
ISABELLA SKYE
CHAOS AT SECOND SIGHT
WEREBALL BOOK 2
I WATCHED THE FOREST. BUT THE FOREST WAS WATCHING ME BACK TOO.

CHAOS AT SECOND SIGHT

WEREBALL SERIES

BOOK 2

ISABELLA SKYE

OceanofPDF.com

CHAOS AT SECOND SIGHT—WEREBALL SERIES

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AUTHOR NOTE

I want to share that Italian is my first language. While this book has gone through professional editing, you may occasionally notice phrasing or rhythms that differ from standard English usage. I hope you'll see these little quirks as part of the book's voice and my own way of telling the story.

And to my dear Scottish readers or anyone familiar with Scotland, I want to apologize in advance if I get anything wrong! The MacKenzie pack is intentionally a little old-fashioned. Their traditions, habits, and the way they live are inspired by how I imagine werewolf packs might have behaved in the past. Some of the older members of the family have their own rather wild and unconventional ways of doing things.

This is not intended to represent Scotland, Scottish people, or Scottish culture as old-fashioned, primitive, or less modern. The MacKenzies are fictional werewolves with their own traditions and history, completely separate from modern Scotland.

I really, really love Scotland. I lived there myself for a while, and that's a big part of why I chose to set the series there.

Now, with that out of the way…

Welcome to the MacKenzie pack.

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CONTENT WARNING

This book contains explicit sexual content, violence, swearing, hunting, skinning of animals, a minor with cancer (not main character), mention of child verbal abuse from a parent (off page), mention of suicidal ideation (off page), kidnapping.

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For everyone out there who doesn't always feel like they belong out there.
This is your reminder to be wild. Free.
And maybe look up at the moon and let it out...
Scream.

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GLOSSARY

- ***Bhiast***: beast
- ***Gealaich****:* moon. It is often used to refer to the Moon Goddess
- ***Haló*****:** hello
- ***Herald Pàipear:*** a Scottish newspaper
- ***Nighean òg*****:** baby girl
- ***Rionnag:*** star
- ***Seanair:*** grandfather

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PACKS AND FAMILY TREE

The MacKenzie Clan — Scotland
Ian & Riona MacKenzie *— The Alphas and parents*
• *Andrew — mate deceased*
• *Angus — mated to Layla (many children)*
• *Clyde — mated*
◦ *Pamela — his daughter*
• *Isabella — → see Comet Pack*
• *Knox — mated to Sarah (many children)*
• *Raphael — deceased*

The Comet Pack — Montana
Isabella & Robert *— The Alphas and parents*
• *Lachlan*
• *Ian*
• *Yvaine — mated to Logan Draven*
◦ *Wolf: Zelda · Ruby*
• *Amaia (mated to Callum), Makenna and Tiziano — Yvaine's flatmates*
• *Gaius — Lachlan's best friend*

The Dark Diamond Pack — Montana
Mrs. Tina *— mate deceased*
• *Jonathan Draven — the Alpha, unmated*
◦ *Logan — mated to Yvaine MacKenzie*
  ▪ *Wolf: Lucien*
◦ *Bellatrix*

• *Callum (mated to Amaia) & Killian — twin brothers and Logan's flatmates*
• *Dylan, Greg & Tank Man — wereball players*

The Black Devil Pack — Italy
***Mirko & Elena** — The Alphas and the parents*
• *Archie*
• *Aurora*
• *Sofia*

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CHARACTER NICKNAMES

- **Archie**: Chie
- **Bellatrix**: Bella, Trix
- **Jonathan**: Big Feet
- **Killian**: Gentle Eyes, Killy, Skeleton Man
- **Lachlan**: Freckles, Highlander, Islander, Lachy
- **Logan**: Lolo, Reindeer, Rudolph, Rudy, Terminator, Thor, T-Man
- **Lucien**: Godzilla, Gollum, Lucy, Mutt
- **Yvaine**: Bunny Doc, Honeybee, Mine, *Rionnag*, Star, Sweet Pea, Vy

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FACTS ABOUT CHARACTER NAMES

- **Andrew**: Ancient Greek, derived from aner/andros, meaning “brave.”
- **Angus**: Scottish and Irish. From the Gaelic personal name Aonghus, said to be composed of Celtic aon “one” + gus “choice.”
- **Bellatrix**: Latin. The word comes from *bellāre*, which means “to wage war.” Bellatrix is also the name of the third-brightest star in the Orion constellation.
- **Clyde**: Scottish origin, relates to the River Clyde that runs through Glasgow.
- **Ian**: Scottish Gaelic origin, derived from the Hebrew יוֹחָנָן (Yohanan) and corresponding to the English name John.
- **Knox**: Scottish surname that originates from the Scots Gaelic “cnoc,” meaning a hillock or a hump.
- **Lachlan**: Scottish origin, meaning “from the fjord-land.” It was originally used to describe the Viking invaders of Scotland, those from the land of the lochs.
- **Riona**: Irish origin, meaning “queen.”
- **Yvaine**: first star of the evening.

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Written By Lady Trex
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CHAPTER ONE

YVAINE

"Y*vaine.*"

A familiar voice seeped into my consciousness.

"Yvaine, my star."

Light pats on my forehead accompanied that same comforting voice. My eyes tried to blink open, but my lashes were too sticky.

A blurry face hovered above me.

"Grandma?"

I'm back in Scotland. What a lovely dream…

Memories, like lightning across a clear blue sky, sliced through my awakening brain.

This wasn't a dream. And it wasn't a dream that had brought me back to my other home. It was a lie.

Remember when I had talked about destiny? About the invisible string connecting us to our soulmate's heart, pulling us to each other? That wasn't me being romantic. That was Werewolf Realism 101.

Well, our cosmic string had snapped, and I took my half of it to Scotland.

Seven time zones and two semi-arguments later, Lachlan and I had landed in our birthplace. A large crowd of werepeople—including uncles, grandparents, countless cousins, and even those who didn't share blood but shared our history, knowing when I first shifted into my wolf and Lachlan

got his first kill—waited at the MacKenzie packhouse gate with ear-splitting cheers and boa-constrictor hugs.

I forgot all about the luggage I had dragged from home and soaked in the moment like the heather ale they threw over us upon arrival.

There was something grounding about returning to a childhood home, a quiet reminder that I had lived other lives before this one. The old wooden bed, the hiking boots still scuffed from eleven years ago, the daisy necklace hanging from the full-length mirror—all of it belonged to earlier versions of me. Versions untouched by my current problems. My current grief.

It gave me hope.

It reconnected me with those past selves.

Here, surrounded by my roots, I could find them again.

"Oh, welcome back to the living world, *rionnag*!" I let myself be hugged, sighing. A slight throb pulsed in the top left corner of my head and in my upper back—I should rename them Rudolph 1 and Rudolph 2.

"Morning. I'm awake." I cleared my dry throat, blinking at the darkness embracing us. "What time is it?"

"Five o'clock sharp. Come on now, we have a lot to catch up on." Grandma Riona rose up after a peck on my cheek. 4:30 a.m. was the time my grandparents woke up every single day of the year, whether they slept in their bed or outdoors. *Be ready before everyone else is. Even the sun,* they would say.

I snuggled deeper into the pillow, breathing in sage.

"Your breakfast and your *seanair* are waiting for you. The stubborn wolf hasn't started eating yet." She yanked the checkered curtains open, and a weak light filtered into the room. Invisible memories hung everywhere I looked, from the hexagonal honeycomb geometry prints and close-up shots of bees on the wall to the old archery bow mounted above the door.

With a full-body stretch, my hands bumping the dreamcatcher hanging above the bed, I climbed out of the nest, rolled down the blankets to air the mattress, fluffed the pillows, and headed for the bathroom. Once cold water washed away the fossils of last night's tears, I trudged to the dining hall.

"Oh, *haló, rionnag.*" Grandpa was still the current Alpha and master of a large beehouse that dominated most of the south garden. Retirement, he insisted, was a myth invented by younger wolves to take charge without killing. Every morning, he read the *Herald Pàipear*, delivered with milk bottles and egg cartons.

“Good morning, *Seanair*!” I kissed his shaved cheek and slipped into my mom’s seat on his right side, always. Since she left for Montana with Dad, no one else was allowed in it. Except me.

His skin and sharp features reminded me of the Scottish version of a Western movie actor. Those blue eyes examined me over his cup—black tea, no sugar—and mine mirrored his, though we’d inherited different callings: mine in hospitals against disease; his beyond pack borders against rogues growing restless.

