch.

"You came back in less than an hour ago." My alpha chuckles, the melodic sound calming the itch under my skin. I rub my cheek along the underside of his scruff, the scratchy bristles making me purr.

“Doesn’t matter. I feel needy,” I admit, wrapping my legs around his waist as he carries me back into the living room.

I’m not even embarrassed by it. They’ve made it clear they like how clingy I can be, and their presence comforts me. Besides, there’s no embarrassment with the pack, not really. We know each other now—our dreams, our nightmares, and the soft places we protect. That’s what makes it so powerful. We see one another, and we love each other, hang-ups and all.

Maybe we haven’t said it in those words yet, but I feel their truth. These men are my family.

“I love it when you’re needy, pretty girl,” Briggs promises. He sets me back down on the couch. “Let me get situated, and I’ll come and keep you company.” He brushes a soft kiss on my lips. “Fifteen minutes, then all the snuggles you need.”

I relent, dropping my arms from his neck and trying to find a comfortable spot in the mound of blankets I’ve amassed on the couch.

Briggs keeps his word. Fifteen minutes later, he’s back, freshly showered, with a plate of snacks in one hand and warm water bottles in the other. He tucks the warm water bottles under the blankets and adds another log to the fire, sending a burst of cozy warmth into the room.

“Scoot over.” Briggs wedges between the back of the couch and me, looping a strong arm around me as he reaches for the snack plate. “You snack, I’ll read. But toss me a stuffed jalapeno first.”

He eats the whole thing in one bite from my hand, pretending to nibble me up like a wolf, planting kisses on my hands and anywhere else he can reach.

I giggle around his teasing, almost dropping the plate. “Cut it out before we lose the snacks!”

“We can’t have that,” he says teasingly.

His playfulness eases some of the tension in my body. It’s hard to be unhappy around Briggs. He’s warm and unassuming, silly in the best way. I’ve missed our daily cuddles, just the two of us while he reads or talks with me.

I give him a soft kiss. “You’re pretty great at knowing and providing exactly what everyone needs. It’s one of the things I love about you.”

The tips of Briggs’s ears tinge pink, but his eyes are full of a soft tenderness that shows how much my words mean. He ruins it a moment later by wiggling his eyebrows. “How many things do you love? I mean, it’s hundreds, right? Especially how handsome I am?”

“Precisely,” I giggle.

The back of his hand brushes across my cheek, that tender look back in his eyes. “Same, beautiful. I love everything about you. Sometimes it’s hard to believe you’re real. I can’t wait to bond with you, to build a life with you. I know how it all started was awful, but I’ll be forever grateful that we found you.”

My chest warms into a gooey, melted mess, and my wolf purrs for her handsome mate. “You’re pretty perfect. That’s another thing I love about you,” I say with a watery smile.

“Damn right,” he teases. We settle, and Briggs opens the book, pulling me back against his chest. “Naughty Nova. You went ahead.”

I feign innocence. “Is thirty-three not the chapter you stopped on?”

“No, and you know it.” He backs up a few chapters and starts where he left off.

Even though I’ve already read that part of the story, I listen with fascination to the cadence of his voice. His melodic timbre is soothing, and I hum while I nibble on my snacks, content to stay here forever.

When my two missing mates return from their perimeter check a few hours later, I’m feeling a little better.

Dex steals me from his brother’s arms, sets me on his lap, and scent marks my hair. He doesn’t say anything, but even without a bond, I can tell he missed me. I wonder if this overwhelming need will simmer down after my heat when we’ve bonded.

Gage leans down into Dex’s space and kisses me before heading into the kitchen to finish dinner.

When I’m covered in Dex’s scent, I plaster myself between the two brothers. Briggs runs his fingers through my hair in the world’s best scalp massage while Dex rubs my feet. The guys talk around me about their perimeter check and the daily chores. I add in every once in a while, but I’m mostly content to just be. Beneath the surface, my cramps twinge, and a general air of mopey-ness makes me want to snuggle and hide under the blankets.

Our resident healer brings me a steaming mug. “Drink this. It should help.”

Briggs pulls me up against his chest and takes the drink, blowing on it and holding it for me while I take sips. It’s got a little bit of a licorice and vanilla taste underneath a mulled wine. It’s wintery and spiced, spreading warmth through me. After a few minutes, it gives me a bit of a floaty feeling that’s nice.

The guys eat dinner around me, but I decline, lounging in Briggs's lap and demanding pets like a spoiled kitten.

After dinner, I shift from Briggs's lap to Gage's, watching the brothers play their nightly chess game while he picks up where Briggs left off in the story.

It's the best moment, even with my pre-heat. The ordinary sweetness of the evening brings tears to my eyes. I hold them back, breathing in Gage's warm earthy scent. It reminds me of my grandmother's home in my village, and for a moment, I let myself remember my first family.

I think they would be proud of the pack we've made. I hope somewhere they are.

Chapter 34

Nova

Gage whimpers in his sleep. I plaster myself to his side, my hands trying to soothe him. He's been sleeping like shit for the last four nights, troubled by the same nightmare. Each day, my wolves check the wards. They find them intact with no sign of the ferals. Doesn't seem to matter to Gage's dreams or my shot nerves.

It's nothing, yet it feels like something. No matter how many times I try, I can't shake the feeling that it's not just a dream. I force myself to push away the thought, focusing on purring for my haunted wolf.

The moment Gage wakes, he sighs, wraps his arms around me, and murmurs into my neck, "I'm sorry I woke you."

"Nightmare?" I ask.

Gage nods. "Same one."

"It's nerves. Your worries are manifesting as dreams," I reassure him and myself, running my fingers through his thick hair.

"Mmm," he mumbles into my neck. "The after-nightmare head scratches are top tier though."

I smile into his hair, loving how his muscles relax and his scent mellows the longer I

hold him.

He moans, the sound making my nipples tighten. “Mmm. Right now, you smell like warm apple pie.”

He nuzzles my neck, the scruff on his skin tingling. Those rough passes of his jaw, followed by the soft feel of his lips, make my belly flutter and slick pool between my legs.

“Can’t help it. The moon,” I moan.

The full moon will rise tonight, and my body is primed to take every act of affection and turn it into an orgasm. It’s an art form my omega has mastered in my time with these men.

“Are you aching?” he murmurs, hands sliding along my back to cup my ass.

“I wasn’t,” I grumble, pretending to be put out. “But if you don’t stop scenting me, I will be.”

His teeth graze my skin so close to my pulse point that my insides clench. The thought of his bite makes my temperature rise. I want it, want to feel his knot and his teeth.

“Not helping.” I shiver when he nips along my collarbone.

“Didn’t expect it to. I could use a distraction, and you’re the most distracting creature I’ve ever met.” He kisses those words into my skin, his hands grazing my ass as he lowers himself beneath the blanket.

He doesn’t waste any time, splaying my legs open and licking along my center. He

spreads me with his fingers, and for some reason, it's so hot my hips jump. His chuckle is buried between the blanket and my legs, but I can feel his teasing gaze.

He keeps me there, teasing me with touches and little licks, never giving me back his full mouth. I grab hold of his head in frustration, but he only skirts his thumb through my wetness before blowing teasingly on my clit.

"Gage," I plead, desperate for his mouth. "Why are you waiting?"

He throws back the blanket and crawls up my chest. His eyes glow, and his fangs glint. My throat tightens at the raw look in his eyes, and the space between us floods with cinnamon.

Gage practically snarls, his wolf in every gesture. "The first time I knot you, I will claim you. And I'm having a hard time convincing my wolf that time shouldn't be now."

Possessive Gage speaks in a tone that directly links to my clit. My neck bends without conscious decision, showing him I'm ready.

He licks the tip of his fang. "You have no idea, little star."

"Show me," I beg.

He leaps for my throat, but his fangs don't land, the tips grazing the skin. I suck in a shuddering breath, chest heaving and clit aching.

Gage licks the spot, then sucks along my neck so hard I know it will bruise. "Soon my claim will live right here."

He trails kisses down my chest, sucking and licking his way down my body. When he

gets between my legs, he gives me a look full of lust and dives back beneath the covers. He kisses my thigh and nibbles the fleshy part, leaving me aching.

Briggs pops his head up beside me, a sleepy smile on his face. “Is he edging you, baby?”

“So well.” I pout.

“Let’s see if I can help him,” he teases, eyes full of mischief.

My core tightens as Briggs circles my nipple with his tongue. He does it once. Twice. On the third time, he finally sucks it into his mouth.

“Please,” I beg.

My back arches into Briggs’s touch, and I grind my hips in desperation. Briggs pinches my other nipple at the same time Gage’s breath ghosts over my pussy.

A burst of heat makes my core ache with need, my perfume going haywire. I spread my legs wider, wanting more, needing something to fill me. Briggs bites down gently on my nipple at the same Gage finally relents and sucks my clit with perfect pressure. When he adds two thick fingers, white sparks dance in my vision. My orgasm ripples through me, sending little bursts of pleasure through my body.

Gage growls, “I can’t resist you.”

He goes to his knees, the blanket falling around us as he notches his cock at my entrance. My healer looks crazed, his eyes glowing and his chest heaving. He drags the slick head of his cock through my wet center, teasing over and over before he finally sinks inside. His grip on my hips tightens, and he pulls me closer, stretching me open as he buries himself deep.

My legs lock around Gage's middle, my heels digging into his ass. As he thrusts, the drag of each stroke lights me up inside, making me push back into him.

Briggs makes a noise of appreciation, his eyes trained on the spot where Gage and I are connected. "It's so hot to watch you take him, beautiful."

Gage snarls, his wolf close to the surface as he pounds into me. My hand digs into the sheet, desperate for an anchor. Gage's eyes never leave mine, the connection between us a live wire.

Briggs plucks my nipples, his thumb brushing circles along my areolas before he draws one into his mouth. Between Gage pounding into me with ruthless precision and Briggs's sweet attention, I get lost. My head falls back, eyes closing as an orgasm thunders towards me.

Gage grunts, his fingers dancing along my clit, and I see white. Bliss travels up my spine, and I moan, slick pooling between my legs. That causes Gage to pick up his strokes, his hands digging into my hips as he comes on a strangled groan. I want his knot. Digging my heels in, I try to pull him closer without success.

"Please," I beg.

"Shhh, pretty girl. It's all right. Gage can't give you his knot without his bite, his wolf is too worked up, but I've got you." Briggs's lips find mine, sucking in my sounds as his hands gently caress my chest, trying to calm my racing heart.

It's not enough, and a whine escapes, needy and breathy. Briggs's purr combats the sound, his lips slowing the kiss until I'm floating in him. Gage collapses, rolling to the side as he slips out. The loss makes me whine again, but somewhere in the back of my mind, I remember we need to wait for the full moon.

My thoughts get hazy as both mates try to bring me down with soft touches. They quiet my heart just enough to dampen the ache, but I feel the heat under my skin. By the time the moon rises tonight, I'm gonna be delirious for a knot and demanding bites.

It's exciting—and scary as fuck.

Briggs takes my lips, molding his over mine. The kiss is lazy and comforting, like the lapping of the river along a quiet bank. It blankets the fear as I float on his soft lips.

Gage joins the kiss, and it crests into something messy and a little wild. It wakes me and fills me with the urge to move, like tapping into the fabric of magic just beneath the surface. I don't understand it exactly, but my instincts are riding me hard, telling me to get my ass in gear.

This is my first real full moon. All those years watching my grandmother work as a healer come back to me. She had traditions for preparing for the mating moon, not only as a healer, but also as an omega. I can almost hear her call to follow them.

"Up, I need to change the sheets," I growl, pushing my two alpha mates apart.

Briggs laughs into their kiss. "Change the sheets? I thought they needed our scents."

"Blankets, yes. But I need new sheets... and sage, possibly lavender—" My movements are frantic as I twist out of Gage's hold, herding him toward the edge of the nest.

"All right, wild child, I'll get them," he concedes. "Give me a minute to find pants."

I turn my sights on Briggs, who holds up his hands in surrender. "Pre-heat Nova is fierce."

He gives me a goofy grin as he trips over his sleeping brother. That jostles Dex awake, and I sigh, frustrated when my snuggly alpha pulls me in for a kiss. It's delicious, and I get distracted, his warm, sleepy scent making me curl myself around him.

"Good morning, sweet girl. You smell so fucking delicious right now." Dex makes this husky, almost breathless growling sound into my neck as I struggle to come up for air.

Shit. I need to focus. My mates don't need to be here now. In fact, I very much need them out.

I push against Dex's chest, wiggling out of his lap as he grabs for me. I'm pinned in the nest blankets before I can think, staring into glowing silver eyes.

"What is it?" Dex asks, nostrils flaring.

My decision to escape wasn't the best way to calm either of us down.

Hot. But not the time.

Breath wooshes out of me, and I give him my best pleading look. "My wolf says I need this space. Alone."

Understanding dawns in his eyes, and the glow sparks brighter, his scent swelling before it dims. "Whatever you need." He nuzzles my palm before kissing it. "Briggs and Gage can check the wards while I do the chores and double-check everything is ready to lock down for your heat."

Dex gives me one final kiss and rolls off me. He grabs a pair of jeans from the closet while the other two talk quietly as they get dressed. I ignore them, focusing on my

nest.

The full moon signals reaching a peak. It's about the process of transformation, of new beginnings. I fall into the first of the rituals, preparing my nest for my mates.

Chapter 35

Briggs

Gage's face is beet red as he pushes himself out the front door in a cloud of Nova's perfume.

"You all right?" I smother a laugh, clapping him on the back. "Your wolf seems a little on edge."

I shouldn't tease him. He's close to losing it between his lack of sleep and the moon rising. He's almost in rut, his wolf desperate to stop holding back when it comes to our omega mate, but I can't seem to help myself. Seeing Gage out of sorts around her is peak shit-talking material, and I can't let the opportunity slip by.

Besides, he's got nothing to worry about with Nova. Whatever hang-ups he's got are in his head. She's head over heels for him. I know he's worried about the magic, but we're strong—stronger than he's giving us credit for.