More werewolves were leaving packs with their hierarchies and rules, often unable to fill in roles and pay their pack contribution, turning into rogues. None had left the MacKenzies since old Fergus lost his mate—and his mind with her—and went rogue, a sign of a healthy pack.

Grandpa Ian extracted half of the newspaper and handed it over. I grinned as I took it, giving it a quick flick to straighten the pages—their crisp crackle a morning comfort—and scanned the headlines about the Inverness Caledonian Thistle and the Highland Wereball League final. Part of it was in Scottish Gaelic, a language I’d learned as a child that I could read and understand but not speak.

“Rough night?” He flipped the page after licking his index finger, his ring with the mountain in flames—the clan crest—glinting.

I sipped my own drink, more milk than tea. “Just jet lag. So, Grandpa… have you done your yearly check-ups yet?”

The subject landed exactly how it always did: unwanted.

He waved dismissively, Scottish tea droplets falling onto the article of a new ice cream trail in nearby Nairn. “A portion of haggis and a shot of Dalmore a day keep the doctors far away.”

I opened my agenda and wrote, *Schedule Grandpa’s prostate exam, blood glucose test.* I glanced up at him as he scooped more haggis onto his plate. *Cholesterol.* He changed the subject to school and my wolf’s development, hoping I’d forget, but once agenda-ed, it was never forgotten.

The Question (capital Q) arrived in its usual carefully phrased form.

“Do I need to shoot that boy?”

A handsome blond face popped up in my mind. The actual *uno* that started as *duo* Logan/Rudolph had made its way into the vessels of my heart through phone calls, silver eyes, and mockeries, taking up too much space.

“Not necessary. I can deal with it.”

“Thank *Gealaich*. I didn’t really want to leave the Highlands.” He never did, not even when my baby brother Ian was born, though that coincided with a war with the MacGraths over a stolen beehouse. We were possessive of our honey up here.

Him leaving the Highlands *just* to shoot Logan for me was, objectively, very considerate.

“Too skinny. Your triceps need more muscle.” He gripped my arm, enforcing his point. “Here, have more protein and good fat.” A generous portion of haggis landed on my plate, and my lips pursed. *What’s better than nourishing sheep’s pluck to start the day?*

Everyone knew I had found my mate, though no one had pressed me about it last night at the welcome dinner. They’d probably wait a day or two. My parents were worried but understanding; explanations cost energy I didn’t have. I also made my father promise not to march to Dark Diamond and demand a modernized duel. I felt mildly guilty for depriving him of the argument with Logan’s dad. Back in the day, our fathers had been ferocious rivals on and off the wereball arena. I also knew Dad needed a weekly dose of arguing like plants needed sunrays to function.

“*Rionnag*, ready to go?” Grandma strolled into the dining room in full camouflage, a shotgun slung over one shoulder. I wondered if she took it to bed with her. Just over seventy, with years spent battling rogues on the front lines, she wasn’t like Red Riding Hood’s grandma who let the Big Bad Wolf eat her up. My grandma *was* the Big Bad Wolf.

“Yes! Let me brush my teeth and grab sunscreen. Be back in six minutes.”

A quick hug from Grandpa, a pit stop, and a change into hunting gear later, we headed for the woods. They were densely green and comfortably unchanged, steeped in old, violent histories that still lingered in our peaceful present. Dawn hadn’t yet broken over the treetops, leaving the forest in cool blue-gray light, and the cold morning air smelled of damp ferns and sap.

“Where’s your bow?”

“Here.” I patted my shoulder bag with snacks, water, and my compact archery set. I eyed the wall of smooth-barked beech trees the animals had probably used to barricade themselves from the approaching predators and smiled.

Grandma hunted in human form once a week—another tradition that started after a visiting elder declared women shouldn't hunt unless shifted. That same day, she kicked open the hall's double doors, dragged in a deer by the antlers and a boar by the muzzle, and informed everyone dinner would be served in two hours. She also suggested to the gaping men that the cooking should start right away and that the blood on the floor should be cleaned up before it attracted pests.

"So." Grandma squinted down the barrel with one eye shut, blew it clean, and then clicked it shut with a flick of her wrist. "Tell me about this wolf that made you run all the way here."

I spun so fast I nearly met a blackberry bush headfirst. "What makes you think that I ran?"

"I've known my favorite granddaughter since before she existed!" She *tsk*ed. "Let's get to the heart of the mutton. Chitchat makes me sneeze." She did just that, straight into the same blackberry bush, and tilted her chin toward my neck. "No marks. Not mated yet?"

Being to the point was a family trait, alongside compulsory emotional transparency. Privacy was rude. *Rude like Rudy. Oh, hush, brain!*

"We'd never really talked in person." *Just made out…twice*.

Her eyebrows climbed.

"Well, we talked when I thought he wasn't my mate, but just over the phone. That should count, right?"

I shared mine and Logan's history. It felt more like prehistory with everything that had happened since, wars included, and a certain werewolf dropping to his knees at the Comet vs. Dark Diamond game, with me almost rejecting him. Talking it through with Lachlan had been liberating; with Grandma, clarifying. For the first time, the full shape of it settled, and somehow, I felt lighter.

"I like this Rudolph." The verdict was declared. "He has a sense of humor. That's precious. You don't spend decades with someone without one."

She hadn't even met Logan and was already acting as his defense attorney?

"Oh, come on. Would you prefer some inexperienced virgin hiding behind his mother's skirts every time a girl looks his way?" I had to blink twice before laughing. "And sure, the lad's had girls. Let him! Men need

practice. Lots of it, and you don’t strike me as someone who wants to teach a grown wolf how to howl.”

“Grandma!”

“Serial relationships aren’t better,” she went on briskly. “Just fear dressed up as variety. Scared of being alone. At least this boy stands on his own paws instead of clinging to someone until something better appears.”

Grandma had a point.

“Does the lad play wereball?”

“The *lad* is his college team’s captain.” She remained unimpressed. Mom had been captain. Uncle Clyde had been captain. Lachlan was captain. In this family, being captain was simply a minimum requirement. “From his very first year,” I added with a smile.

That earned a whistle. “Good. Is he pretty?”

I grinned. “What do you think?”

“How firm and round is his arse on a scale of one to ten?”

Heat crawled into my cheeks. “I’ve never, um, *tested it*, but from observation alone…eleven on the Mohs Hardness scale.” *Diamonds* ranked at ten for hardness level.

We spent the next hour dissecting Logan. The midges had spotted us and buzzed around our faces. We swatted them away.

She was already Team Logan, which bugged me—especially after Logan’s violent episode with Sillas, my former non-mate with benefits. “He’s an Alpha. Alphas don’t share,” she said after my recap of the infamous game. “That bloody ex of yours wandered into his lair! It’s not Logan’s fault that *Sullen* Sillas couldn’t defend himself. And werewolves heal!”

Even so, she admitted that lies and omissions were rotten roots that needed to be eradicated before they poisoned the whole forest.

“Look there. Ravens.” Grandma pointed to them. “They’re following something.”

And so did we.

It happened to be a herd of red deer, calm and unaware, in the clearing below.

Crouched on a moss-covered rise that looked as if nature had built it specifically for us hunters, I lifted my bow, the initials *Y.M.* carved into the wood near the grip.

Grandma lay still; I twitched a little, my elbows itching to let go of the string, but the deer were still too far. The midges were back for round two, and I blew air at them. One landed on the tip of my nose. Despite it, I held steady.

The bush near us rustled, and two hares burst from the undergrowth. One eye closed, elbow high, I released the string. My arrow cut through the air and a furry throat. Then a second throat.

Still, we didn't move. The ravens circled closer, spotting us, but didn't dare steal the meal of wolves. They respected us enough.

Finally, the red deer moved closer, many with fat bellies grazing the grass, pregnant probably because of that big stag Grandpa spotted earlier this week. As a mother herself, Grandma aimed only for the deer with a single heartbeat, not two.

A click, aim, and the deer only had time to raise its head before dropping, never to stand again.

A clean shot, an artery severed.

The herd scattered; the ravens didn't. Grandma lowered her fuming rifle and walked down the slope. As I clasped the two hares by the ears, she cut a large strip of meat, tossing it into the bushes. "Thank you for showing us the herd," she told the ravens, bowing to them.

We reached a small clearing where remains of past campfires still marked the earth. When I brought back wood for a new fire, Grandma's arm was already deep inside the deer's belly.

"The truth? I'm worried." I wasn't embarrassed, and I was honest enough to admit that. "Logan lied for too long and so easily, it became a habit. What if this is his *modus operandi*? I can stitch wounds, but I can't fix broken trust. And I know many cardiologists—my roommate's one. They can replace a broken heart, but that wouldn't be fair to who's on the waiting list! And what happens if—"

"Exactly, *rionnag*. *What if*."

She drew her gut hook across the deer flank. Her cut was perfection; I wish I had that same confidence during surgery practice. "We don't do *what if*s in our family, we live by *let's do*s. We take all the chances. And those not meant for us? We take them anyway. If he hurts you, I'm sure you can take care of it. Not to mention the army of my crazy offspring and that grandfather of yours. His torture chamber is full of webs, and the spiders need to be disturbed. That is, if your mom doesn't kill him first."

She chuckled with me.

“Nobody needs to beat anybody up, but why are you on his side?”

“Selfish reasons.” She wiggled her gut hook. “I need grandpups before I’m too old, which will happen sooner if your grandfather keeps pestering me to marry him!” My grandmother had never accepted his proposal after forty years, always saying he had to deserve it first.

“Relationships are complex. Because we are complex. We have histories and traumas that we carry with us everywhere, also into new relationships.” She swept her long gray hair back. She never dyed it—any alteration would follow into your wolf form, but most wolves hated their fur dyed. “All I’m saying is to hear him out. *Eventually*. Let him sit in his suffering for a wee bit.”

“It’s not that easy, Grandma.”

“It’s called the right thing, not the easy thing.”

I hung a few slices of hare over the crackling fire while Grandma hummed a prayer, thanking the animal for nourishing us. *When you consume something, it becomes part of you. Beautiful, in its own way, to be eaten.* If Emily Dickinson had been a werewolf, she might’ve said something similar.

“I didn’t leave just because of him. I needed a break from my life for a while.” My eyes welled up as she dropped her gut hook, her own eyes watering. “And little Ian…Grandma, I set aside thirty minutes every week to cry about him. I even have to plan when to be sad!”

So that morning, we hugged. We sobbed. We cursed cancer and life.

When the meat became overcooked, we ate it, cry-laughing at our burned tongues, and headed back when two hundred midges joined forces to explore our nostrils.

Grandma’s parting words echoed in my head for the rest of the day.

Do me a favor, my rionnag. Let yourself off the hook for what you have no control over. And stop following your schedule!

Still, later that day, I wrote one final line in my notepad.

Be wild.

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CHAPTER TWO

YVAINE

A break from our daily lives? Never a bad idea.

Funny how we forget to recharge the one thing that keeps the whole place running: our brains.

In my case, it was my heart that needed the well-earned vacation. It had been two weeks since it began. Twelve days since I'd turned off my phone. Four days since Lachlan and my uncles left for the cloud-covered Fair Isle, famous among humans for having only one phone box and housing sixty inhabitants, all werewolves tracking rogue activity in the area. Thank Stephen I'd already finished my midterms.

That morning, like every morning after breakfast with my grandparents, I wandered through a stretch of woods at the northern edge of the packlands, a backyard of loneliness, wild animals, and low clouds.

I loved it.

A wild, lonely nature, but still *my* nature.

Patrols were rare here, considering the steep, uncrossable hills that served as natural protection and the deep, silver lake, disturbed only by the dappled trout. A regiment of insects buzzed in the narrow womb of the lake, and wind-stunted thistles crowded the banks.

My gaze lingered on a trapped islet ringed by four tall pines and a dead, bent trunk. There, a tiny bird was making a buzzing noise, like a small electrical fault.

I spread my arms and inhaled the mossy damp earth and the shy spring. *Ah.* The urge to add *morning stroll and meditation* to my agenda was strong, but scheduling it would steal away its magic, making it just a task. I'd spent my days with my family, hunting, reading, and practicing the ancient and terrifying art of living without a plan. As a result, I'd also avoided making a plan for everything waiting for me back in Montana.

Real life could wait.

The only things I had kept were my daily calls with my little brother and the sporadic ones with my parents. Together, we had managed to get Ian into a new trial with promising results. There had been community tears, cheering, and an impromptu celebration with Ian and my parents, them smiling from a giant screen while the rest of us crowded around it. Plus, my friends and I still had weekly video calls and reading sessions.

"Callum and I are fine now," Amaia had told me with shining eyes and a fresh mark on her neck that she kept brushing. "It was difficult at first. He needed space to think, he said. He didn't trust me after the rejection…"

"I can imagine."

"He understood eventually. But only after I sent him an e-mail explaining *everything*. About my parents. My mission. How I don't want a mate that I could potentially lose too."

Her eyes had filled with tears. Mine too.

Amaia rarely talked about losing both her parents to cancer. She hated being pitied.

"You won't. We'll make sure he gets check-ups every six months and is eating healthy."

"Anyway, he cried, then hugged me for forty-two minutes. My Callum is emotional, but it's okay." She shrugged. "Then we had the issue of me being a virgin."

"How come he was upset about that? You both waited for each other."

"His irrationality confused me too. He was sad that I had waited for coitus without even knowing I was waiting for him."

"What did you tell him?"

"That my devotion to him has nothing to do with whether I have a mucosal tissue over my vaginal opening."

"So, you *were* a virgin…or *are* you still?"

"Past tense." Her cheeks turned pink.

I grinned. "How was it?"

“I’ve had a total of forty-eight orgasms since we mated.”

My eyebrows shot up.

“He’s had twenty-four, but he insists mine are more important.” She nodded solemnly. “I come first. Pun intended.”

That made me laugh.

The days in the Highlands were good.

The nights? Not so much.

I was taking pills to knock myself out—sleep deprivation being one of the lesser-known side effects of being apart from your fated mate.

A rustle sounded to my left.

My head whipped around just as a furry, dark shape burst from the bushes.

“Dinori!”

Saurus, Volf, Malxom, and Brun also barreled forward.

I sat cross-legged on the grass. Experience had taught me standing only encouraged more of their messy mischief. The wolves tumbled over me, demanding scratches, rubs, and attention. I obeyed with a grin.

One hand found a gray muzzle, the other disappearing into short, maroon fur. They were real wolves, not werewolves, born and raised in the Scottish wilderness. Some called them pets, but that never felt right. Pets didn’t vanish for months, even years, then return with a scarred paw and a missing ear, thinner than before. These wolves stayed because they chose to. They knew they’d always find food, shelter, and me chasing them around with tick medication.

We MacKenzies had a theory: The stronger the pack, the more wild wolves were drawn to it.

I flicked my gaze from the rippling loch to the rising sun. The hum of insects quieted. The jackdaw’s buzzing faded.

I heard it before I smelled it.

A strangled growl rolled from beyond the trapped islet.

I watched the forest. But apparently, the forest was watching me back, too.

A crooked figure, at least seven feet tall, detached itself from the pines. It was a beast that resembled a wolf but stood like a person on its hind legs. Long, midnight-black fur draped most of its body, with only its barrel-like chest and visible eight-pack covered in a shorter, gray-tinged pelt.

Wait.

It has abs?

A long tail with the thickest fur, as if the beast had stolen it from a warhorse and claimed it for its own, lashed behind, scattering the midges and rustling the grass in its wake.

It was like an eclipse on Earth.

“Oh my Stephen…”

Its eyes—two red pits of hell over that massive muzzle—were fixed on me from across the loch, never leaving me as the beast prowled forward.

“What i-is that?” I stuttered to myself. Around me, the wolves dropped low, baring gums and fangs at the intruder.

The creature showed its own fangs, and I would have fallen on my butt if I’d stood, because it charged forward on four legs, its footfalls shaking the ground.

My brain ordered me to run. Yet the fact that *it* simply existed kept me in place, along with its…*scent*…

“It smells like…like—” I choked out. “Amber.”

The wild wolves retreated, backs curled, growls ignored. The dominant energy emanating from the beast pressed in on me like gravity.

For something so enormous, it moved fast.

A heartbeat later, it halted in front of me and fell into a crouch, its head snapping toward the scattering wolves.

I didn’t care. I had more immediate concerns, like not becoming lunch for a creature that still needed a biological classification.

When my hand touched the ground behind me, its head whipped back to me.

“I-I don’t taste that good,” I blurted, hands shielding my eyes. “I had sheep stomach this morning.” Actually, that might make me more appealing.

When nothing happened, I peeked between my fingers, only to draw in a gasp.

It was staring at me, *transfixed* by what it saw. It was…*confusing*, and my stomach did a flip—not entirely reassuring.

I gawked up at it and slapped my cheek. *Hard*.

The beast didn’t like that, if the low growl was any indication.

Its muzzle inched closer. Too close.

I smacked it away with my forearm. “Go find some deer!”

The growl that followed blasted my hair backward, my heart lodging itself in my esophagus.