Gage growls in agitation, picking up his pace through the courtyard. I jog to catch up, burying my smile at his grumpiness. He's hopelessly fighting his instincts, and for some reason, I find it endearing this morning.

"I can't wait to see you go full wolf tonight."

I grab his wrist, tugging him to look at me. Gage is small for an alpha, barely six feet, and all lean muscle. His features are sharp, making him more refined looking than

rugged, but right now, in the cold forest with his wild hair dancing in the whipping wind and his breath a white cloud around him, he looks like a predator. He curls his lip, his fang tip peeking out as he lunges for me.

He shoves me back against the base of a tree, our mouths colliding in a lashing kiss full of his frantic energy. He vies for control. It's a passionate slip of the tongue and a sharp nip. My alpha pushes back against him, determined to take over and soothe his desperation.

I grab the back of his neck and wrench my lips from his, using my hunter's strength to outmuscle him and flip our positions. I press into his back, splaying my palm against the rough trunk and nestling my bulge against his ass.

Gage bucks, but it only grinds his ass against me.

"You're damn near feral with the need to claim, aren't you? You keep trying to hold back, but you're desperate to knot her, to sink your teeth in our pretty wolf's neck and mark her as ours." Wrapping my other arm around his waist, I brush my fingers against his hard cock.

Gage sprouts claws, digging into the wood, his wolf chuffing.

I suck a blooming mark on his neck, my hand dipping below the waist of his jeans to trace the length of his hard shaft. His head falls to the side, and I lick a long trail before nipping his earlobe.

"You're going to claim her tonight with your pack." I tighten my grip as his dick slides through my curled palm, squeezing on the downstroke. The pull of the moon, even this early in the day, is filling me with the deep need to fuck, but it's nearly taken Gage. I drag my hand up and down his length. "We're going to make her wet, get that pink pussy shiny for us, and then we're going to see how much of a mess she

can make of our cocks. Together, all of us will claim her and finally make this pack official.”

His wolf makes a sound deep in his chest. It’s animalistic and hot as fuck. Gage’s dick slides through my grip, slick with precum. He rocks into the tunnel of my curled palm, his claws digging into the wood as he keeps up the ragged moans. His wolf knows what he needs even though the man has been fighting us, and the wolf will win.

“Is that what you want? To take your mates and make us one under the moon?”

My nearly feral mate shivers, fur sprouting, then receding under his skin as his cock jerks in my hand. I squeeze his knot, cutting off his orgasm.

Gage whimpers.

“Give me the words,” I growl. “Tell me.”

“Mine,” he says, the sound barely more than a snarl.

It’s close enough. I stroke his knot, and he goes off, painting my hand with warm cum. I nip his ear, stroking him through his orgasm until he’s panting, collapsed against the harsh bark. Planting a kiss on his neck, I turn him in my arms, burying him against my chest.

“Breathe.” My alpha purrs, trying to settle his wolf. He needed this, and he’ll be in a better place for tonight if I can help keep him from getting too riled up. “Stop fighting so hard and just breathe.”

Gage takes a few minutes before moving again, his scent finally mellowing. He pulls back, his cheeks pink as he nervously tugs a hand through his hair. “That was…”

“That was a promise.” I give him a dastardly look as I strip. Backing away, I call for him. “Now come on, let’s finish the perimeter check and get back to our girl.”

I shift, taking to the snow-covered trail. By the time Gage catches up, I’ve made a path through the deep snow to the boundary line.

My mind switches to full hunter mode, my wolf’s instincts on high alert. We’ve been checking the wards twice a day since Gage started having those dreams, but after that first time the western crystal was depleted, we haven’t had any issues. We’re safe behind his wards. We need to focus on the magic of the moon and our mating bond, but on both fronts, my wolf is confident.

My wolf sniffs along the wards, checking for strange scents or signs of ferals. Gage falls in beside him, his grey-and-white wolf matching pace. All thoughts of Gage’s hang-ups and Nova’s upcoming heat get tossed aside, my wolf fully focused.

The fresh snow has been worn down into a small path we’ve made along the perimeter, but even with that, it’s slow going. We head west along the wards but don’t find anything, not even at the spot where the ferals had initially gathered. The traps are clear, the boundary is intact, and the woods are free of feral tracks.

My wolf gives over my skin, and I kneel, running my hands through Gage’s fur. “We’ll loop around the perimeter to check the crystals, but I don’t sense any activity.”

The grey-and-white wolf nods, taking off. I shift, racing to take the lead. A cold blast of wind whips through the trees, making it feel as though the fresh mountain air is charged with static. I’m alive with the hope of it, the world almost shimmering with my happiness.

My wolf picks up the pace again, eager to finish so we can return to our mate.

Chapter 36

Dex

Milkshake lets out an undignified moo as I loop the lead around her neck and get her situated in the wooden chute for milking. I strap her in and wash her before attaching the milking machine.

It's early, the drama of Mother Clucker and her hen house tucked away in the rafters. Later, this place will be a wordless soap opera, the hen holding high court and Cluck Norris strutting around his roost.

While Milkshake is in the chute, I muck the roost. It's messy work but a necessary part of living here. I'm a hunter, but I have to admit I like taking care of the animals and the property.

At first, the animals were wary of me. The bull still keeps his distance. The animals can feel my predator, and it puts their instincts on edge. But after a month here, we've come to an agreement of sorts. They still prefer Nova, but I can't blame them for that.

I wash up and finish with Milkshake, who is in much less of a hurry now. It takes sweet-talking and cooing in her ear before she lets me lead her back to her area of the large barn.

The courtyard is next but only requires light shoveling. Snow has held off for a few days, giving us a reprieve. I catch sight of Nova through the kitchen window as she dances around, her fuzzy socks making her slip and slide along the floor.

She's fucking radiant, my own personal sun. It's never gonna get old that she's here and mine. It's like I've found a missing part of myself. Around her, I feel whole.

I stare like a creeper, watching her for so long that she must feel my gaze. She looks my way, and a slow smile spreads over her lips. Her flour-covered fingers curl in a wave. She blows me a kiss before going back to the dough. I couldn't keep the grin off my face if I tried, but I force myself to get moving so I can get back to her.

By the time I finish the remainder of the chores, the itch under my skin has become too much to ignore. The moon is a hazy dot in the bright afternoon sky, its power seeming to shimmer in the air.

My wolf is eager for it to reach its zenith. He's ready to share my skin, to sink his teeth in and claim our mate. I hurry back to the cabin, just as ready.

Nova is still in the kitchen, her cute ass in the air as she bends to take a tray from the oven.

The place looks as if it's been covered in omega confetti. Soup bubbles on the stove, and the kitchen island is covered in small moon cakes and loaves of braided bread. She's been nesting today, not only in her actual nest but throughout the house.

My alpha rumbles his approval, enamored with our omega and her den. Mako told me once that an alpha will never know a better home than with their omega. I thought he meant the house. I can admit that I longed for the physical place as much as the mythical person. A home meant a place where Briggs and I belonged. Even in Mako's house, I never felt like I do now—settled deep inside.

It isn't because of the cabin or the fact that Nova is cooking for us. It's not even from the comfort of the lush blankets in her nest. Briggs and I have lived on our own for most of our lives. We know how to build a house, hunt, cook, and clean. That wasn't

the kind of home Mako was talking about. I get that now.

She's home . It's Nova—nurturing, kind, bold, sexy. So fucking brave and fierce but also tenderhearted and in need of so much care. I love her. Now, I need to find the words before I'm lost to the moon.

Talking is easier with her than it's ever been with anyone else. With Briggs, the littermate bond means that I don't have to find words, but with Nova, I want to share them. I just don't think words will do her justice.

Nova sets a batch of cookies on the counter and wipes a hand across her forehead. Her cheeks are flushed, and sweat beads on her brow. If the scent of apples and cinnamon is any indication, the moon must be riding her already.

“How are you feeling, sweetheart?” I ask, making my way into the kitchen and washing up at the sink.

“Like there's something I'm forgetting.” Nova makes a disgruntled sound and tosses down her oven mitt. She leans against the island, mumbling as she takes inventory.

I survey the space with her. “Looks like plenty enough for a feast to me.”

She cuts her eyes to me. “It needs to be right.”

“What does?” I plant my hands on either side of her hips.

Her teeth sink into the side of her lip, and she looks up at me nervously. “Today. Tonight. I'm trying to remember everything for the full moon, but I feel like I'm forgetting something important.”

This clearly matters to her, though I don't understand the significance. I caress her

cheek with the backs of my fingers. She's warm, her freckles hidden under the lush bloom on her cheeks. "All right. Tell me about it, and I can help."

She licks the seam of her lips, those wide eyes studying me. "In the village I grew up in, before... the full moon started with a pack run, then a bonfire feast. After, the kids were carted off with the elders for stories and games while everyone else spent the moon in the packhouse or at home with their mates. I was trying to make the traditional dishes for us..."

I sling an arm around her hip and swipe a space clear on the counter with the other before lifting her. Nova lets out a startled meep, clinging to the front of my flannel. She's tiny, and even sitting on the counter, she still isn't at eye level with me, but it lets me get closer.

"It's perfect even if it's not exactly the same." I step between her spread knees. "It's the thought that makes the ritual, yeah?"

Her shoulders slump. "Maybe. But I figure we can use all the help we can get."

I eye the round moon cakes decorated in white icing. I had those once at a full moon ceremony in a village we were passing through. They were damn good. "Those cakes will help. I'm sure of it."

Nova giggles. The sound is so sweet it makes my chest ache. "The moon cakes are to celebrate the return of light."

"And the others?"

Nova points at the golden oblong loaves. "The pack bread is savory and a little sweet. It's got herbs and flowers added to the dough, each signifying something for the mating union. This is my first time making it by myself, so it might be awful."

“Never,” I promise her. I’ll eat every damn thing she makes, no matter what it tastes like.

She eyes me as though she’s on to me. “It’s supposed to be good luck for all mates to eat from the same loaf. The same thing for the soup.”

“It’s perfect and thoughtful.” I smack a kiss on her lips. “Like you.”

“Maybe try it before singing my praises,” she says with a cocked brow. She grabs the nearest moon cake and steals a piece, holding it up for me.

I indulge her, taking the offered bite and managing to suck the icing off her fingers in the process. It’s good—the lemon in the icing bursts with sweetness on my tongue. Her eyes darken, and her nipples pebble at my moan.

“Delicious.” I kiss her palm. It’s true—she is. The cake too, but I’d rather have my mate.

She rolls her eyes, clearly seeing my meaning, but her scent gives a little burst of cinnamon sugar. “I’m on to you, Dex. You’re a sweet talker.” She gives me a stern look, daring me to contradict her.

The idea that I’m a sweet talker is ridiculous. I’m known for being silent and dangerous. “Maybe.” I shrug. “With you, I can’t help it.”

“Good, because I like it.” Her floured hand scratches along the scruff of my jaw. The comforting gesture makes my wolf purr. Nova sighs, stress bleeding into her scent. She rests her forehead against my chest. “What if this isn’t enough?”

I rub her back, my purr ratcheting up to meet her anxious energy. “It will be because you are. You’ve already given me more than I ever thought to ask for. The only thing

we need for our bonding and this moon to be perfect is for us to be together.”

Nova makes an amused sound as she plants a kiss on my chest. “Total sweet talker.”

This time, I can’t help but chuckle. “If you say so. I was only speaking the truth.”

Nova looks up, searching my face. Her small hand cups my jaw. “I do love you, Dex. You make me feel happy and safe. I haven’t had that in a long time.”

I lick my lips and try to swallow around the massive boulder lodged in my throat. She beat me to it, but damn if her declaration doesn’t make my pulse drum and my heart squeeze. “I’m crazy in love with you, Nova. You’re everything to me, and I’m honored you let me show you that.”

Her smile is bright as I lean in to steal a kiss. I lick the seam of her lips and sweep my tongue against hers. It’s slow and savoring, a simmering heat that warms my blood.

I rip myself away from her mouth before I can get carried away. “Why don’t I start a bath? You can soak while I clean up. Then we’ll be ready to hunker down in the nest.”

“A bath sounds nice. I’m sweaty and covered in flour.” Nova’s eyes are a little glazed as she wraps herself around me and lets me cart her toward the bathroom. We get halfway down the hall before she wiggles, trying to get down. “Turn around. I remembered what I need.”

“What?” I ask, continuing my journey. Whatever it is, I can get it while she relaxes.

“Gage never brought me the lavender and sage for the nest.”

“I’ll grab it before I clean up the kitchen.”

Nova cuddles back against me, scent marking my neck. “Will you join me in the bath? After?”

“Yeah, just let me finish up.” I set her on the tile floor and start the bathwater.

“Deal,” she says, bouncing on her toes in excitement.

Gods, she’s so fucking cute.

I add some of Gage’s oils and bubble bath to the water and turn my attention back to my omega. “Arms up, little wolf.”

She gives me a coy smile as I lift her sweater and reveal miles of soft skin. I kneel, taking my time undressing her slowly. Each inch I reveal as I peel off her leggings gets a kiss so that by the time she’s standing naked before me, the room is thick with the scent of her arousal.

“Dex,” Nova says, my name sounding like a plea on her lips.

I’m fucking feral for the way she says my name. “Just a taste, baby girl. I need it,” I growl into her skin, nipping under her breast.

I spread her legs, lifting one delicate foot onto the tub ledge so she’s on display for me. Her pink pussy glistens, wet and inviting. My big hand looks monstrous against her spread thigh as I trace her smooth skin and down her slick center.

“Please.” She shivers, her hips tilting into my touch.

I can’t ignore the temptation. I bury myself between her legs. The first taste isn’t enough. I don’t know that it ever will be.

I drown myself in her honey, tonguing her clit. My finger slips into her tight heat, fucking her to the knuckle in fast strokes. The sounds of her wet heat are deliciously dirty, the squelching making my dick throb with the need to be inside her.

Nova latches onto my hair, her nails digging into my scalp and her hips rocking. I let her grind her sweet little pussy on my face, rolling her clit between my lips until she trembles and comes on my fingers in soft moans. My alpha is at the surface, ready to claim, but I force him back. I can wait. I want all my cum trapped in her sweet pussy, filling her up over and over under the moon.

I wrap my little orgasm-drunk omega in my arms, letting her stabilize herself as she rides out the waves of pleasure. When her breathing returns to normal, I shut off the water and help her climb into the tub.

“I’ll be back soon,” I promise her, forcing myself to back away.

She gives me a lazy smile, her fingers dipping into the water. “Hurry.”

Chapter 37

Nova

My mind floats, my omega wolf at the surface, vying for control. I lean back against the ledge of the large tub, running my hands through the hot water and along my belly to brush past my nipples.

The orgasm Dex gave me didn't do anything to stem the heat rising in my blood. If anything, it seems to have kick-started my neediness. I squeeze my legs together, my mind replaying the feel of his mouth on me.

My mates already make me insatiable. I can't imagine how much more I could want them. I can't wait for Dex and Briggs to take me between them. Or to feel Gage's knot. I imagine myself between the three, all my mates taking me at once.

Without conscious thought, my hand dips between my legs. The sound of boots in the hall signals the return of my mate, and I tease a circle around my clit in anticipation.

"That was quick," I purr.

"Not nearly," a sharp voice growls.

It's the voice of my nightmares, and I blink, confused by the shadowy figure lurking over me.

"We meet again, troublemaker."

My nostrils flare, but the king's scent is missing, covered by the grey ash marking his face and hands.

"I don't make the same mistake twice." His cruel lips twitch. "This time, I came prepared for my opponents."

The grey scent-blocking ash hollows his cheeks and eyes, making him look like a skeleton king. His dark, cruel gaze looks lifeless and devoid of any warmth.

A million questions race in my mind. All the answers break my heart.

My wolf bursts from my skin in a splashing wave as she lunges for the Alpha King's throat. Before my teeth sink into his jugular, another shadowy figure steps into the doorway and raises a hand. I feel the green sparks before I see them, the electrical current freezing my spine in a burst of pain.

The healer keeps me immobilized while the King slaps on a collar. The moment the metal touches my skin, my wolf yelps, the searing brand forcing her to give me back my skin. It's a mind-melding combination, the freezing numbness of the dark healer's magic and the burning fire of the wolfsbane. I fight against it, thrashing in the King's hold and sinking my teeth into his shoulder.

He throws me onto the wet tile floor. "Stupid bitch. You'll learn to respect your alpha."

"You're not my alpha," I growl, crawling for the door.

The King grips my ankle, yanking on my leg and flipping me in a harsh move that quakes through me. His ghostly face hovers over me, his lips curled into a cruel snarl.

"I'm your fucking king!" He tugs on the chain connected to the metal collar,

painfully yanking me forward. “For weeks I’ve hunted you, biding my time, circling the territory while I conquered the ferals and tested for a way past the wards. I’ve watched from afar. Now, it’s time to claim what’s rightfully mine.”

I should be afraid. I am terrified for my mates, for myself. If he’s here, then something is very wrong. He means to make good on his original dark promise, which can only bring more suffering. But I don’t fucking care what he thinks he’s owed. I won’t fucking cower for him.

“Even after your worst, you will never own me,” I spit the words. I may be afraid, but I’m also angry at him, at the world, and at how things are. I had forgotten the feral world here in this cabin with my mates, and I resent the king reminding me of it. Why can’t I just be an omega who bonds her pack without the constant threat of death? Is that so hard?

He wraps the chain tighter around his fist, forcing my head to tilt back. “That’s where you’re wrong, omega. I already do.”

His mouth covers mine in a brutal kiss. I bite him until the coppery tang of blood makes me want to choke. The king curses. The back of his hand lands with a resounding smack on my cheek, and I wince at the thudding ache but scramble from his grasp as he backs away, spitting blood.

His dark sidekick steps in, another bolt of his magic immobilizing my spine. The force of this blast is triple the power of the last. Darkness tugs at my vision, and the floor rises to meet me.

Chapter 38

Gage

The sun and moon battle for dominance in the sky. My tongue hangs from my mouth, my wolf panting from our run along the perimeter. Briggs and I are almost finished with the checks, and I'm ready to go back to the cabin with Nova and settle in for the night.

I race around the last stone marking the coming boundary line and follow the snow-packed path to the ancient pine tree. My wolf skids to a halt before the crystal in the ward fencing. The black tourmaline stone sits dark and lifeless. Its usual soft-green glow is missing.

It's completely drained.

Again.

I backpedal, sniffing the tree's base for scents I might have missed.

Briggs chuffs next to me, clearly anxious.

This is our last checkpoint in the ward line, and all the others have been intact. Nothing in the forest has felt out of place. There have been no tracks from ferals or sounds of wolves. I'd practically convinced myself that the others were right and my anxiety over bonding with Nova had manifested itself in my sleep.

Even still, my alpha has been agitated since this morning, battling me for control. I thought my wolf was on edge today because he wanted to claim Nova. He does , but maybe this is why he felt the urge so strongly this morning.

I curse myself for not listening to my instincts. If we had a bond right now, I could feel her and urge her to lock down with Dex so they could stay safe.

Idiot. Always ignoring the important things.

I try to recall the nightmare to see if it can guide me since I haven't listened. It's always the same. The pack is huddled around a large bonfire in the forest. Ferals inch closer, the glint of madness and violence in their yellow eyes before they snap. It's fuzzy, parts of the dream hazy upon waking, but the moment's terror is etched into my skin like a memory. Was it a vision? A warning? With the wards down, the ferals could've breached the perimeter.

My wolf nudges Briggs with a burst of magic, and he lopez off, clearly understanding that I'm asking for help with my search. We need to figure out if anything has made it past the wards.

The only way the same stone was depleted of magic in such a short time is if someone did it intentionally. That means I'm dealing with another magic user. A wolf or human witch, possibly another healer?

Backtracking leads me to a narrow stretch along the perimeter that looks undisturbed. There's no scent, no prints in the snow, no snapped branches. But when my wolf licks the air, the burnt smell of dark magic sizzles like acid on my tongue.

Fuck.

The magical signature is that of a wolf healer, but this magic is twisted and corrupt. I

follow the magic until I find a small green stone. It's a wraith stone used to drain energy.

Well, shit. That's how the healer brought down the ward.

It's impossible to tell if the healer was alone, but whatever the wolf has done was powerful enough to cloak his presence. If he's gotten in, it's possible he brought others.

Briggs shifts back in a burst of power, his roar shaking the birds from the trees. "Something is wrong. Dex's bond just spiked with panic."

He goes to run, but I call him back with my wolf's bark before I shift to my human skin.

"Wait. We have to play this smart. Whoever this is, they're prepared."

Briggs turns on me, veins popping along his arms as he squeezes his fists. "What do you know? Why is the ward down? Is it your dream?"

"Someone used a wraith stone to drain the ward. Not ferals. I don't know how my dream ties in, but I'm sure it's connected."

Briggs huffs, chest heaving and his wolf in his eyes. "The first time was a test. If it's not ferals, it's gotta be the king. Could his healers do this?"

"A wraith stone can be used by anyone, but they're rare. It doesn't need a spell as long as you know how to use it. But the air has the scent of dark magic. The king has always had healers, but I don't know them personally, and who knows who he's got now after the alpha challenges and in-fighting."

Briggs curses, his hands moving to his hips. “That’s a problem for later. Right now, we need to get the fuck out of here and back to our pack.”

Panic and fear race through me. We have to get to Nova. She has to be safe—not after everything, not this way.

My wolf takes back my skin in an angry burst, darting toward the cabin in a mad dash of paws. My heart pounds, fear making me run faster than ever.

Briggs pulls ahead, and I push myself to stay at his speed, frantic to get to her.

Chapter 39

Dex

I quickly make my way out of the greenhouse, my dick pounding with the need to get back to my mate. This is the last damn thing, then we're locking down.

The guys should be back anytime from their daily check, and it's getting late enough that the moon will call the shots soon. I can feel the surging in my blood unlike any other moon I've experienced.

Briggs likes to think it's because I'm shy that I've never entered the rutting moon with the others, but that isn't it. I've never felt the call. Not like this. Not even the first time I found her huddled in that awful bathroom in a cloud of perfume.

She's mine now, and my wolf wants to be unleashed.

Halfway across the courtyard, my wolf snaps, trying to take control. I wrench him back, but it's a close thing, my fangs sprouting. My wolf is desperate, his thoughts jumbled. Fear slides down my neck, making my claws push through my skin.

That's when I realize it isn't only the rising moon and our omega mate making my wolf wild. There's the slightest trace of another alpha on the breeze.

Not pack.

I tear through the cabin and into our nest. The sight that greets me makes me lose my

shit. My warning growl is so loud it shakes the walls.

Nova is laid out between the bathroom and the bedroom door, limp and dripping wet. Hovering over her is the Alpha King, his body covered in ash and his hands clamped on chains connected to the metal around Nova's neck.

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

"What did you do to her?" I shout, more wolf than man.

"Nothing yet. But don't worry. What I have planned is what she's made for."

Motherfucker.

I lunge, tackling him and pinning him beneath me. The first punch is brutal, breaking his nose. It's not enough. I keep going, landing several blows to his face.

Still not enough.

The ghost-like fucker laughs, blood spitting from his nose. "Always watch your back, hunter."

Before I can process his words or snap his neck, magic slices through me, paralyzing my muscles. My mind races as my body falls, crushing the alpha. I can't move, but I try to thrash and lash out even as I feel a collar slam shut around my neck.

They can't get her. They won't.

I've promised her she's safe with me, and these assholes aren't gonna make me break my word. I send my desperation through my littermate bond and feel Briggs's fear in response. The two sensations feed one another, a loop of rising dread.

The Alpha King shoves me off him, and another burst of magic must come to his aid because my muscles spasm and lock, my vision going hazy with dancing spots of pain.

His minion healer, dressed in dark robes and adorned in ash, stands over me with a twisted smile. “Come on, beast.”

It takes both him and the king to get me off the floor. My muscles refuse to cooperate for any of us, but at least it slows them down.

Another wolf enters her nest, and a few more crowd behind him. I want to howl my dissent, to throw them all out of her sacred space and tear out their necks. But the wolf’s dark magic and the wolfsbane keep my alpha caged.

“The others aren’t here,” the third man says, keeping his eyes downcast and bearing his neck to the alpha.

“Well, find them!” the king shouts. His face is smeared in blood, distorting the pale grey ash. I want to wipe the snarling smile from his mouth and paint the rest of him red for daring to put his hands anywhere near her.

“But the healer—” the man objects.

“Kill them both. Drain his magic first.” The King turns on his healer, lifting a cruel brow. “Get the beast to the tent. I think he deserves to watch.”

A sound of pure darkness leaks from the deranged-looking healer, and he licks his fangs. “Let him have our leftovers when she’s been bred by us all, too loose to use.” His dead gaze lands on me. “Maybe then you’ll understand your place in our new world, hunter.”

The healer is young, maybe not even twenty, but that doesn't matter. He's lost whether he's feral or not.

The king picks up Nova off the floor, his movements too rough for my sweet wolf. She deserves a pack that loves her, and that's what she has. These alphas don't know the first thing about loving or caring for her. It breaks a piece of me, watching them take her and being helpless to do what I promised.

My sadness mixes with my outrage, but no matter how much I rage, my body remains stiff and unmoving.

I've failed her.

Something is wrapped over my head, and another burst of magic sends me into darkness.

My last thought is a vow to Odin for vengeance.

Chapter 40

Briggs

My wolf deliberately snaps a branch to draw the hunters' attention, and one of their howls fills the air.

The pack of three wolves made a ruckus in the forest, alerting us to their presence long before we reached the cabin. Too bad for them—they're no longer the ones hunting.

There is no doubt in my mind that the pack of boys hunting us is part of the king's guard. The king can always be counted on to send the young to do his bidding. It pisses me off, but at least he's made this easier.

The king has Dex and Nova. That much is clear from the littermate bond. Whoever took down the wards is working for the king, or maybe it's the king himself. But if they somehow subdued my brother, my bet is on magic.

The pups respond to their leader's howl, abandoning Gage's scent trail to chase me. They loop back, following my path to where Gage is ready in a tree. My wolf's paws pound faster toward the trap, and I turn on the hunters as Gage sends out a burst of green sparks. The wolves are stunned by the magic, frozen as I attack.

It's a swift mercy.

I take down two with singular bites and leave the one in charge, my fangs set to

pierce his neck.

Gage hops down from the tree, sending snow falling. He crouches next to us, leaning in to speak to the wolf. “Shift.”

The wolf snarls, fighting against my hold. He’s no match for the size and strength of my wolf, who clamps down harder on his neck.

“Shift or I’ll force the change,” Gage snarls, his voice devoid of its usual warmth.

The wolf beneath me transforms, but my wolf’s jaws don’t unclamp.

“Where did he take her?” Gage barks.

The boy shakes his head, his eyes wide with fear.

“Where?” The word is a rumbled growl backed with magic.

Green sparks fly, and the pup yelps, his words tumbling out so fast they’re almost slurred. “On the other side of the river, past the wards. He’s made a camp. I’ll take you there?—”

My wolf snaps his neck, the crunch of the break satisfying.

Nobody fucking hunts my mates.

Gage darts to the side, puking into the snow.

Well fuck.

I shift back to my human skin, anxious to check on him. My poor healer. His hand

trembles as he wipes his mouth and straightens. Gage wasn't made for this; he's too soft-hearted under all his sexy storm clouds.

Gage's silver eyes narrow. "Fuck you. I'm fine. It's the magic."

"What do you mean?" I ask, fear prickling my neck. My nostrils flare, and I can scent smoke in the distance.

"I'm not sure, but something is happening. We need to get to them. Fast." He shifts without waiting for my reply, racing toward the river.