I needed out of here, *pronto*! Scouring the ground around me, I grabbed the first thing I found and chucked it straight at its face.

It yelped, stumbling as its snout took a hit from a thorny branch. Not sticking around to see its reaction, I sprang to my feet and bolted. Full speed ahead, no looking back.

Probably not my smartest decision.

It chased after me—every single predator on this planet would. To confirm my theory, a growl, neither human nor wolf, detonated behind me.

I leapt over fallen trees, dodged uprooted bushes, and skirted around half-eaten carcasses. Branches snagged me like desperate hands, tearing my clothes.

This was uncontaminated land. Rogue land. And I had run straight into its belly.

My feet pounded the ground as my breath came in gasps, sweat dripping down my face. Fast, heavy footfalls hammered closer along with a steady, low growl.

Deviating suddenly, I slid under a broken log and popped back up mid-sprint.

Behind, a *smash* shook the air. *Good*. I hoped it had tripped somewhere and face-planted.

My sweater snagged on a branch. I yanked, pulling myself out of it, leaving it behind as I sprinted left. Or tried to.

Next thing I knew, a thick rod of an arm barreled down in front of me, blocking my way. The momentum shoved me backward with an *oof* as I collided with a wall of solid muscle.

Capers!

Warm air trickled across my neck, and the thing took a greedy breath.

I wheeled around, hand on my chest, just in time for a massive furry hand with five beastly fingers tipped in black claws to land on the top of my head.

I was wearing Lachlan’s wereball cap with his number three on it, and the beast didn’t seem to like it.

“Hey! You can’t have it!” I sputtered as the creature peeled it away and looked at it with nothing but disgust. The offending cap was torn in half and tossed aside.

The beast dropped to its knees before me. My breath caught, my eyes lingering on several thorns stuck in its muzzle from when I had hit it. Furry, defined arms snuck around my waist and clutched me so tight, not even a strike of lightning could divide us.

But I didn't mind that…

Because there were *sparks*. Mate-bond sparks that lit me up from the inside like the beast had plugged me into a generator.

But it was only when I heard *him* speak in a strange, throaty voice—or rather, when I heard what he said—that I passed out for good.

"Hello, Mate."



GRANDMA RIONA

From my perch on a pine tree, I gawked at my granddaughter being carried away bridal-style by the blackest, meanest-looking thing I'd ever had the displeasure of setting my eyes on. They were far out, deep in rogue land, but the hideous beast didn't seem to mind that.

My best friend, my rifle, lay on the ground after it had slipped from my shaking hands, the bullets scattered around. I bet it was useless against that thing.

"Ian. We need the bear traps," I told my mate through our mind-link.

"Sure. How many?"

"All of them."

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CHAPTER THREE

YVAINE

P*lop.*

On my forehead.

Plop.

On my nose.

Plop.

On my chin.

It was raining in my room.

An image of umbrellas popping up through the holes in the ceiling to cover the roof flashed through my mind. I pulled the woolen blanket higher and rubbed my face against it. *Warmer than usual. Softer, too.*

Wind brushed my hair.

Wait. I was outside.

I must've taken a nap after playing with the wolves, and now a drizzle had rolled in. It had been sunny, from what I remembered, but this was Scotland; the weather changed personalities every fifteen minutes.

And a radio was on. No, not a radio. A chant, inside my head.

I groaned as my hands and feet spasmed, readjusting to the movements of being awake. The plopping stopped.

My mind clawed its way out of the confused cave of unconsciousness.

Then I realized three things at once.

One: The plopping wasn't rain; something had drooled on my face.

Two: The blanket carried tiny electric shocks. *Mate* sparks.

Three: I knew that scent.

The cream on the scone? My wolf was the horrible radio inside my head, just as restless and hyped as the day I had met my—

"Mate, mate, mate!" The lunatic had been chanting it on repeat.

My eyes flew wide open, and I found myself nose-to-muzzle with a black, hairy face. A bullet of realization blasted through my awareness. The gates of hell had been opened, and a creature smelling like Logan had crawled out of it, chased me through the woods, shredded Lachlan's cap, and called me *mate*.

With a startled squeak, I flapped my arms, untangling myself from its tail—what I had mistaken for a *blanket*—and scrambled backward, heart racing, mouth hanging open.

"Mate, mate, mate!" My wolf bounced in circles, limbs flying everywhere as she performed deranged airborne cartwheels.

Like it could hear her mania, the creature tilted its humongous head, its furry beard flailing in the dull sunlight.

Still seated, I crab-walked away using my hands and heels. One huge red eye streaked with silver remained fixed on me. Unblinking. Watching. Tiny blond lashes curled around it.

I slapped my cheeks. "Wake up. This is a nightmare. I'm not here."

The beast dropped its muzzle with a sigh and glanced at its curled, clawed fingers resting on its lap. *Can he understand me?*

If I hadn't been busy having a small existential crisis, I might have recognized the emotion flickering across those impossible features. Instead, I was staring at the claws. Freddy Krueger's glove looked like a set of innocent teaspoons in comparison; those things could crack my skull like a macadamia nut.

What is it? Surely not a werewolf. Could it be some hidden species? Our version of a mythological creature that was somehow real, the same way humans didn't know werewolves existed?

My wolf continued bouncing in circles. *"It's our mate, you silly human! He came for us!"*

Confusion joined with shock. Shock invited fear. Curiosity pulled up a chair beside them. The scientist in me refused to sit this one out.

I cleared my dry throat.

"You're Lucien." The name came out with a slight stutter.

The effect was immediate—his ears twitched and his head snapped back up.

“Lucien.” It bobbed its muzzle once, twice, thrice. Then the corners curled up, revealing rows of gleaming sharp teeth. Apparently, that was a smile. A chilling, wolfish smile that promised medical emergencies, but still a smile.

I stared at his fangs. All of them were sharp, but four oversized canines interlocked at the front on the sides. A butcher would have wept with envy.

When he moved toward me, so very slowly—shoulders rolling out with caution, paws hesitant—I remained glued to the moss. Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t leave. Boulders were piled up behind him, and there were even more behind me.

“Mate…so perfect.” He sighed, making me gasp, eyes full of adoration roaming all over my face. “So beautiful.”

The beast crouched in front of me, staring with his scorching eyes like headlights from hell, his head cocked to the left. Up close, he was massive. I was left breathless.

“Much more beautiful in person. Yes. Mate, yes.”

Gawking at me, he lifted one hand and reached out for my face…with those slightly curved, tipped claws that could slice necks, bones, and small airplanes.

I let out a small shriek and stumbled away, hitting the back of my head on the rocks behind me. A small lizard, startled by my movements, slipped away into a crevice.

The look of pain that crossed his face hurt my heart deeper than those claws ever could.

“Mate hate Lucien.” His voice dropped, just like his head, and he turned away, his back to me now.

“No, wait.” Massaging my head, I reached out for his furry hand.

Sparks. Magical mate-bond sparks.

I swallowed, pawing at my neck. “I don’t…*hate* you.”

He gazed down at my hand wrapped around one of his clawed fingers and then back up at me. I let go, taking a step away.

“Mate scared of Lucien.”

A pang of guilt washed over me. “I’m sorry.”

His scent dominated everything. I felt sparks buzzing in the air, and he wasn’t even touching me! My brain struggled to keep up with the sensory

overload.

I dared to look up at him and drew in a gasp. A lone tear trailed down his muzzle.

I had hurt him. *Unacceptable.*

I balled my hands into fists. *Be brave, Yvaine.* “I’m not scared.”

He pouted and averted his sad eyes. My nails dug half-moons into my palms, matching the day one peeking out in the sky. *You can do better!*

“Then…Mate thinks Lucien ugly?”

Ugly?

“Lucien, you are…” My voice trailed off as I searched for words that evaded me. *Ugly* had never crossed my mind. Mighty, colossal, impossible, yes. But ugly? *Never.* “Very handsome and immensely powerful.”

He perked up, peeking at me shyly. “Immensely? And very?”

I nodded.

“Mate promise?”

“Of course. I just…never expected you to be, well, *you*. I’ve never seen anything, er, *anyone* like you. You’re a surprise.” A life-altering and eye-popping surprise. But still a surprise. “I don’t know what you are.”

“Human call Lucien many names. Lucifer, mutt, beast, *lycan*—”

My eyes widened. “You are a lycan.”

And, as hard as it had been to believe at first, Logan was somewhere in there.