The gurgling riverbank meets us, the round moon making the water shine. Across the bank, outside Gage's wards, the forest looms. In the distance, dark smoke chuffs into the night sky, the sight sending chills down my wolf's spine.

The king is so sure he'll win whatever game he's playing that he hasn't bothered to hide his camp. At least his arrogance means he'll assume his hunters were successful. Maybe we'll be able to take him by surprise. If the pack he sent after us is anything like his personal guards, we'll get lucky.

I shift back to my human skin, Gage following suit. My littermate bond tells me Dex and Nova are alive, but Dex is close to losing it. We need a plan before we go in there half-cocked.

"What is that?" I lift my chin.

Gage scans the horizon, his eyes narrowed at the strange smoke. "Magic, but I can't tell what from here. Dark though."

I groan. "That sounds ominous."

“What isn’t these days?” Gage says, voice full of bitterness. He nods toward the east. “At the ward crystal, I’ve got some stashed supplies. We cross there.” He looks back at the sky. “We’ve got maybe an hour until the haze sets in, but it’s a Blue Moon, so its pull will be stronger.”

“You just get us there. I’ll come up with a plan.”

Chapter 41

Dex

My head hits my shoulder, and I jerk awake. The mask has been removed, and large yellow flames dance in my vision. I blink, and they slowly sharpen.

I attempt to move and realize my limbs are my own again. Just as quickly, I'm yanked back to a tree post by a set of chains on my hands, ankles, and throat. The wolfsbane burns my skin, muzzling my wolf, but it can't douse my rage.

I try my hand at breaking the chains anyway, the cuffs burning brands into my wrists and neck. Panting and pissed, I stop lashing. I need a plan, not to burn through my energy.

A large fire, as big as a funeral pyre, burns in the center of a cleared circle in the woods.

Frantically, I search for Nova until my gaze lands on a large tent off to the side. It's over the top. A wolf banner proudly sways in the night air, and the curtains are drawn to reveal lush furs and tables draped with food. It's as if the Alpha King fancies himself some kind of medieval warlord.

I can't see Nova, but I know she's in there. I feel it. If they hurt another hair on her head or touch her, I don't fucking care if I'm chained in wolfsbane—I will find a way to destroy them all.

A rotten stench draws my eyes to the great roaring fire billowing smoke into the wintery night. The scent of it is off, the fire too dark despite its light. The flames seem to draw closer, leaping at me for a taste. I remember what flames feel like when they lick flesh, and I draw myself in as much as the chains allow.

I watch with a deep sense of foreboding in my bones as little purple-and-black sparks spit from the white flames. Whatever moon ritual the King and his skeleton crew are performing, I don't think it's the same as Gage's.

My littermate bond surges with relief. Briggs must be able to feel me now. I focus on the bond, but all I get is that he's alive and coming. At least, I think that's what his determination means.

It doesn't matter. Even if he is on his way, he and Gage may not make it in time. I take in the wolves just beyond the fire. They're mostly boys, but there are dozens of them, all standing around eagerly awaiting their unhinged king, and beyond them, I can scent ferals in the woods.

The Alpha King doesn't disappoint, striding from the tent with the swagger of a self-appointed god. His chest is bare, a feral wolf pelt draped over his shoulder, its fangs wrapped around his throat. He takes his place before his crowd. He hasn't bothered fixing his face, the macabre ash and blood making him look like the fucking psycho he is.

His equally sadistic healer follows from the tent, dragging Nova behind him by the chain around her neck. They've put her in a red gown, the bright color harsh against the dark night and the white snow. Like me, she's shackled, but she fights every step, her sweet voice at odds with the curses she hurls.

That's my girl, a fucking fighter till the end.

It wrecks me that I can't step in. No matter how fierce she is, this is a fight she shouldn't have to enter.

The dark healer backhands her, and I fucking lose my shit, pulling against my chains as a red haze washes over my sight.

“Get your fucking hands off my mate.” My words don't even translate. It's my wolf's snarl that cuts into the night.

The Alpha King ignores me, shouting a welcome to the crowd. The wolves holler in answer, but I'm lost to any form of coherent thought. My shackled wolf chants in my mind.

Mate. Protect. Avenge.

Chapter 42

Briggs

My plan did not account for a snapping wall of ferals. Gage kneels next to me, hiding in the underbrush as he digs in the small bag he retrieved from its hiding place near his boundary line.

I take another peek, cataloging the perimeter of the camp.

The Alpha King has chained ferals in groups of three to trees along the outside of a wide circle. Beyond his feral guard, a large group of wolves stands around a huge bonfire. They look young and unarmed. Most of them have already broken into groups, called to fuck by the rising moon. I can't see my mate or brother, but I know they're there.

It's not looking good. We're outnumbered and pretty much unarmed, wearing only the jeans Gage had stowed for emergencies at the wards.

None of that matters. My omega mate and my brother are in there, and I'm not stopping until I've got them back. My wolf is in agreement, ready to tear out the throat of every person who stands in our way.

Next to me, Gage crushes herbs with some dirt-looking mixture, forming a paste.

"Tell me you have weapons in that bag." I nod toward the small pouch, wishing I had at least a knife. Preferably, I'd have my dart gun, then we could take out the ferals

from here.

“Me, that’s what we’ve got.” Gage raises his hand, eyeing me. “This is gonna hurt. Hold still.”

Before I even register his words, Gage draws a rune on my forearm with the mixture. It’s cool to the touch but not painful. I lift my brow, ready to give him shit, but he whispers something, and then my skin is burning. It’s the fires of death ripping through me in a painful blaze. It takes everything I have to keep still and quiet while it feels as if my insides are rearranged. Fur spouts and my claws extend, digging into the snow.

Gage repeats another chant, and the tattoos on his body glow. He grabs my hand, and a burst of magic passes through me, cooling the raging flames. In the wake of the icy magic, my body feels energized.

I pant, off balance and surging with a strange burst of power. “What the fuck was that?”

“A temporary power boost.” Gage lets go of my hand and pulls another satchel of herbs from his bag. “Find me some pinecones, acorns, rocks—anything I can spell.”

“It’s fucking winter.” The landscape is grim and covered in snow.

“Then snowballs. Just anything to throw,” Gage growls.

I crouch through the underbrush, digging around in the snow and brush as fast as I can. Eventually, I’m able to gather a small pile of snowballs and a few pinecones before returning to him.

I’m barely able to contain my wolf. He wants to charge in and kill them all. I force

myself to wait but growl for Gage to pick up the pace.

“Take these.” Gage shoves a few small pinecones into my hand. “Once I subdue the ferals with my magic, we’ll use these to create a distraction. Throw them and haul ass. They explode.”

Okay. Apparently, Gage is the weapon.

A voice rings out in the clearing, and a thundering round of hoots and cheers answers.

My wolf scratches at the surface, desperate to be unleashed.

I crouch, ready to spring. “On the count of three.”

Gage pulls me back to him, his eyes glowing. “Get her safe. That’s the only thing that matters.”

I shake my head, seeing the resigned death in his eyes. He’s not wrong about the probable outlook, but I refuse to accept that we’ll lose. We’ve made it this far, and our happiness is inside that clearing.

The king doesn’t deserve Nova or deserve to live for thinking he can take what doesn’t belong to him. I refuse to fail her, to let this be where our story ends. It doesn’t matter what’s in the way because the alternative isn’t something I can live with. I let that determination settle in, backed by the power of the spell charging through me.

“Fuck that. No martyrs.” I kiss Gage hard. “Now let’s go cause trouble.”

Chapter 43

Nova

The king's man wraps his fist around the chain, tugging me closer. "Almost showtime, omega, and I can't wait to hear you beg." He licks his lips, his eyes focused on my caged neck.

My vision blurs, the dancing flames from the fire making it feel as if the world is gyrating.

In front of us, the king speaks to his subjects, droning on about fate and mates, his destiny as the king who has restored the power wolves lost. It's laughable. He knows nothing about what it takes to be a mate or to rule as an alpha should.

I don't laugh though. My head is spinning from the rising moon, and slick runs down my legs. Despite the cold, my body is flushed with heat. The cinnamon of my scent is thick, creating a cloud that seems to make the crowd of alphas inch closer with each passing minute.

Everything about this is wrong, an upside-down version of how a moon gathering is meant to be.

When I woke in the tents, the king and some guards from his inner circle were preparing some sort of ritual, but it wasn't like anything I'd ever seen. I didn't recognize the spells, though the salt circle and the crystals were familiar enough. They drained a feral and chanted around the circle while they drank its blood from a

shared cup like a bunch of psychos. Then the assholes painted that shit on my skin, covering me in runes before fighting me into this dress.

My wolf is quiet inside me, the wolfsbane forcing her to retreat. I have no way to escape. Whatever happened to our magic when the original betrayer slew my family has spread and twisted itself into a sick darkness that has led us to this Alpha King. I want to cry, hide under my blankets in my nest back at the cabin, and pretend none of this is real. But despite the fear, I feel numb. My body is peaking, going into heat, but I'm detached.

I scan the circle with half-dazed eyes, landing on Dex. My formidable mate is chained to a tree, his arms raised above his head and his neck covered in the same wolfsbane shackles as mine. He locks eyes with me, and it isn't my mate staring back but a hunter. Maybe that should ratchet up my fear. Somehow, though, the violence and madness in his eyes ground me, making it feel as if I'm looking at an avenging god.

The dark healer shoves me forward next to the Alpha King. I feel Dex's gaze on me, which gives me the courage to face the sea of nameless alphas crowding before the king.

"Watch as I take your queen," the king shouts.

He looks deranged as he talks to the crowd, the sickness apparent in the blackness of his eyes.

"It's time for you to bow for your King, troublemaker." He pushes me to my knees in the snow, yanking on my chains until I'm forced to look up. The Alpha King traces my jaw and pinches my chin. "Your body and soul belong to your pack now. As it is meant to be."

I hold his eyes, refusing to submit. He will never take me willingly. I have a pack. We belong to each other, and he can't take that from me.

His lips curl into a snarl, and he opens his mouth to speak, but the words are lost.

A resounding bang followed by a blaze of light explodes within the circle of wolves.

Another blast, this time to the far right, is accompanied by sparks of shooting green magic. The crowd shouts, mayhem and chaos erupting as another bomb explodes inside the circle of wolves.

The king lets loose a rage-filled growl. He yanks on my chains, forcing me to fall face-first into the snow as he drags me behind him. "Get her in the tent," he orders a wolf from the small group circled near the tent's entrance.

I scramble to my hands and knees, fighting against the chains with a renewed sense of purpose. My other mates have come. I just have to fight long enough for them to get to us.

The king turns on the dark healer. "You guard my back, but I want their throats. She can watch their bodies bleed out while I claim her."

Before the king and his healer disappear into the crowd, another shock wave rocks through the night. Only this time, it isn't a bomb—it's an explosion of magic. The power feels like a tsunami sending a crashing tide beating against my chest. It steals my breath and burns the skin on my back. The searing pain sends darkness creeping into my vision.

A deep grumble echoes through the clearing, shaking the ground. Dizzy and panting in pain, I twist to watch as Dex roars. My mate sprouts fur and claws, his clothes shredding as his body takes on his wolf. Only, it's not his full wolf but something in-

between. He's both a two-legged man and a beast. A monstrous and terrifying sound erupts from his throat, the power of his wolf sending out another blast of magic.

Dex snarls, fighting his captivity, and the chains buckle under the strength of his beast. His eyes glow red with vengeance, and the skin on his chest is etched with a luminous blue rune.

It's the symbol for mate. It's my rune, activated by the connection between us.

I watch in awe as my mate—my avenger—tears through the clearing as if Odin himself is among us.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:59 am

Chapter 44

Dex

“ F or what they have done to her, they will pay.”

The voice of the First Wolf echoes through my mind, his snarl becoming my own.

Yes , my wolf agrees, submitting to the power of the ancient alpha spirit as he shares my skin.

We will paint the snow red until she is safe.

Chapter 45

Briggs

I 'm pretty fucking sure my brother is feral, possibly also possessed—maybe a god? I'm having trouble wrapping my head around it. But then, it's not every day my brother turns into a full-on werewolf and breaks through wolfsbane chains.

Whatever Gage put in those tiny bombs is some crazy-ass shit because one went off, then magic just exploded. My mating rune appeared on my chest, matching the one glowing back at me on Gage. I can't even process that because my brother is mowing down everything that breathes without mercy or thought, a trail of wolves in his wake as he charges the king.

I'm not saying it's not badass, but my asshole is puckering. This is some fucked-up shit, even for me.

I keep the king's wolves at bay, fighting them off while Gage blasts through the crowd toward our mate. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Nova gain control of her chains, whipping them around like a lasso before she strikes her captor.

That's my badass omega.

My wolf howls, both in awe of my fierce mates and in frustration that these fuckers are making us fight when we should be bonding in her nest. When I get to her, I'm never letting her out of my sight again.

Green sparks shoot from Gage's fingers, and the wolves closest to Nova fall to the ground.

Honestly, my mates are seriously impressive.

Nova turns and catches sight of us, her face sagging with relief. It's a toss-up of who runs faster, but we meet in the middle as she throws herself into my arms.

"Alpha," she sobs, her nails digging into my back.

"Where are you hurt, baby?" I frantically check her over, touching everywhere I can for signs of injuries. Her lip is bleeding, and she's covered in blood runes, but she doesn't appear seriously hurt. Not physically anyway.

"It—it's not bad. Only a few bruises and weird magic. They didn't—" Her words are strangled by a whine that sets every hair on my body on edge.

"All right, love, we're here. I'm sorry it took so long, but we've got you." I pull her closer, my purr kicking in to try to soothe her.

I hate that she thinks a few hits aren't bad. Those sick fucks stole her peace, wrecked our bonding, captured her, and planned to take her by force. And they hit her? "Not bad" my ass. It makes me want to rage at the world and tear the king apart limb from limb.

But right now, she needs my comfort more than my anger. Besides, I think my littermate might have it covered. I hope he gets in a lick for me.

Nova smells wrong, and I rub my cheek into her hair, trying to smother the scent.

Gage shoots sparks, and another set of wolves falls as he sprints toward us. His gaze

nervously scans the chaos, his hand raised as he keeps a protective barrier around us. “We need to move. I won’t be able to keep this shield up for long.”

“No!” Nova pushes away from me, turning toward the melee. “We’re not leaving Dex.”

I grab her wrist, tugging her back to me. She doubles over in pain, her scent swelling. “Shit, baby, I didn’t mean to be rough?—”

“It’s the moon. She can’t keep fighting it,” Gage grits out the words. “We have to get her somewhere safe.”

Another thundering snarl rings out from the center of the clearing, and I watch, frozen, as the king shifts into a wolf and leaps for my brother’s throat.

Time seems to stop, as does the fighting. All eyes are held captive by the sizzling magic between the king and my brother.

Dex doesn’t flinch away from the king’s attack. He doesn’t move to defend himself either. Yet the Alpha King crumples at his feet, his wolf yelping in pain until his cries turn quiet and he lies in a pool of crimson.

The king’s dark healer lets loose a disturbed shout, lifting his hands to cast as he steps toward Dex. The magic shoots from his fingertips and circles back, swallowing the healer in a magic plume. The healer jerks with the force of his own blast, his eyes rolling back as he collapses.

What. The actual. Fuck?

I eye Gage, but he shakes his head. He didn’t interfere. That was Dex.

Nova gasps in pain, holding her head.

A deep, raspy sound echoes through the clearing. It's in my brain, in my head, ringing in my ears—inescapable, ancient.

My brother's mouth opens, but it isn't Dex speaking. Power seems to surge from him, his eyes glowing a freaky red. "You have forsaken your purpose, lost yourselves to the darkest urges of humanity. For this, you are marked outcast and stripped of your wolves until your beasts deem you worthy of return. The Northern Forest will be your wasteland. You are chained to its borders, trapped to a world of your own making."

The force of the alpha command ripples through the circle. Wolves around us drop to their knees in silent screams, their faces distorted with agony and terror in their gazes. Black runes appear on their cheeks, the mark foreign but repulsive to my wolf. The king and his healer remain on the ground, unmoving and lifeless before Dex.

Gage and Nova look at me, eyes wide, but I don't have answers. It's as if my littermate bond is blocked. I can see Dex, but I can't feel him.

The night air is pierced by a feral howl, a stark reminder that we're not alone in the forest. The ferals' glowing yellow eyes peek through the darkness as they creep closer. Their mouths foam, and their lips curl into snarls, broken chains dangling from their necks.

Every obstacle we overcome unleashes a new nightmare.

Gage curses. I pull Nova tighter to my chest, unsure whether to flee or fight. Gage huddles closer, sparks of magic shimmering around us as he tries to keep up his shield.

More yellow eyes appear, so many it looks like an army rising from darkness.

One lone wolf emerges from the pack, slinking over to Dex, then sitting calmly before him.

Dex bends and speaks to the feral, his voice still that same haunting echo. “Enforce Odin’s will, escort them to the border, and guard the cursed lands. When his will is done, I will welcome you home.”

The power of the command rings through the circle. Magic crescendos and bursts, the raging campfire’s flames turning a shimmering blue. The feral leader howls, and the others of his kind join him, sending an eerie chorus into the night air.

My mates and I huddle together, watching the feral wolves retreat, dragging the king’s wolves into the dark forest behind them.

Dex turns to us, the red of his eyes boring into me. He looks like the incarnation of death, and the power he wields is terrifying. I have the uncanny urge to kneel before my brother and bend my neck.

Nova springs from our hold, but I can’t move. Whatever power my brother wields holds me in place. I never thought I would have to question whether our omega was safe with Dex, but he isn’t himself right now. My insides tighten, fear traveling up my spine.

Nova doesn’t seem to have the same reservations. She walks toward Dex slowly, surely, bending her neck in submission. Inches from his monstrous form, she holds out her small hand until he kneels for her. She traces the glowing rune on his chest.

Her words are soft, barely audible in the night. “Take me home.”

Chapter 46

Nova

Dex doesn't speak. My warrior mate rips the chains from my neck, tossing them aside before he picks me up like a bride and carries me from the leftover destruction of the king and his followers.

I loop my hand around his thick neck, rubbing his wolf's fur. He isn't really his wolf, nor is he the man; he's trapped somewhere in between. I don't even bother to guess what this means or why it's happening. All of that will matter at some point, but right now, he smells like home and safety, and that's the only thing I need to know.

Behind us, I hear Briggs's confused voice. "Does that mean we follow?"

"I don't know. I'm just glad he isn't taking her here in front of his dead enemies like a true Viking. For a second, I wasn't sure," Gage grumbles. "I swear it's always the quiet ones."

"Of course you follow," I tell them between giggles.

I don't know why I find their conversation so funny, but I keep picturing their faces when Dex looked our way, and I can't stop laughing. It's a deranged sound, hysterical and half-full of the giddiness of my rising heat. It shakes loose some of the tension in my muscles. I snuggle against Dex's furry chest, content not to think about anything that just happened.

I let my eyes track the beams of moonlight spilling from between the trees, getting lost in the shadows and light. My mind is fuzzy, the heat rising under my skin. The feral wolves sound in the distance as we move through the forest, but I'm not afraid. Instinctively, I know that another feral will never hunt me.

My alpha mates fall in behind Dex, the two of them shit-talking the whole time. Their banter is comforting, and the scent of my pack makes my racing heart settle even as my blood heats.

When we reach the river, Dex wades through the icy water, lifting me so I don't get wet before settling me back against his chest once he hits the other bank. The longer he jogs through the forest toward home, the more the heat seems to take over my thoughts.

By the time we're in the courtyard, the moon's haze has made me slick. I run my hands through the fur on Dex's chest and squirm in his arms, desperate.

Dex growls a sexy sound that zips straight through my core. It's a wordless command I don't understand, but it seems to get my other two alpha mates moving.

Something warm and tingling settles around me, and I recognize Gage's magical touch. Green sparks swirl around me as Gage's hands soothe my neck, taking away the last of the wolfsbane. The other aches and pains just below the surface of my raging heat abate as a rush of magic floods my system, sweeping away the last of this strange night.

"Rest, little star, and let the magic work," Gage murmurs.

Before I can comply, a wave of cramps makes me whine. My core clenches, empty and desperate.

Dex moves, but I close my eyes, unable to focus.

Hot water jolts me back to the present, and I roll my head around, trying to take in my surroundings. It's a shower in the cabin but not ours. It's Gage's old room from when he was hiding out.

Good. I don't want to go back to our room. The thought of those wolves in my nest makes another whine creep up my throat, but Dex's steady palm soothes my back.

"It's all right, sweet girl. Let me get you cleaned off, and then I promise there will be no more waiting."

The clarity of Dex's voice draws my eyes to him, and I realize my mate has returned to me. He still looks a little more wolf than man, his eyes wild, but the red has receded, and his voice has lost that strange rattling power.

He gingerly sets me in his brother's waiting arms, his deep purr rumbling around us. I brace myself against Briggs's chest, plastering my cheek to his glowing mate mark while Dex gently washes me.

"You're all right, pretty wolf. We've got you. You're safe and ours," Briggs murmurs, his big palm rubbing my soaked hair.

I refuse to open my eyes, refuse to see the sickness washing down the drain. The king's darkness has no business here with my mates and me.

Dex's slow, soothing motions and his rumble purr combine with the warm sound of Briggs's quiet reassurances. Together, they send my body into a trance of good vibes and heated skin. My nipples pebble, and I focus on the ache in my core, rubbing my legs together to get friction where I want it.

My hunter's big hand brushes between my legs, lathering me. The soap mixes with my pooling slick as he rubs me clean. It's so good I push my ass against Dex, mouthing along Briggs's chest and sucking along my mark.

Briggs groans. "You're wrecking my control, baby."

His brother growls. "Fuck, little wolf. I know what you need, but just a little longer." Dex's words are at odds with his hand, the pads of his fingers kneading my clit.

"Please, alphas," I beg.

Dex shuts off the water and picks me up in one hurried movement.

Briggs hops around us, gathering towels while Dex sets me down, kneeling in front of me. The towel is scratchy against my skin, the roughness making my nipples ache. I bite my lip, looking at my sexy hunter on his knees, trying to fight off the urge to bend over the counter and offer myself for the taking.

A warm chuckle brushes against my neck. "You gotta hold on because once we get started, we're not leaving wherever we end up until you've been knotted and claimed."

Briggs's words are the final straw. I turn, pouncing on him and stealing his lips while I wrap myself around him like a vine. His arms anchor themselves across my back, and he picks me up, never backing away from the kiss as we stumble out of the bathroom. He bangs into a wall, but I don't care.

Dex growls something, then we're wrapped in a blanket. Briggs pulls back from the kiss with a curse, but I'm undeterred. I suck along his neck and rub against him, rocking my wet center along his stomach.

Freezing air whips across my heated skin, and the contrast makes my nipples burn. I'm on fire, heat raging up my spine. The world shimmers and shines, my body feeling like liquid gold. I lick Briggs's skin, tasting his rich, salty flavor.

The temperature changes again, and it's like stepping into a blooming garden of sunshine. I peek up just enough to see we're in Gage's greenhouse. The lights are off, but the room glows with Gage's magic. Soft white orbs hover in the air, sending little starbursts of shimmering light to dance among the lush flowers of his fragrant garden. It's like stumbling into a secret fairy world.

Briggs stops at the back of the large greenhouse where Gage is waiting. Gage runs a nervous hand through wet hair, his lean chest glowing with a patchwork of runes. My favorite is the new one glowing over his heart.

"It's—"

"It's perfect," I promise him, giving him a starry-eyed grin.

Gage has transformed his makeshift office into a nest. No, not just a nest— my nest.

He's carried my blankets and bedding here and rearranged them to look exactly as they did before, adding sage and lavender sprinkled all along the outside of the nest.

My throat gets tight at the same time another wave of cramps hits. I love these fucking men so damn much. I would tell them, but my omega is insistent on showing them.

I scramble from Briggs's hold and crawl to the center of my fairy-tale nest. I sit on my heels and lick my lips. "Come here and claim me already."

Chapter 47

Gage

The two brothers don't hesitate to join Nova, tossing their blankets, crawling into the nest, and each taking a side. I watch for a moment as they take turns kissing her, trading her mouth between them. Their big paws tease her nipples, swallowing her small tits as they cup and tug. Nova's knees spread, exposing the glistening slick on her thighs and a hint of her pink pussy. Her hips thrust, and Dex's scarred palm travels over her heaving belly to skirt his thick fingers through her wet lips.

I palm my dick, slicking the shaft with a drop of precum. The burn of my rough palm aches more than soothes, but I like the rawness. Forcing myself to focus, I reluctantly pull my hand away and set the final crystal in the protection circle, whispering the words that will bind the space.

All the rules seem broken tonight, but I figure I'd better not risk it.

Spell finished, I join my mates in her nest, settling on my knees between Nova's legs. I nudge my fingers next to Dex's, teasing her clit while he stretches her with three fingers.

Nova breaks away from Briggs's mouth, her glowing silver eyes locking with mine. "Knot," she begs, gasping as Briggs torments her taut nipple between his teeth.

"Come for us first, little star." I pinch her clit, and Dex finger-fucks her until she's creaming all over our hands.

My wolf nudges the surface, eager to sink his teeth into her neck and lock her on his knot.

I nod to Dex. “Grab the jar behind the nest, along the wall.”

He lifts a brow but reaches one long arm behind him as Nova slinks into my lap. She wraps her arms around my neck, and I snake an arm around her middle, tugging her closer. She drapes herself over me, grinding her wet pussy against my hard dick.

I collar her throat with my hand, cupping her jaw and holding her in place. The magic healed her newest marks, leaving only her first scars from the king visible, but it doesn't stop me from wanting to write over the pain, replacing it with my claim.

Nova looks up at me with big, glazed eyes.

“We're going to get you ready to take all of us, get you sloppy and slick until we claim you. Is that what you want, little star? To be taken by your pack?”

Nova moans in answer, rubbing herself against me as she begs me with her eyes.

“Tell me,” I command, keeping her from squirming by locking her arms behind her back.

Dex and Briggs shuffle around. Dex slips in behind Nova, and Briggs's hot, bare chest slides against my back.

Dex cups her tits and speaks in her ear. “Tell him how you want to be at the center of the three of us, how you want to be taken by your pack, claimed, and bred.”

Nova moans, her jaw trembling in my hand. “I want it,” she whispers, eyes skirting away.

Briggs traces her lip with his thumb. “That’s our needy girl. So fucking perfect.”

I watch with hungry eyes as Dex’s hand travels around her middle and down her back. I know the moment he teases her little ass because she grinds against my dick, gushing slick as her pussy flutters along my shaft.

“She likes that,” I purr, mesmerized by the look on her face.

Dex keeps teasing her while I hold her steady with my grip on her hands and throat. I use my magic to tease her nipples with little jolts until she whines and pushes back against his hand. Briggs’s hard body presses against mine as he finds space between us, gripping my cock and notching it at her entrance.

“Give her what she needs,” he growls in my ear. “Now.”

I let go of her arms, wrapping one of mine around her ribs and keeping her steady with my firm grip on her throat. My hips lift, and I claim her with a deep thrust. Nova braces her small hands on my chest as I retreat and surge back into her warm heat.

“So good, little star,” I moan, grinding into her until my knot is teasing at her edges.

The brothers are moving again, but I’m fucking lost in the mess she’s making of my cock, her slick spilling onto my knot and her wet glide so tight it’s fucking nirvana. My teeth graze her neck, my knot tugging against her opening on each rocking thrust.

I can’t hold back, can’t think. Nova’s glazed expression finds mine. My forehead falls to hers as I slowly drag out and push back in, my knot lodging a little farther each time. A hand skirts between us, grinding against her clit, but I can only see her.