The sparks, the blond lashes, and the scent were the only common traits, but he *was* Logan. Or an extension of Logan, my reindeer, the guy I’d fallen for long before I knew he was fated to be mine. Granted, I was still irritated with him and definitely owed him several lectures—maybe a few more wacks of an umbrella over that blond head—but he was my mate. My *mythological* mate.

I gathered courage. *Come on, Yvaine.*

Cheeks flushed, I edged closer then stopped, shifting from foot to foot, trying hard not to gaze up into his eyes. A sharp twinge of something very close to stage fright twisted in the pit of my stomach.

I rested a hand against his chest and rose on my tiptoes. The other pressed down on his shoulder, just as I’d done with Logan at the party. *Before we kissed for the first time.*

Lucien was wide-eyed and carefully still. He sucked in a sharp breath. Under my palm, his heart abandoned any typical rhythm.

Smiling, I brushed my lips against his…*cheek. As if someone like him could have cheeks.*

A breath later, the left side of my face was pressed against the short fur covering his pectoral. Heavy arms engulfed me while he buried his muzzle in my hair…sniffing.

He was so warm that Scotland suddenly felt tropical. His scent was sending my nose into overdrive. *I wonder what he thinks of my scent.*

"Another kiss?" His hopeful tone sparked a giggle out of me, and I pecked the side of his muzzle again.

Lucien beamed, flashing me that prehistoric dentition. "One more?"

I smiled. "Last one."

I repeated the operation, with Lucien watching me with rapt eyes, arms secured around me. It was an electrifying experience, literally and figuratively.

"Last one now?"

"You said that *last* time!" I poked his rock-hard abs. "Are you cheating?"

He lowered his head. "Yes." A pout tugged at his muzzle. "Lucien is sorry."

His honesty was almost alarming. Had Lucien inherited it all and left Logan with none?

"I forgive you," I teased.

When his eyes darted back to mine, my stomach fluttered. *I'll need time to get used to those.* They were crimson, flecked with silver specks lost within.

Was Logan also lost? Lucien and Logan were so different. Colors, voices, mannerisms…

"You threw branch at Lucien," he said with a reverent tone.

"Oh, sorry about that. Did I hurt you?"

"No." His chest puffed out. "Mate strong. Lucien proud."

A laugh escaped me. "Well, it was still wrong of me, even if it was self-defense. Violence is never ideal."

"Human is captain. Human beats up many players."

I pursed my lips. "Don't remind me."

"Now Lucien can mark mate?"

My hand flew to my neck. His eyes followed, glinting with ferocious hope. "What? No!"

Those fangs looked perfectly capable of causing a hemorrhage, assuming they didn't burst my carotid artery first.

"But Lucien must mark mate," he said with a hint of a growl and a plea, eyes darkening. Until now, he'd been nothing but gentle, but there it was—that Alpha edge.

"No, Lucien, you can't. Please understand." I tried slipping from his arms, but they didn't budge.

"Why Mate always say no?" He huffed, releasing me and turning away with his arms folded over his chest. "No here, no there. No, no, and no!" Another long sigh. "Always no to Lucien."

He had a point. Saying *no* shouldn't be so easy. Like Pythagoras said, the shortest words, *yes* and *no*, often require the deepest thought.

"And the *human* never let Lucien see mate. Human pushed Lucien away. Human said we can't mark mate. Human said we cannot mate, Mate." Lucien glanced back at me with a frown. "But why not? We are mates."

Human. He was referring to Logan. Could *Human* hear us? Was Rudolph spying on me through Lucien's eyes while I stammered and blushed? Was he mortified? Amused? Or was he just…away?

Logan and Lucien were two souls forced to dwell in one body.

"I…" My cheeks warmed, probably matching his eyes by now. "We should get to know each other first. Spend time together. Talk."

"Spend first time?" His head tilted, like he didn't understand. "But you are my mate. Mark now. Talk later."

I sighed, my neck throbbing under my palm. If things with Logan weren't unfinished and his fangs were smaller, maybe I'd let him mark me…one day.

"True, we are mates, but Logan and I have…*unresolved* business. And there are *procedures* to follow."

"But Lucien and Human love Mate forever."

Catching my clenched hand, he flattened it against his hard chest. "Our heart belongs to Mate." His voice was softer now. "Only to Mate." Two careful fingers brushed my cheek, his claws angled away from my skin with painstaking precision.

His scent was like Logan's, only muskier, like twin versions of the same fragrance. Lucien smelled of rain and wilderness; Logan carried the city version of it. They both emanated that same rich amber scent I was already

addicted to, climbing straight onto the podium beside fresh heather honey and clean gauze.

“How did you find me?”

A plane or a ferry seemed unlikely. Airport security would’ve had a few concerns.

“Lucien ran, then swam, then more run.” A shrug of his mountainous shoulders, and the matter was closed.

I tried to calculate the *how*s. “What did you eat while you were swimming?” He had crossed an *ocean* for me. A burst of affection made my chest tingle, followed by anxiety. He could’ve died. Drowned. The ocean didn’t care who navigated it.

And a cruise ship needed around a week to make the trip. *I* wouldn’t have managed to cross, let alone so quickly, in wolf form. Most wolves I knew couldn’t.

But Lucien wasn’t a werewolf.

“A squishy thing with long tendrils.” He wrinkled his snout. “Didn’t want to go to stomach and it slapped Lucien.” Another nose twitch. “Made teeth black. *Bleh*.”

A giant squid?!

Was *bleh* his version of *ew*?

More affection swelled.

“Can I…can I see your hand, Lucien?” I smiled at him, holding my hand up. He ducked his head, all sheepish and shy now, but he eventually nodded and opened his palm for me. Before I touched it, he brushed it over his leg.

I traced my fingers over his hand and up his forearm. He wagged his tail like crazy, thumping the ground so hard they probably heard it down in England.

This whole thing felt surreal…

I stroked his fur, slowly, carefully. Sparks from the mate bond leapt between us, stealing my breath. The separation anxiety I had been feeling vaporized, and a soothing sensation cured all the loneliness I had accumulated over the years. *Stephen, I needed this.* It felt as though every nerve in my body had been asleep for weeks, months.

We could have had this all along if Logan had come forward. But he lied.

My throat clogged, but it dissolved the moment Lucien started *purring*.

My giant mate, a different species who crossed an ocean for me, also purred! *Aww!*

“You like cuddles?”

His rumble deepened. “What are…*cuddles*?”

My heart dropped. I stroked his ear and head, and he pressed into my hand as I explained, “An exchange of affection.”

“Lucien never got cuddles before.”

Before I could ask why not, a slick and raspy tongue dragged from my chin to my temple. *Who needs facials anymore?*

I jerked back, wiping my face with my sleeve. “*Ew.*” I wince-smiled at him.

He flashed me a toothy—or should I say *fangy*—grin.

“Can Lucien mark Mate now? We talked. We did cuddles.” He folded his arms. Very Logan-like.

“Lucien…” I warned him, still smiling.

His *fangy* grin widened. “A joke.” He opened his arms. “But a hug for Lucien?”

I blinked as he lumbered toward me.

Then everything changed. His mane bristled, his ears flexing back. A growl erupted from him, shaking the earth along with my teeth.

“Sorry!” I blurted. Maybe I did something wrong? Maybe refusing the mark pushed him over the edge? Maybe he was a volatile creature? I knew nothing about lycans!

But he wasn’t looking at me. His blazing red eyes were fixed on something *behind* me.

Huge hands seized my waist and lifted me effortlessly like I was a flowerpot. Sparks shot through me at the contact. A gust of wind later, I was perched on the branch of a pine tree, needles crowning my head.

“Mate, stay here.” His head remained turned east.

“No, wait! Where are—”

Too late.

One colossal leap and he vanished beyond the boulders, like a shadow fleeing the sunrise.

Then I heard them.

One by one, foreign wolves let out long calls. Their howls climbed toward the sky, almost bouncing off the clouds that lived up there, pervasive and unmovable.

Across the opposite slope, they came, rogues pouring into the clearing. They fanned out and stopped, forming a semicircle of brown and rust-orange fur underneath my tree.

Savage eyes, four pairs, locked on me. Their snarls were also for me. Their long fangs, though some chipped and some missing, still gleamed cruelly white.

A spark of despair ignited in my gut, and the need to fight, to *defend my mate*, grew stronger with each inhale. For once, I wanted to be the monster. The one nothing hunted. The one everything avoided.

I growled back. Hopping down off the branch, I squared myself against the slobbering wolves. Shifting into my wolf wasn't an option—those few vulnerable seconds could get me killed.

"Come on, scoundrels." My hands fisted. My wolf surged up, claws first, fangs popping out and cutting my lower lip, desperate to fight. I shoved her back so hard it hurt.