She’s fucking iridescent, glistening and soft, lit up from within. The mating runes glow, circling us in a blue aurora I never thought I’d see in my lifetime. She’s

extraordinary, and she's mine.

"I would do it all again to get to you," I whisper before kissing her forehead as I wedge my knot inside on the upstroke.

The heavy base of my cock expands, and her tight heat squeezes me with such fucking pressure that I can't hold back. Nova moans my name as thick ropes of cum fill her, claiming her as mine.

My wolf takes over, finding her neck. I lick her skin and taste her sweetness before I sink my teeth in deep. Nova gushes, her pussy squeezing and a moan spilling from her lips as the bond locks into place. My little starry wolf dances with my alpha, our souls locking together and binding our magic.

The profound comfort rearranges my world and fills me with a lightness I haven't felt in so long. I nurse my bite, rolling my hips as she rocks on my knot.

"My beautiful bright star. Love you so much," I coo, nearly slurring my words.

"So much," Nova moans, rocking on my lap, her sweet purr motoring.

Briggs sucks along the other side of her neck, his palms cupping her tits.

"More, alphas. More," she whines.

"Lay her down for me. Let her settle on your knot," Briggs urges.

Without much coordination, I try to rearrange us. It's mainly Dex, shoving pillows under my head and helping Nova get settled on my chest. She makes that difficult, groping for Dex as Briggs gets in place.

“Easy, sweetheart. Let us help you. I promise we will always give you what you need,” the big alpha says softly.

I lie against the pillows, eyes closed and blissed out. I run my hands along her back, tracing her mating runes in an endless loop and riding the aftershocks of my knot. My cock is still hard, and every once in a while, Nova squeezes around me, causing me to shoot off another round of cum.

When she’s making garbled moans and squeezing me tightly, I open my eyes and take in the scene. Briggs is kneeling over her, his fingers buried in her ass while she sucks Dex’s fat cock.

I don’t even know where to look; everything kind of shimmers in the heat, and my body boils with the urge to thrust. Together we get lost in the rhythm until Briggs is pushing inside her, sliding up next to me and making her so fucking tight that my body tenses. I’m locked inside her, which means he controls the pace.

He goes slow, and Nova whines, moaning for more and pushing back against his unhurried pace. Her nails dig into my chest as she drools around Dex’s cock, letting him slip into her throat.

It’s too fucking much. She squeezes around me, coming as Briggs pulls out and thrusts back in. I come again, my knot strangled by the intense pressure.

Holy shit. I’ve felt a rut led by the moon, but an omega’s heat is fucking wild.

My knot deflates, but my dick remains hard and ready to go again.

Dex’s low grumble rumbles through the room. “I let the healer get you ready for me, but it’s my turn, baby girl.”

Chapter 48

Nova

B riggs pulls out, then Gage follows in a trail of gushing slick. My core aches.

I said more. Why aren't they giving it to me?

Before I can whine, I'm gently moved, pillows pushed behind my back. Dex splays his big hands on my thighs and folds himself between my legs. He spreads me open with a firm press to each thigh, his thumbs pulling me apart.

"You're a fucking mess, sweetheart, dripping cum and puffy pink with your little ass winking at me. I can't decide which of these pretty little holes to fill." His eyes glow as he looks between my legs.

Dex stuffs two fingers in my ass and growls, leaning in to suck my clit. My pussy squeezes at the naughty thought that he's licking up his packmate's cum. He isn't bothered, sucking on my clit and pushing Gage's leaking cum into my ass.

Briggs leans over me, clasping my throat and holding me in place while he takes my mouth in a demanding kiss. I moan as I part my lips for him, letting his tongue twist and tease mine.

Dex dives lower, driving his tongue between the lips of my pussy, sliding and flicking as he laps up my slick. He slowly slides his thick fingers in and out of my ass until I'm sucking on Briggs's tongue and rolling my hips for more. Briggs adds his

fingers, filling my pussy while Dex stretches my ass and sucks my clit. I come on their fingers and mouths in a rush of pleasure.

Briggs pulls away from my mouth on a hungry rumble. “You ready to be trapped between us, claimed by us both?” He caresses my cheek with the backs of his fingers.

“Knot. Bite,” I demand, the words barely getting out. My core twists, clenching my insides. I need them to stop teasing me.

Dex slowly slides his fingers out. Briggs picks me up and rests against the pillows, settling with my back to his chest. He curls himself around me, his thick cock nudging at my stretched back hole. He shifts his hips and pulls me down, easing his way inside in one deep thrust.

It’s the most foreign sensation, dark and forbidden but so fucking good. Briggs drags his thick cock in and out while his brother plays with my clit.

My head lolls on Briggs’s shoulder, my heat-hazy eyes landing on Gage, who lounges on a mound of pillows near the edge of the nest. His cock is hard, his hand idly stroking the shaft.

I can feel his blissed-out pleasure in the bond and his growing desire as he says, “You look sexy as fuck splayed out between them.”

Dex pulls my attention back to him, pushing on my knees and shuffling between us until he’s hovering and we’re tangled together in a way that allows him to notch his cock between my soaking lips. “I’m gonna fill you with my cum, sweet girl. Fuck you over and over until you’re so full that my cum is gushing out of you and you’re marked mine.”

A string of need tumbles from my mouth, asking them to give it to me, please, to fill

me until I'm dripping in them. I want to be messy, with no doubt who I belong to.

"You like how much cum we have for you, baby? You want us to rut that sweet pussy of yours until you're big and round with our babies?" Briggs sucks along my neck, holding still as his brother pushes inside.

I whimper, both needing and trying to escape the burning stretch. Dex is already fucking huge, so big that every time I take him, it feels like an accomplishment. This time, with the fullness and pressure of Briggs in my ass, it's too much. I pant at the tugging sensation, moaning a half-hearted no.

"Easy, baby girl. You can take a little more." Dex's eyes track down to where he's buried between my legs, watching with a primal hunger as he stretches me around his fat cock. "Show me how you take it for me, how this pussy is mine."

Dex rolls his hips, feeding me another inch. He burns away anything but the feel of the two of them. They're everywhere, sinking into all the space in my mind.

It's so full. It's so much.

My mind floats, the painful stretch becoming a glorious ache nesting deep inside. Dex blankets me with his body, the ridge of his cockhead pulling out before he plunges back in.

"That's it, beautiful. You're taking both of us so well. You feel so snug around me, so fucking right," Briggs grits, his words jagged and deeper than usual. He picks up a tandem rhythm, the brothers stuffing me between them.

Each drag of their cocks sweeps me closer and closer to the edge of an epic orgasm. My perfume swells, my eyes rolling back. A tingling spark flutters along my skin, and Gage's warm hands caress my nipples. Each shock of his magic is timed with

their thrusts. Gage sweeps his tongue against my lips, swallowing my moans as he sucks on my tongue.

It's too much. It's fucking amazing.

"Come for your alphas, sweet girl," Dex growls, the alpha command in his bark a delicious tendril that zips along my spine.

My body clenches, and two sets of teeth sink into my neck. My wolves' tongues slide and flick along their bond marks as the magic grabs hold.

Dex's and Briggs's bonds are an interesting weave of singular threads and woven strands. They wrap around Gage's until my pack is nestled in my chest and soul. Having them with me in the bond is everything—love and family, heat and desire, hope for the future. All the emotions are there. The pleasurable wave of my climax rushes over the feelings of sweet devotion, pulling us into the moon's orbit.

My mates blanket me with their bodies and their claims, covering me over and over with cum. We answer the calls of our wolves until we collapse in a pile, our racing hearts beating as a pack.

Chapter 49

Briggs

Nova moans, throwing her head back as she rides Gage's face. From my position behind her, I can see her mate runes down her back, her skin glowing in the soft light.

Gage wraps his arms around her thighs, pulling her closer as he growls into her flesh. He's on a mission, and it may have to do with the fact that he can't come until she comes another two times. The challenge was eight—he's given her six.

Bonus points for using nothing but his mouth.

She wiggles atop him, trying to escape, but he holds her steady until she's panting through another orgasm.

Make that seven.

I slowly drag my hand up and down his length, spending time on each pass brushing my thumb along the head and teasing the crown. Gage jerks in my grip, his hips thrusting in a silent plea for more. I back away, straddling his chest and curling myself along Nova's back. I suck along my mark on her neck, loving the way it sends a burst of pleasure through her that I can feel in the bond.

Her chest is heaving, her eyes closed and her expression dreamy. She's lost to her heat, trusting us completely to care for her when she is most needy. It's heady to see her let go, to feel the strength of her faith in us to give her what she needs.

It's also hot as fuck on repeat.

I'm hard and aching, even days into this heat, but this isn't about my pleasure. It's about hers. That doesn't mean I can't enjoy the show though.

As I trail kisses up her neck, I murmur, "Can you give him another for me, baby?"

She slurs her answer, her voice honey and sex. "Alpha, please."

"Last one," Dex growls, shooting me a look of reprimand.

Nova is trailing into the end of her heat—at least we think she is—and Dex is itching to take care of her. My alpha thinks she needs this push to send her through the last wave, probably another knot.

Nova bites her lip, a little humming sound spilling from her mouth as I roll her nipples between my fingertips. It doesn't take long with me nursing my bond mark to send her close to the edge.

Fun fact: Nova likes dirty talk about as much as she loves to ride a knot. And praising her? It makes her bond bubble with arousal and her pussy weep.

Second fun fact: I fucking love telling her how perfect she is.

"You look so sexy riding his face," I say into her skin, my words raspy and thick. "You're dripping, gushing slick like a perfect omega, showing him how much you love when your alpha licks your pretty pussy."

Nova's mouth drops open in a moan, her eyes falling on Gage. She tugs a hand through his hair, looking at where he's buried between her legs.

“I want to watch you come for us. Let me see my pretty wolf.” I nip her ear.

My omega collapses against me, rocking her hips through the tremors of her orgasm.

Dex doesn't even wait for her to stop trembling before pulling her into his lap and trying to get her to drink from a water jug. Nova is determined, as I figured she would be, and she takes what she wants. My brother never stood a chance against her.

I shift so that I'm hovering over Gage and suck along the hollow of his throat, licking my way to his mouth. I tease his tongue, and at the same time, I skirt my way along his chest, petting the area right below his belly button in slow strokes.

Gage nips my lip. “Stop being a dick and make me come. Fair is fair.”

I break away from his mouth to roll to the side, sitting up as though I'm debating the merit of his words. “I don't know. I'd definitely say that last one was at least an assist from me, if not my win.”

My healer uses his powers for evil, zapping my balls with a magical pulse that makes my dick jump. At the same time, he lunges, pinning me to the nest. His hair hangs in my face, his silver eyes glowing.

“Tell me again, because you seem confused, who exactly was suckling our little omega's clit?” He sits on my chest, his hard dick practically in my face. With a wicked grin, he wraps a fist around his cock, scooting closer. “That would be me. To the tune of eight. So, if you please, suck. My. Dick.”

“I've got a better idea.” The grin that takes over my face doesn't stop the hunter in me from flipping his cocky ass and pinning his arms above his head with one of my hands. I grope for the jar of lube, coating my fingers before slicking both our cocks. “You gonna take me, Gage? Let me give you my bite?”

I notch my cockhead underneath the crown of his dick, using my fist to pump us both together. The slip and slide of our dicks makes my knot ache with the need to come.

“Fuck,” Gage shouts, jerking into my hold.

“That wasn’t a yes.” Our dicks slide through my tight grip. It feels so good I snap my hips.

Gage practically snarls, his look murderous. “My dick has been shouting an enthusiastic yes since you started teasing me. Do you need a written invitation?”

I nod in approval. “That would be nice. Maybe a new mug. Something more suited to?—”

Gage jerks forward in a burst of power—damn magic—and pushes me back until he’s in my lap, taking my lips in a kiss that’s at least fifty percent smile. “Shut up and fuck me already.”

Beside me, Nova’s moans as she rides Dex, begging for a knot. Her scent is rising again, making the haze of rut creep back into my vision. I see it reflected in Gage’s eyes, his alpha near the surface.

I tap Gage’s hip. “On your side. Let me prep you before my wolf demands we make it rough.”

Gage grinds his ass down on me. “I want to feel it.”

“You will. Now move.”

He rolls his eyes at me but lies on his side, letting me slide behind him. Someday, I’m gonna take my time and explore all of him, but right now, the deep need to fuck wins.

I tease his hole until he's slick and soft, scissoring him open first on one, then two, then three fingers.

When he's begging, I line up my cock and take him in one thrust. The haze grips both of us, Gage pushing back against me as I pump my hips. I find that spot that makes him take shuddering breaths, his hand fisting around his cock.

He looks at me over his shoulder, mouthing, "Mate."

That nearly makes me go off. Already, my knot is heavy, and my orgasm is close. I grind into his ass, hold his solid chest to me, and bury my nose in his neck. He smells like his greenhouse —life, nature, and healing. He also smells like Nova came all over his face.

Best fucking scent in the world.

I thrust deep and wrap my hand around Gage's fist, helping add pressure on the upstroke. My fangs extend and sink into the soft flesh of his neck.

My alpha runs circles around his until he chases me back, bonding with mine and filling my chest with our connection. Gage's presence joins Dex's and my link, and the pack alphas are now connected. It's a settled feeling, the three of us protecting her bond together. I can also feel everything Gage doesn't say in the mate bond. He's glad I came for him, that I keep coming for him, that he loves me. I send back that love, offering myself in a way only a bond allows.

I nurse my bite, surprised to see the dazed look on my healer's face. "I fucked your brains out, didn't I?"

Gage makes this sound of satisfaction, which I take as agreement. I lick the healing bond mark again and kiss his cheek. Snuggling into his side as I slip out, I purr for

him.

In the background, I hear Nova battling with Dex, but I can't make out the words. A few moments later, our heat-delirious omega flings herself into our cuddle.

"More love," she sings, letting loose a giggle.

In our bond, I can feel her satisfaction at having her pack all together as one.

"More hydration. A shower. Food," Dex grumbles.

A chuckle slips out. It's amusing as hell to watch my brother daddy her. He gets so worked up, and she just pushes right back in her sweet way.

Nova's eyes water, and she gives me this sappy grin that makes my eyes sting. "I love you guys. No matter what happens, no matter where we are... you're my home." She leans over, kissing Gage, then me, in a slow brush of lips. She pulls away from me with a sigh. "But what I really need is a nap." She burrows between us, shoving her face in my armpit.

"So many naps," Gage adds.

She's out a moment later, Gage following close behind.

My brother wraps a clean blanket around us, his eyes soft as he takes her in. "I'm never gonna get over the fact that someone as beautiful as her is here with me."

She is extra fucking cute with her hair a wild nest sticking out, her body flush with heat and her lips plump and red.

"I mean, you are a god now... so?—"

“Fuck off.” Dex shoves my shoulder. “I’m going to check on the property and get her something to eat.”

He makes his way out of the nest while I stare at my two mates, awestruck that we made it. I was mostly full of bullshit, but it seems my overconfidence might have worked.

“We deserve a home, brother,” I call after him.

He turns, giving me a nod and a rare grin. “And we’ll fight to keep it.”

“Damn straight.”

Chapter 50

Nova

“O h my gods, quit it.” I squirm away from Gage, yanking my legs together and pulling my towel tighter around me.

Dex crosses his arms over his thick chest. “Baby girl.”

I let out an exaggerated sigh, rolling my eyes. “I swear I’m good. I feel great.” It’s mostly true, but it’s also kind of annoying that my mates can feel the part left out of “mostly.”

Dex growls. “Bend over, little wolf, and let him tend to you.”

A thrill races through me at his command, even though they’re being ridiculous. My body is sore, but it doesn’t stop me from reacting to the deep sound of his voice.

In the mirror, Dex lifts a brow in challenge.

Briggs steps out of the shower, grabs a nearby towel, and rubs himself down. “Better listen, baby, unless your goal is a spanking.”

I lick my lips and place my hands on the bathroom counter, arching my back.

“That might be the goal.” Gage smirks, shaking his head in the mirror as he lifts the edge of my towel. He sets a jar on the counter and dips his fingers into the healing

salve. As he rubs the cooling gel between my legs, he crowds against my back, his breath on my neck. “Look at how pretty your neck is wrapped in our claims.”

Following his command, I take my eyes off my mates and study my reflection. I like the puffy red marks. They don’t cover my scars, but they’ve changed them, making my body feel more like mine. I recognize myself—how I feel seen and strong yet protected—even if this reflection is new to me.

My mates send back pride and love in the bonds as I let Gage finish rubbing in his healing gel. He plants a kiss on Briggs’s bond mark and pulls back to wash his hands. I turn to face Dex, bracing myself against the counter.

Despite the peacefulness of my pack bonds and the low, thrumming arousal in my core, my mood plummets as I take in Gage’s old bathroom. After waking from my heat, I’ve been a yo-yo of emotions.

I don’t know if it’s a hormone drop or what, but it’s dizzying the way I keep swinging from gloriously happy to anxious. My mates have all been sweethearts, hovering over me, but reality has come crashing down like a pounding wave. Combined with how tired and hungry I am—even after Dex insisted on feeding me in the nest before we showered—I sort of want to cry. Which is ridiculous because I just had the best three nights of my life.

If I don’t count the fact that it started with a kidnapping and a dark magic ritual...

“What do we do now?” I whisper, voicing my fear. I don’t know if I can stay here, not after what happened.

“I say we find a new place.” Gage shuts off the sink and tugs me against his chest, wrapping a hand around my hip. “See if we can get some peace and quiet. Don’t we deserve that?”

“Do you think it’s safe to leave? It’s really over?” I ask.

Briggs wraps his towel around his waist and steps beside his brother, nudging his side. “I don’t know. I think possessed Dex might make a good deterrent.”

“What do you think happened?” I ask, eyeing my big alpha. He’s my Dex. There’s no trace of whatever came over him on the night of the full moon. It’s almost like a fever dream, fuzzy around the edges, but I remember that night—how protected I felt, how in awe of his loyalty.

“You mean when he became king and somehow channeled Odin? I pissed myself. That’s what happened,” Briggs jokes.

All our eyes are on my silent wolf.

Dex huffs, looking away from our stares. “I didn’t channel Odin. I don’t know how to explain.”

I pull away from Gage, cross the bathroom, and trace Dex’s mating rune. Every time I touch it, it sends a burst of calm through me. “Can you try? I want to understand.”

“You get dressed. I’ll talk.” He scowls.

It pulls a smile onto my lips. This man is always worried about me being cold. Briggs tosses his brother a pile of clothes, and my alpha signals with a nod for me to lift my arms.

Dex pulls a thick sweater over my head, his deep voice rumbling as he dresses me. “After they took you, I swore to Odin I would avenge you. When they brought you out and that sick wolf had his hands on you, I saw red. It was like this surge of power. I think Odin answered my plea to come to our aid and sent the spirit of the First

Wolf.” His voice is filled with hesitance, and his bond surges with uncertainty. Even now, he thinks we fear him.

Dex held the power of our most ancient shifter, the First Wolf of Odin’s decree, the original protector of our people. I’m in awe of his strength.

“What did it feel like?” his brother asks. “Your bond was muted. I could see you, but inside, you were gone.”

Dex busies himself by helping me into my thermal leggings, his scent full of embarrassment. He hates being the center of attention. “Like wrestling lightning. I knew the world would burn if I let the spirit loose.”

Gage yanks on a pair of jeans before coming closer to examine Dex. “I’m not sure the power truly left. Your alpha feels stronger, and your magical signature is different. Not just from the bond.”

“Do you think whatever happened fixed the magic? Is that why the mating runes appeared?” I ask.

Gage’s brows furrow in concentration. “I’m not sure, but the magic feels different. Our bond is strong, grounded, and connected like it’s supposed to be.”

“Exactly. We kicked ass just like I knew we would,” Briggs adds. “Because Dex is a god-beast.”

Dex sighs, the sound deep and full of resignation. “I can feel the earth, sense other wolves around us. They’re like little dots in my mind now.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s because you’re the Alpha King, big guy.” Briggs claps his brother’s shoulder.

“No,” Dex growls, fists clenched at his sides. “I killed a menace. He was never the true Alpha King. It was no challenge.”

“But—” I try to cut in at the same time Gage speaks, his voice sure and steady. “He’s not the king. His magical signature is different, but he’s not Alpha.”

Briggs and I gape at Gage.

“My best guess, if I put it into words... is that the First Wolf granted him the powers of a true enforcer, not the Alpha of all.” Gage shrugs as if it’s obvious.

Dex holds out his hand, and I take it, letting him pull me into his embrace. “I’m your alpha. Protecting this pack is my duty.” He looks around, meeting the eyes of each of our packmates, his gaze landing on me last and staying there. “My instincts are telling me we shouldn’t stay here. We need to keep heading southeast, not rebuild. I believe the curse on the wolves will keep us safe, and the ferals are occupied with carrying it out, but this isn’t where we belong.”

Briggs makes a questioning noise. “You mean you think we need to go to the dragon?”

Dex nods.

I’ve heard rumors about the dragoness but never been to her territory. I’ve never actually left wolf land. “Will she welcome us?”

Gage speaks up. “I don’t know, but I agree with Dex. Her territory is our best shot. They have a powerful human witch there and strong wards powered by the dragon’s ancient magic.”

I swallow around the lump in my throat. “Are you sure?”

Briggs hugs me from behind. “This feels like a good thing. My wolf isn’t worried. I promise.”

My pack surrounds me, all of them hugging me until I feel more grounded.

“We rest and pack up. But as soon as we can, we should get moving,” Dex commands. It’s the final word from our pack alpha.

Even though I’m nervous, I trust him to lead us. I sigh and pull away from their embrace. I guess our time here is over.

Chapter 51

Nova

The low, rhythmic beating of the dragon's wings steals my breath. She's huge, sparkling in blinding color as she descends from the clear winter sky. She comes to a screeching halt in the courtyard. Her form is so big that she brushes against the barn and the cabin before she shrinks down to my height.

In human form, it's also clear she's pregnant. Her stomach is rounded, her body literally glowing. Next to her, a presence emerges, a whirlwind of mist shrouding her in a cyclone of darkness.

I shrink into Dex's side, unsure what the heck is happening.

Dex grunts. "I think that's the arrival of the king. I can feel his power."

"He's the Alpha King? He isn't even an alpha," Briggs mumbles quietly, the confusion I feel evident in his voice.

Gage steps off the cabin's front porch, turning to look at me over his shoulder. "It's all right. She brought her pack—or horde, as dragons call them. Vandera said she was mated to a serpent."

Yesterday, after spending two full days basically catatonic and recovering in the greenhouse nest, we decided that we needed more of a plan than just heading southeast. Given what happened in the forest, none of my alphas were willing to take

the risk of a blind trek through the wilderness, and I don't blame them.

Gage was able to contact the human witch who works with the dragon. The woman, Vandera, helped Gage years ago, right before the brothers first came here. Apparently, her magic helped power the spells to initially build his wards. Vandera's mates also know Briggs and Dex from some connection to the former Council. They've offered our pack refuge in the dragoness's territory, and my mates are confident it's a safe plan.

But for some reason, I'm super nervous and feeling out of sorts. I don't know if it's because I feel young around all these people with a shared history or because I still don't really feel comfortable in my human skin around anyone except my mates. Whatever it is, it's sent a wave of angry screeching bats dive-bombing into my belly.

The serpent's shadows seem to retreat into his skin, lightly hovering around him. From behind his veil of mist, a large group of people emerges. An alpha bends over, sucking in deep lungfuls of air.

The vibrant-haired dragon tugs on a fluffy robe before patting the sick wolf's back in sympathy. The wolf is big and commanding, distinguished with some silver threaded through his hair and beard. The sight of this pregnant omega consoling the powerful man makes a giggle bubble up my throat.

"Sorry." The serpent winces. "I tried for a smooth walk, but there were a lot of folks to hang on to."

A woman, whom I assume is Vandera, steps from a group of alphas, moving toward Gage with her arms open. "Would you look at you?" To my surprise, she completely bypasses my healer and stands in front of Dex, whom I'm tucked behind. "Hello, enforcer. I won't harm her. I only want to give her my blessings."

I peek around Dex's back to see a warm smile and soft brown eyes. The human witch is naturally pretty with smooth brown skin and flowing hair. She's covered in colorful fabrics, and even though she's probably only a decade or two older than me, she has an old, kind soul that reminds me of my grandmother.

That gives me courage. I squeeze Dex's hip and take a step forward to meet her. "I'm Nova, and you're Vandera. Thank you for agreeing to?"

"None of that." She cuts me off with a hug. "We're going to be great friends. I've seen it. And your garden will be beautiful. I know just the spot."

"My garden?" I ask.

She hums in agreement and steps back from our hug, looking me over. "Do you mind?"

"Mind what?"

"Your runes. I know we just met, but you're the first to gain them outside our circle."

My head is spinning with questions, but nothing pops out.

"May I?" She lifts her brow.

Right, she asked me a question. "Yeah, okay."

Around us, Gage and Briggs greet the alphas who have joined our circle. The older wolf holds out a hand. "I'm Fennik, the Alpha of Moon Lake Valley."

"You're the Alpha King." Dex bends his neck, and my other mates follow suit.

The wolf grins. “Semantics. The power found me but I share it with my mate as we rule her territory. But it does look Magic has decided like you’re my new enforcer.”

My mate and the Alpha King shake hands, then Dex introduces Briggs.

The dragoness joins us, pulling my eyes away from the alphas. She wraps a hand around Vandera’s waist. “Don’t let her bully you. We can talk magic later.” The dragon smiles at me, transforming her intimidating beauty into something warm and approachable. “I’m Randi, and I could really use a bathroom if you have one.”

“Of course.” I flush, trying to find my manners. I mean, how do I even talk to people? This is such a weird situation. I haven’t seen another omega in so long, and I kind of want to just stare at her.

Dex’s eyes follow me as I head into the house, but I shake him off. I can do this. I want to do this. The two women trail behind me, keeping a quiet conversation, but I can’t figure out how to join.

I nod toward the hallway, pointing. “Just in there, first door on the left.”

“Thanks,” the magenta-haired dragon says, dashing around me. “Pregnancy bladder.”

Vandera heads straight for the bookcases, eyeing the contents. “Gage told me the spirit of the First Wolf came to your aid. I wasn’t sure what he meant, but I can sense the essence of the magic.” She turns to look at me over her shoulder, a smile on her lips. “We also cast a moon circle that night and the mating runes returned to the wolves in our valley, restoring the power of the Alpha King in our lands. Our combined efforts have begun to repair the magic. You are proof of that, as am I.” She lifts her shawl, then her sweater, revealing two intertwined mating runes running down her back.

A warm laugh startles me, and I turn to see Randi heading our way. “Vandera, what did I tell you? Let the woman breathe.”

The witch shrugs, letting her sweater fall back into place. “I was just trying to explain. I didn’t even ask to see her runes this time.”

Randi rolls her eyes. “Vandi doesn’t understand no. Feel free to tell her off.”

Vandera scrunches her nose, teasing her friend. “She’s just salty because I’m always right.”

“It helps when you see the future but don’t share what you know,” Randi grumbles.

Their banter reminds me of my mates, which puts me at ease. They’re funny and not too serious for a powerful witch and a dragon queen.

Randi stops before me, her hand on her belly and her eyes searching mine. “I know what it’s like being the last of your kind, so I’m just gonna say it—from one omega to another, I promise you my territory is safe. There are other women there too, humans and serpents. Wolves with human mates like Vandera and families with children. Gage told us about what happened. We can talk more about it after you settle in, but I want you to know that in Moon Lake Valley, you won’t have to hide.”

I totally lose it then, my eyes watering. “Okay,” I choke out.

I don’t think I really believed what people were saying could be true, but looking at the two women in this cabin, I’m filled with hope.