The four rogues crouched, drool swinging from their jaws, ready to savor their next meal.

I could take two, no doubt. Just because I preferred healing didn't mean I couldn't do my share of breaking when necessary and put some manners into these rogues. I knew how to defend myself, and I had Alpha blood in my veins.

Though I'd probably end up in ribbons, maybe missing a limb. Nothing medicine couldn't fix.

The four rogues ceased their growling, ears shooting upright. With tails tucked, they scrambled away.

All my sweat and worry? *Wasted.*

"Yeah! Run away!" I shouted after them, annoyed I'd psyched myself up for nothing.

I turned and walked straight into something solid. Ridiculously solid. But soft, too. Except I landed on my butt like an uncoordinated pup. A clawed hand reached down to haul me up. "Sorry," Lucien mumbled, staring at his humungous feet, all embarrassed.

His long fangs were dripping and glistening with fresh blood. His chest and arms were drenched, too.

"You okay?" My hand slid over his blood-matted fur. None of it smelled like his at least.

He nodded twice, peering at me, his eyes roaming over the length of my face.

Because he was mine, I hugged him as tightly as I could, smelling his wild scent.

"Your human is a pain in the butt," I mumbled. *He'll be a pain in your ass…literally.* Heat rushed to my cheeks at the intrusive thought.

Lucien tilted his head.

"But not you." I squeezed him tighter. "You're the best."

His tongue lolled happily, like I'd just told him he was the goodest boy in the universe, and his arms folded around me. "Lucien best only for Mate."

I smirked. "And you're so much bigger than Logan."

He puffed out a laugh.

"But next time…" I leaned back enough to look up at him. "Let me help."

I swore I heard him scoff.

When I peeked around the boulders, my eyes widened. A dozen rogues. All dead. All sliced to surgical perfection. Now I understood why the other four had fled.

I would have done the same.

Without warning, Lucien whirled around, his long tail knocking me to the ground. "*Oof!*"

I glanced up in time to see him leap over a nearby rock.

He yanked out another hidden rogue and threw it down onto the dirt. Lucien's roar only ended when the rogue stopped twitching. The echo faded, but my heart still hammered. I staggered to my feet after witnessing his brutality.

Suddenly, he turned to me, and the fury vanished. His ears twitched, his tail wagged, and he purred like a radiator.

My rational side urged caution. But a mountain of muscle, black fur, red eyes, and incorrect grammar stood between me and doubt.

Later that evening, tucked in Lucien's arms as he carried me through the dark hills in search of somewhere to sleep, too exhausted to tell him to return to the MacKenzies—not that I wanted him to—I mulled over what *he* was.

What made Lucien stand out the most? The way he treated the forest like a resource, a birthright, his in never-ending abundance. He moved like

he owned it.

My mate was something else. Gold wrapped up in faux darkness, sweet yet unhinged.

Logan wasn't a werewolf.

My mate wasn't like me. He wasn't like Archie. He wasn't like anyone I'd ever known.

No. He was really a *lycan*.

A creature I had always assumed belonged to old stories.

And this creature? This giant, beautiful, fierce creature?

He was *mine*. All mine.

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CHAPTER FOUR

YVAINE

Ever since the invention of fairy tales, humans have been sold the society-approved fantasy of finding their own prince charming. You know the one.

The man of every heterosexual woman's dreams. Chivalrous. Heroic. Smelling of expensive soap and wearing clothes I've only ever seen as curtains. He rescues the damsel in great, often silly, distress, sweeps her away on an obligatory white horse, and gallops into the glowing sunset, with the happy birds chirping to their eternal love.

Me? In a way, I did get my own fairy tale.

Except I wasn't a damsel, and I wasn't in distress. Instead of the prince, I got the beast, the sort that would snack on the prince…and the horse.

There were no glowing sunsets, only the cloudy Scottish sky. And the birds? Gone, hiding probably.

So yes, my fairy tale looked a tad different.

A little secret?

I'd choose the beast who slaughtered the white horse, flattened the puny prince, and scared away every last bird, a thousand times over.

Because honestly? Princes were overrated.

Skinny calves. No sparks. And absolutely zero bite!



SPARKS WOKE ME. A TENDER GAZE GREETED ME, AND MY OWN AFFECTION answered in my chest. The ground—or should I say Lucien—shifted underneath me.

Last night, he had stuck my head beneath his muzzle and rested his chin on top of it. He was a five-star mattress and a blanket, two in one. No, wait, three in one—he purred too.

My face was resting on the soft pillow that was the hollow of his shoulder. His scent and all his fluffiness had lulled me into the best sleep of my life. *Finally*, I could say that I had experienced sleeping curled up against my mate, even if not in his human form—a minor detail.

"Cuddles."

I hummed in response.

Lucien growled in approval when I shifted closer and sniffed his neck. He tightened his grip. "Lucien so lucky."

I sleepily rubbed my face against his gothic Santa Claus beard. When I glanced up at him, he was already watching me with an adoration that humbled me.

I could have spent all day looking into those eyes. When I first met him, I compared them to hell—a lazy comparison. Cowardly, even.

Now? They resembled twin Mars. Scientists said the planet's color came from iron oxidizing over millions of years into rust-red dust. His eyes were out of this world.

"Good morning, *Lucy*." My words were muffled against his chest.

A puff of warm breath escaped his nostrils, dispersing into the chilly morning air like steam from an old train.

"*Lucien*," he corrected with a frown.

I tapped his nose. "I prefer Lucy."

His ears flattened. "But Lucy is girl name."

I chuckled. "If you say so…*Lucy*."

He grumbled as I extricated myself from his spark-producing embrace and hopped up. Stretching my arms overhead, I welcomed the satisfying

pops from my shoulders and spine before wiggling life back into my toes. His martian eyes followed my movements with interest.

The pearly dawn of the Scottish morning wore a blanket of silver-gray clouds, and the branches here were already dotted with hints of spring. I was proud of my genetics putting up with the gloomy climate.

I approached the lake equipped with a smile and a lighter heart and took a deep breath. Small waves rippled across the loch, and for a moment, I imagined millennium-old sea monsters chasing each other beneath the surface. Maybe Lucy's ancestors had chased *those* monsters away…or had eaten them.

Bears had been here. Maybe they still were, the breeze carrying their scent. The half-chewed bodies of a dozen fish were strewn among the lakeside shrubs.

Before the water could dare lick my still-wiggling toes, a furry *wall* materialized in front of me, and I was scooped off the ground and cradled in its arms.

"Hey!"

The wall peered down at me from over his muzzle, then crouched down between me and the enemy (the water). He reached out and dipped a single clawed finger into the lake.

His verdict came immediately.

"Cold water." The clawed finger withdrew. "Too much for Mate."

Warmth bombarded my chest, enough to save on heating bills for an entire Scottish winter.

"You're so caring." My arms wrapped around his waist, my chin perching on his chest as I looked up at him. "But I can do it. I take ice baths. Good for she-wolf blood circulation, as long as I'm not menstruating."

"Mate can't bathe. Too cold. Too dangerous." He set me down five big steps farther from the shore.

"But I need to wash! The last time I showered was yesterday morning!"

"*No.*"

End of the discussion.

Maybe it was the stiff posture. Maybe it was the crossed arms. Maybe it was the puffed fur around his neck. Whatever the reason, I burst out laughing.

"Aww, Lucien, you're adorable."

His frown deepened. “Lucien not adorable.”

My grin widened further. “Yes, you are.” I pinched what passed for his cheeks—the short, trimmed fur stretched over his muscles.

Yes, he had alarming quantities *everywhere*.

“I’ve been swimming in lochs since I was a pup. Trust me, there’s nothing dangerous in there.” I pointed toward the water. “You don’t believe in the Loch Ness Monster, do you?”

Lucien bared his fangs, looking at me despondently.

“Go catch us some rabbits for breakfast while I do a few laps.”

His nose scrunched. “Lucien no like rabbits.”

“Why?”

He grimaced. “Too many bones. Little meat. *Bleh*!”

After a pause, he launched into a detailed warning about lake weeds grabbing my legs and dragging me away. When he finally paused for breath, I clasped my hands together. “Please, Lucien? For me?”

His eyes narrowed. I widened mine. And he relented with an inevitable huff.

Alpha or omega, lycan or werewolf, it didn’t matter—no one in the history of our species had ever resisted the devastating combo of *please*, big eyes, and strategic eyelash fluttering from their mate.

It was written in our DNA.



BACKSTROKING, MY BODY WAS ALMOST OBSCURED BY THE MURKY WATER AS my hair floated around my face, playing with the long algae curiously reaching out from underneath me. A shape, like a hyphen in the air above the glen, caught my attention, but rather than stopping and freezing with hypothermia while squinting at it, I kept moving. A buzzard? A hawk? A second black hyphen joined the first above the crest of the hill.

Spending time with my mate was refreshing, and not just because of the climate. It was a balm for my soul. A caress for my heart.

I chuckled aloud, sputtering some water with it, thinking of how Lucien had swum around the lake before *letting* me go in. Probably scaring the fish

to death and searching for imaginary dangers. Then he went who-knows-where to hunt who knows what. I still remembered how the fir treetops shook at his passage.

My mind focused on nothing but the rhythm of my strokes, the sound of the water, the smell of home, the feeling of a moment that was only now and never would be again, the peace surrounding me, and the smell of heathers. Heathers reminded me of Mom. Back then, she wove flower collars for the wild wolves visiting the pack, before she and my uncles brought us hunting.

I dove down, touched the rocky bottom, and found myself thinking about Logan. Unreadable, just like a lake. You saw what was on the surface but had no idea what was underneath. Lucien was one of the things he hid well. What else?

Things would be okay. After all, we were mates. Almost all the mated couples I knew were happy, so why wouldn't we be? The odds weren't against us, right?

I tried to swim the full length of the loch but couldn't manage without my lungs burning; a toss of my head above the surface got the hair and most of the water out of my eyes.

Having spent enough time freezing for today, I decided to dry off quickly with my shirt and get dressed in yesterday's clothes. Years of camping in the woods made me resilient, especially knowing I would head back to the MacKenzies soon.

As I was trying to untangle my hair from knots and a squishy leaf that somehow had managed to burrow into the strands, the bushes shook. Lucien marched out. Every time I looked at him, something inside me lunged toward him, like my heart had grown hands and was dragging me by the ribs to him.

Lucien was dragging a bloodied boar by its hind leg, its tongue lolling out. He then dropped it on the ground, flattening the ferns.

"Mate." He brought me to his chest and licked me from chin to ear. "Lucien missed you," he said with a reverent tone.

I appreciated the lick-kiss—the mate-bond sparks were there—but I wasn't going to return it.

He sat down, making a few pebbles jump with the movement, and dragged me over to sit on his lap. "Breakfast is here."

I admired how he methodically removed the fur with his claws. Then he started pulling out and discarding parts of the animal. There were three piles: garbage such as the pelt and bones, the edible bits, and the best parts. Lucien picked the latter, chewing without offering.

He must be hungry. I stroked his arm absently. I didn't take it personally that he didn't offer me any. After all, he hunted the boar and deserved to feed himself first. But then I watched, horrified, as he plucked the chewed-up food from his mouth and brought it over to me. "For Mate. Best part."

"Lucien! Don't be disgusting!" I slapped his beastly hand away, my cheeks red with mortification and boar blood droplets.

He insisted.

My palm stayed firmly clamped over my mouth. I wrinkled my nose and turned my face to the left; his hand followed. I tilted my chin up, then down, but he shadowed my escapes. I knew I was acting like a spoiled brat after he went to get me food, but I'd challenge anyone to accept meat already *chewed* in someone else's mouth.

Apparently, Lucien had already devoured two sheep on his hunt, further proven by the tuft of white wool still wedged between his fangs, and had dessert too—a badger—on the way back. Which meant this entire boar was for me. All of it.

A low, wounded whine slipped from him.

I pinched the bridge of my nose. "Lucien, I'm not a baby bird. I can feed myself!"

His ears dropped, his head following, as he stared mournfully at the mangled chunk of meat resting in his palm. Heartbroken.

Great. Just great. Now I've offended him.

"Listen, Lucien." Every time I uttered his name, it seemed to excite him a little, his ears twitching in response. In the end, he was just an overgrown puppy dressed in beastly fur; all he wanted was cuddles and to take care of his mate. "I don't eat raw meat in my human form. The bacteria would make me sick." I palmed his forearm. "But I'm grateful you hunted this for me."

He looked away, still unconvinced.

I sighed. "I'll cook it over the fire. How about that?"

"But Mate teeth so puny." He frowned at my mouth. "Lucien must chew meat for Mate."

I bared my teeth with a small growl, and he immediately leaned in to lick them. I giggled and dodged him, also trying not to gag. “Please, Lucy?”

He huffed. “Okay…”

Relief flooded me. I didn’t want to hurt his feelings by explaining that food already chewed was revolting. *Mate or not.* I’d been born with a functional set of teeth, perfectly capable of chewing my own meal.

After gathering some dry wood and coaxing a crackling fire to life, I skewered the pieces of meat (those not chewed) and roasted them over the flames. Lucy watched the boar meat with fascination as it browned. So, I offered him some portions as I couldn’t possibly eat the whole animal and I didn’t want to waste it.

“Good, huh?” I nudged his arm.

He looked sheepish but nodded adorably before inhaling three-quarters of the boar. “Yes, good. Thank you, Mate.”

It was strangely relaxing to be here, in the middle of nowhere. The Highlands rolled out like a sea with big blue-green waves in front of me, with glinting waterways, shadows in their glens, and hollowed corries. A flock of wild geese passed above, and on the opposite hillside, five red deer grazed among the rippling purple heather while a soft Highland drizzle tapped on all of us.

I reached up my palm to collect it. “Rain is called *smirr* in Scots.”

“*Smirrrr.*”

I grinned and flicked it at him, giggling. His eyes widened in surprise. He also gathered water in his hands but didn’t throw it at me. Instead, he transferred over the rain into my cupped palms so I could throw it at him again!

Two large stags were eyeing Lucien, heads down. He ignored them, at least for now.

“Lucien doesn’t like deer,” he admitted when I asked about his preferences. “Lucien likes pigs and sheep.” To emphasize his point, he licked his muzzle before returning to his favorite activity: watching me. Minutes could pass without him blinking. The scientist in me wanted to time it; the woman in me was self-conscious under that unwavering gaze. It was hard not to imagine Logan somewhere behind those eyes, with that amber scent drifting over me. I probably looked like a savage…and I was okay with it.

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CHAPTER FIVE

YVAINE

After the boar feast, I decided to wolf out. Time for Lucien and my wolf Zelda to get acquainted. And my brain needed a break—she hadn't stopped yelping since Lucien had shown up.

"You can't mark her." I'd repeated it dozens of times and then some. Lucien waved me away, as if he were deviating a crow's fly.

"No marking, no mating, no sniffing inappropriate places. Lucien got it." His impatient grumble only made me laugh.

Since he didn't believe I could walk on my own, he carried me down a slope to a small clearing. After a *Turn around* and *Don't peek, Lucy*, I stripped off my now two-day-old clothes and proceeded to fold them over a flat rock that seemed almost there for that purpose.

Eyes closed, I drew in a deep inhale and let my wolf spirit out. The shift overtook me, seamless and instinctual.

I dropped to all fours midstep, my feet shattering into hazel-brown paws. Canines surged from my gums. Muscles knotted and rewove like living things and bones popped and crunched, ones unnatural for humans. Fur burst free into the rushing wind as my breath ripped from my muzzle.

The shift was barely finished, my fur still sprouting to its full length, when my overexcited wolf yipped and launched herself to her mate, beyond eager to spend time with a lycan. *"My lycan,"* Zelda said.

Lucien was sitting on a boulder, elbows on parted knees, very Logan-like again, looking as innocent and peaceful as a gargoyle of a gothic

cathedral. Perking his ears and tipping his head, he looked up at Zelda. Immediately, his eyes filled with so much adoration I wondered if I could keep *just* Lucien forever and return Logan and his inevitable headaches.

My wolf took full control. I feared that she would *force* Lucy to mark her, mate her, and start a family with twins or triplets—the genetics for those a certainty here. I slapped a hand over my eyes as Zelda yipped and, at top speed, tore circles around a stunned Lucien. *Is she greeting her mate or performing some shamanic wolf fertility dance? Hard to tell.*

"Lucien mate," he said in absolute awe, gawking at her with parted lips, like he just walked into a form of lycan nirvana. *Lycanvana*.

For the rest of the morning, Lucien and Zelda played and chased each other, forgetting about everything else, with Lucien also on all fours though triple her size. I watched them like my favorite movie.

My wolf harassed Lucien the whole time. She ambushed his hind legs, bit his tail, hanging from it with all four paws when he tried to walk, then pounced onto his back with no warning and tackled him to the moss. Meanwhile, Lucien accepted every blow and let her do anything, so long as she remained under his radar. I was mesmerized by his saintly patience, considering he had purred through the entire ordeal.