“Oh, hon, I didn’t mean to make you cry.” The dragon pulls me in for a hug, unleashing the waterworks in us both.

“You’ve done it now.” Vandera laughs, and at the same time, Randi sobs. A moment later, the witch has us all tangled in a group hug. “See? We’re already friends.”

“It’s the hormones,” Randi hiccups.

“Wait for it,” Vandera warns on an amused huff.

The cabin door bursts open, and the alphas tumble in with a rumble of growls, looking for a threat. Vandera must have known they would come when our distress signaled in the bonds. It’s not a crotch sniff, but it’s still embarrassing.

Randi’s serpent mate pops into the living room. “I told you it was a good cry. It’s fine.”

A shocked sound spills from me, and I’m caught between laughing and crying. This entire afternoon has been absurd. I spent years alone in the forest, and suddenly, my life is full of unexpected people. It’s overwhelming and kind of amazing.

Dex has me in his arms a moment later, and my other two mates follow close behind. We don’t say anything for a long moment, but I can feel their relief in the bond.

“I’m okay. It just hit me that this is real,” I explain into another round of hugs.

It’s a whirlwind after that, with me mostly staying close to my big alpha while Gage and Briggs work with the others to orchestrate the move. We packed a few personal bags this morning, including the items we saved from my nest, but they have a whole plan for moving the animals and greenhouse.

When it’s time to go, Dex squeezes my hand. Briggs and Gage pick up the last bags and join us, forming a circle. Randi’s serpent mate exits the forest’s shadows and steps into the courtyard. He’s already taken the others, and it’s quiet except for us. I

look back one last time at the cabin that changed my life, trying to memorize it.

The serpent steps into the center of our circle. "Hang on."

For a moment, the world is a blinding swirl of grey-and-white clouds before we step into a snow-covered clearing. I'm dizzy, my head spinning as I hang on to Dex. The serpent says something to Gage, but I'm currently paying for my amusement at the expense of the Alpha King. It feels as if my stomach is in my throat.

Dex scoops me up, tucking me into his neck. "Breathe for me, sweetheart. It will pass in a minute."

His scent helps with the nausea, and I focus, closing my eyes so I don't see the world spinning. Briggs's purr kicks in, and finally my body settles enough to peek out. We're alone in the clearing, but just up a hill is a small cabin, smoke puffing happily from the chimney.

"Where are we?"

"Home, little star," Gage says. "I think we're home."

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 7:59 am

Summer—Nova

“ You’re a brave woman,” Vandera says, obviously amused as she watches me fumble through the back door of her shop.

“Not you too! It’s one box of herbs,” I grouse. I’m six months pregnant, not incompetent.

Briggs stomps his boots off at the door, calling, “See? The witch agrees with me.”

“Wrong.” Vandera cackles. “It doesn’t take my gift of sight to know an alpha will act a fool when it comes to being protective of his pregnant mate.”

“Thank you!” I roll my eyes, setting the offending crate on the wooden island that runs along the back of her workshop storage area.

“Happy to be a fool in love.” My good-natured alpha throws me that smirking grin as he sets his stack of crates next to mine. It’s the secret smile I swear he saves just for me.

The bond pulses with fondness and this ooey-gooey feeling I can’t even name. I feel my face flush as my scent swells.

He leans in and smacks a kiss on my lips. Before I can sink into it, he pulls back. “I’m going back to the truck for the others.”

I watch his ass in those tight jeans his entire way to the door.

Vandera's warm chuckle draws my eyes back to her. "You got it bad, girl. That, too, is predictable."

"So true. But I can't help it." I hand her the moon-dried rose petals she's been waiting for and dig around in another crate until I find the satchel of rose thorns.

"These are perfect, thank you." Vandera brings the ingredients to her table near the window.

I get to work unpacking the crates and restoring the workshop reserves while Briggs makes another two trips. He sets the last crate on the table and snakes a hand around my waist, spinning me into him.

"I'm heading to training. Gage is over at the clinic. Dex should be back with his patrol in a few minutes and is planning to pick you up here, but if you need anything, call."

"I know. It's the same as last Tuesday and the one before that," I tease him.

Briggs doesn't look chastened. "I will never apologize for caring for you, pretty wolf." His big palm rubs across the rounded curve of my belly. "Or these two."

He brushes a soft kiss on my lips before bending to do the same on my stomach, talking in a low voice to the babies. Whatever pretend annoyance I had at his hovering melts into a puddle at my feet. My eyes water, but I force myself to pull it together.

Briggs gives me another of those knowing grins as he exits through the front of the shop.

Vandera pretends to ignore my almost blubbering as I return to the comfort of my task. I've been stocking the store from our pack's garden for months, and we fall into

our usual routine. We chat about the latest news and the preparations we've been making for the upcoming summer solstice celebration.

It took me a while to settle into Moon Lake Valley, but now I feel like I've found my groove. For the first few months, I stuck to our cabin outside of town and didn't go anywhere without my mates.

The brothers easily accepted their roles as pack enforcers, working with the Alpha King—I still can't call him Fennik, and every time I see him, I feel a little green around the edges—on patrols and security, including training. Gage and I—no surprise there—took more time.

The first time Gage healed someone, it was because of Dex. He had been on patrol, and a younger alpha got hurt. After that, word spread, and people kept coming. My reluctant healer couldn't turn them away. Watching him fall back in love with his calling has been food for my soul.

It helped push me to talk to Randi and Vandera about taking on responsibility for the valley's herb and flower gardens. The other farms focus primarily on food, and I could see how they were struggling to keep up with the demands of the increased population. Now, Gage and I work the herb gardens together, though he spends several days a week at the clinic in town.

I get sunshine and herbs, with a few of the people sprinkled in too. It's the best of both worlds. Sometimes, the weirdness of living among others in community again hits me out of nowhere though. It's almost strange to think about wishes coming true.

Dex interrupts my daydreaming, his deep rumble traveling from the front of the shop.

"In here," I call, stacking the last of the empty crates.

"Hands off those crates, baby girl. I'll load them," he commands.

I huff but throw my hands up in surrender, turning with an eye roll. “I wouldn’t dare.”

Vandera’s soft laugh makes me grin.

Dex stalks my way until my handsome hunter is standing before me. He smells like outside and sweat, and I kind of want to lick him. His big palm skirts along my back, and he squeezes my hip, pulling me closer. “You ready?”

He rubs his cheek on my hair, scent marking me before planting a kiss on his mating bite. I decided I liked my short hair for that very reason.

I reach up on my tippy toes, kissing under his jaw. “Yup, all done.”

His other hand falls to my stomach, drawing circles on my belly. “Good, because I was thinking we could stop in town for some ice cream before we pick up Gage at the clinic.”

I do a happy dance. Apple caramel chunk is the best thing to ever happen to my pregnant taste buds, and the owner of the Cream Dream is a goddess who keeps it in stock. I don’t care that everyone thinks it’s weird to crave a fall flavor in summer.

Vandera gives me a wink and a wave. “See you at solstice.”

Summer—Briggs

Don't look, don't look, don't look.

Nova hums, reaching over the coffee table to fit a piece into the puzzle near the edge.

My eyes dart there anyway, and it’s the exact peep show I imagined, her tits spilling out of the top of her tiny tank top.

Her scent is sleepy, and I know she's tired after the summer solstice celebration in town this afternoon, but I can't help how my scent spikes with arousal. She's atop my brother's lap, sitting there as though it isn't the hottest thing in the world that she's casually doing a puzzle while she takes a knot. My brother hands her another piece, seemingly undisturbed, and she fits it next to the last.

"Why did you stop reading?" Nova asks, looking at me innocently.

I give thanks that my bond isn't completely giving away how much I want to leap from the couch, tackle her to the floor, and suck on her full tits.

My brother gives me a shit-eating grin.

I don't know how the fuck he can sit there so calmly and not thrust. My dick is aching, and all I'm doing is sitting across from them, pretending—badly—to read my book.

How Dex has the patience for long knotting is beyond me. Gage and I never make it longer than twenty minutes. My healer has explained over and over that this is part of her body preparing for birth. She needs the stretch of the knot and the comfort it gives, along with the pheromones. It's not even really sexual.

Except it drives me wild. My wolf is totally obsessed with how naughty it is that she spends most evenings doing normal things while being knotted and claimed.

"You're so worked up by her you're making me near feral," Gage whispers into my neck, his hand darting under the blanket to tease the outline of my hard cock.

Nova bites her lip. "What is it?"

This time though, I realize she's on to me by the look in her eye. Her nipples pebble against the thin fabric of her top, and she grinds down on Dex's lap. I can't see

exactly what she's doing, but that makes it hotter for some reason.

"Come over here, little star, and I'll show you how hot we find watching you do that puzzle." Gage gives her a love tap, the green signature of his magic shimmering around her chest.

She lets out a sultry moan, and my dick jumps. Gage's hand dips beneath the waistband of my sweats, and his rough palm strokes my cock, the tingles in his touch making me so hard it hurts. Dex's hands go to her nipples, and finally the hard-ass takes over, thrusting into her. Gage slowly teases me while we watch Nova come apart.

It's agony and bliss, so fucking good that by the time Dex's knot goes down, I'm practically vibrating.

My brother kisses her forehead, passing her into my waiting arms. "Let Briggs and Gage get you comfy, sweetheart. I'll lock up and join you in a minute."

"Mmm, you smell extra spicy," Nova purrs. My snuggly omega wraps her arms around my neck, nuzzling into my throat.

"That's because you make the most basic things naughty as fuck." I wrap my hands around her ass, carrying her to our pack nest.

It isn't the same as our old nest, but it's got the vibes right. Nova and Gage's plants are interspersed around the comfy reading nook in the corner, and the bed Dex and I made sits in the center with her mounds of comfy blankets. The nest is a hodgepodge of old quilts and soothing forest tones with strands of twinkle lights above the poster bed making the room glow softly.

I set her on the bed, and she wiggles around until she's tossed the small tank top that wasn't doing shit to cover her anyway. Gage loses his sweatpants and joins her,

helping her get comfortable and supporting her belly with a pillow as he tucks her into his side.

She's still got months to go, but with a litter and her small size, she's already round. I fucking love seeing her like this, happy and safe, growing our pack's babies. If I could knock her up again tonight, I would try.

I strip and crawl in behind her, draping myself across her back and slinging one of her legs over mine, my hands going to support her belly.

"Knot me, both of you," Nova says sleepily.

If Dex is a marathon knoter, Gage and I are team "fuck her to sleep."

We get into our nightly position, the only one she really enjoys right now. I rub the head of my cock through her slick pussy before nudging my way inside her.

Nova moans, reaching back to dig her nails into my ass. "More."

"We know, baby. You need both of us filling you up, giving you that aching stretch," I purr in her ear.

Nova doesn't correct me. We all know it's true. She's insatiable, and her need ratchets up the more her belly grows.

I still, and Gage wedges himself in beside me, pushing in just the tip. We've been putting her to sleep between us for the last month, but the first feeling of us sharing her never gets old.

He slowly slides in as I slide out, and Nova's expression glazes over. Gage makes a hoarse growl each time I pull out my slick cock, nearly leaving her completely so that he fills her. When she's panting and moaning, I decide she's ready. I cant my hips

and thrust on a long stroke that makes his cock rub against mine, and Nova's tight walls strangle me with glorious pressure.

Gage takes her mouth as she makes a mess of our cocks, rocking and encouraging us to go harder. We fuck her together, our legs and arms tangled around each other, her mouth passing between us until she's gasping, incoherent, and shaking. The two of us press against that needy place that makes her wail. Our knots tease her edges, our cocks buried deep. Her pussy squeezes, and I can't hold back, my orgasm blasting through me. That sets off Gage, both of us filling her with cum until she's shaking and spluttering through her own orgasm.

She comes so hard she goes limp. I crave seeing that blissed-out expression on her face, her soft purr humming. We pet her, caressing her smooth skin, and praise her until her harsh breathing turns deep.

At some point, Dex climbs in, and we're forced to move. He settles her on his chest while I snuggle in behind Gage.

It's a regular night, and the routine of it makes it even sweeter. We're home—with Nova safe between us where she belongs.

Fall—Gage

Nova groans, but it's not the good kind. I press my hands along her back, using my magic to help ease the ache of the latest contraction.

Dex speaks softly, giving her words of encouragement while Briggs braces himself against me, letting me siphon power from his touch. He's bubbling with it, his eyes soft and smitten with the alpha boy currently bundled in his arms.

Nova has been doing great. Her labor for baby Leo went smoothly and quickly, but the second baby is taking their sweet time. I'm a mess on the inside, trying my best

not to let old fears send me into a panic.

“Almost there. One more push, Nova. Then you can rest,” Vandera commands.

Nova holds onto Dex for dear life and screams through the last push, collapsing against me at the same moment a small cry sounds in the nest.

After that, there’s a flurry of activity and little bursts of Vandera’s magic as she cleans our omega and our newest addition.

I can't hold back when Vandera places the little omega on Nova’s chest. Tears blur my vision, and I bat them away without success.

Briggs places our little omega’s brother next to her on Nova’s chest and hugs me. “It’s all right, babe. They’re healthy and so good. She’s made it. She’s strong.”

“Come over here, Papa, and see for yourself,” Nova says. Her voice is tired, but her bond surges with love so bright it steals my breath.

I force myself to get it together, crawling beside them to nuzzle her side and touch tiny toes. They’re blond like her and tiny, so beautiful that more tears come.

“Hello, Lavender and Leo, welcome to the world. You’ve got a whole pack who loves you and the best mommy,” Dex coos.

Briggs joins in, talking to them. “We’re your daddies, and we’re going to make sure you grow up happy and safe.”

They’re perfect, all of them. Absolutely perfect.

My little star’s smile is so bright I can’t stop my own from taking over my face.

Vandera works around us, preparing the potions to help Nova heal and rest, but our pack settles in, watching the babies nurse for the first time.

It's a miracle, a moment when the world tips back to rights. I savor it, take it in, and give thanks for the day when my pack showed up on my doorstep and forced me into the light.