No rogues or wild animals disturbed us; either we'd gotten lucky or the predators simply avoided us.

When we reached a pond in the canopy, stopping for a well-earned drink, I sighed, content. This was a place where time forgot to pass. Somewhere gnomes and woodland spirits would hide from modern progress.

The forest breathed around us, full of birdsong and visions of green. The peace. The absence of humanity. It felt like I was seeing all of this for the very first time, like someone had removed a blindfold made of work, packed schedules, and city life from my eyes.

I had forgotten it. I had forgotten what it meant to be wild, and free, and myself. My *true* self. A creature of the wilderness, where boars defended their young. Where predators prowled. Where you felt moss under your feet instead of shoe soles and smelled rain instead of matcha lattes.

I'd become civilized. Too civilized. The realization settled over me with surprising weight.

Back in Montana, I had barely shifted into my wolf. I hadn't forgotten how to be a wolf. I had forgotten that I *was* one.

Somewhere between working to be who I wanted to be and becoming who I needed to be, I'd left part of myself behind. The wild part. The part that understood freedom wasn't the absence of responsibility—it was remembering who you were beneath it.

But the forest hadn't forgotten me.

It had simply been waiting for me to come back.

And I was going to enjoy it.

Suddenly, without warning, Zelda shuffled backward, then charged like a battering ram. Caught off guard, Lucien toppled into the water, causing a miniature tsunami. Before he'd even resurfaced, Zelda was already tearing through the thistles like a bat out of hell…with the devil himself on our heels.

I tried to stop her, scold her, lightly threaten her, but her perfectly functioning ears weren't listening to me.

The growl that erupted behind us might still be echoing all throughout Scotland.

If he marks us now, we deserve it.

The futile attempt to outrun a lycan was, well, *futile*.

One moment, Zelda was crouched behind a fallen log, camouflaged beneath mud, leaves, and what looked suspiciously like a rotten bird's nest, complete with ticks. The next, a giant pair of furry arms scooped her up. "Caught you."

Lucien panted, oozing with satisfaction at a whimpering Zelda in his embrace. "So easy to snatch." He nuzzled her forehead. "Your little legs can't carry you away from me."

With a tender smile, he licked her muzzle. Zelda butted her head against his with an indignant yip, fretting and huffing, all riled up from being caught.

The moment her paws touched the ground, she pranced around Lucien all over again, her tail wiggling. Lucien shook himself from nose to tail, spraying pond water, and let her be.

After another round of bullying, Zelda yawned, displaying her tonsils, and tucked her head between her front paws, looking up at him. A blow to the gut for poor Lucy.

"Oh no…" He immediately crouched. "Lucien's little mate is tired?"

My wolf nodded with huge eyes and a long, drawn-out whine.

I snorted. *“Drama queen.”* She wasn’t tired, not even slightly. The furry thing just wanted more attention. It worked.

Lucien gathered her very carefully, pressing her to his chest, sniffing behind her ears and rubbing his damp muzzle against her neck. Zelda licked his chin and I swore Lucien blushed beneath all that black fur.

“Okay, time to shift back, Zelda.”

She refused.

“You nasty furball.”

She made herself heavier out of pure spite. Lucien had to lick her clean in most places, and she had to purr in his neck for another ten minutes before she relented.

After getting my clothes and phasing back, Lucien declared that I looked even more beautiful and was pleased when human-me hugged him tightly.

Only a few streaks of sunlight remained, dying golden veins glowing past the canopy of trees and bleeding across the moist earth. I followed the last light, first with my eyes, then my feet.

In the stillness, I strolled undisturbed, regaining confidence in my humanity—the feeling happened after every shift. Until I was swept into muscular arms, and Lucien carried me like a stolen treasure to our nest.



WE FOUND A CAVE WITH FRAGMENTS OF SOME ANIMAL LONG DEAD, THE bones as pale and brittle as broken biscuits.

Lucien inspected the cave with grave severity, sniffing every rock, every shadow, and every suspicious-looking pebble. Then he nodded. “Good nest.”

Verdict delivered, he curled around me like a living fortress. After meeting Zelda, Lucien had somehow become even more protective. But at least he seemed content here with me, the faint light of the dying sun kissing a farewell on our skin, his pile of dead animals for dinner beside us, and an egg he’d proudly stolen from a partridge “for mate dessert” tucked away for later.

“Does Mate like her school?” He nudged his nose against my cheek.

“I do.” I scratched behind his ear. His eyelids drooped. “I love medicine. I love learning…and my roommates make the difficult days easier.”

During our wandering, I’d told him about everything—university, hospital shifts, exams, my dreams of becoming a surgeon, and my fears of failing a patient.

“Human hates studying,” Lucien grumbled. “Never studies. But Human loves to watch Mate study. Human proud of you and always says, ‘Look how clever Bunny Doc is.’” He puffed out his chest. “Human brags. Lucien also brags.”

My heart throbbed.

“Is Mate still angry with Human?”

I rubbed my temples. “It’s complicated. Logan lied to me. Pretended to be someone else. I can’t trust that.”

“But Human scared. That’s why he lied.”

This was a good opportunity to investigate their relationship. “Scared of what?” I asked. Though by then, an idea had already started to form.

His ears suddenly snapped upright; the change was instant.

“Lucy?”

He rose to his full height in one fluid movement, his ears brushing the cave ceiling. A menacing growl rolled through his chest.

“What is it?”

I had asked Lucien to take me home before nightfall but, too engrossed in our bubble of sparks, stolen eggs, and cuddles, I had forgotten about one tiny detail. *My family.*

When a line of mean-looking wolves emerged from the trees, I realized *they* hadn’t forgotten me.

“Oh no.”

It was my snarling uncles in their huge wolf forms, hackles raised. Grandpa approached behind them, his furrowed gray eyebrows looking like two furry caterpillars.

“Hello there, *rionnag*,” Grandma said pleasantly as she cocked her shotgun, its familiar noise now the sound of impending doom echoing throughout the clearing.

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CHAPTER SIX

YVAINE

I wasn't sure whether to laugh, cry, or roll my eyes.

So I breathed in oxygen, performing the minimum task required for my body. My prefrontal cortex suggested, *Take a mental picture. One day, this will be hilarious.*

My uncles switched to their human forms the instant they spotted me. Fur retreated, paws lengthened into hands, and muzzles folded back into faces, as natural as the icy stream chattering over the stones nearby.

I met Uncle Clyde's eyes. "How did you find us?"

"Easy." His dark gaze slid to Lucien, narrowing. "We just followed the trail of dead sheep and the shouts of angry shepherds."

Hansel and Gretel had breadcrumbs. Lucien? Carcasses.

"Aye, three crofters demanded the head of the beast that feasted on their lost coin," Grandpa added stoically.

Lucien crouched around me, unleashing a nasty snarl. A tuft of his fur drifted into my mouth, making me cough. His growl stopped mid-rumble, and he looked down at me funnily, tilting his head to the left, one ear flopping sideways.

Uncle Clyde stepped forward, one fist striking his opposite palm with a crack. My eldest uncle—personal founder of the Yvaine's Boyfriend Removal Department, one of Mom's four brothers, and Co-Alpha with Grandpa—was the family's hound. Before I was born, they had to lock him in a high-security prison to protect everyone else, no chains strong enough

against his anger. When his twin brother died, something in him died too, and what remained tore the pack and its people apart. Only when his fated mate found him did he leave the abyss he had fallen into, though only partially. Some survive loss, while others learn to live with the monster it leaves behind. Uncle Clyde had done the latter.

He studied Lucien the way a butcher might inspect a sinewy cut of meat.

Unimpressed.

"*Nighean òg*," he said without taking his eyes off my mate. "Step aside. We shall *kill* the *bhiast* properly."

"Aye." Uncle Angus nodded. "Then revive him and kill him again."

"Let's make it quick," Uncle Knox added, checking the sky. "Kickoff's in an hour."

"We may have time to stop at Keith's first." Angus scratched his beard thoughtfully. "Venison gut sandwiches today."

My mind zeroed in on *kill*, not in a metaphorical sense. My uncles always chatted and teased like that before a slaughter.

"Excuse me! Nobody is killing anyone. Lucien is my ma—"

A furry hand covered my mouth.

"They're my family, Lucy," I said, my voice muffled.

"No." One claw tapped his chest. "Lucien is family."

"But that doesn't mean—"

Uncle Angus clapped once. "Let's take Yvaine away from it."

"Aye," Uncle Knox agreed. "She'll cheer up after a venison sandwich."

A growl split the valley in two. Birds exploded from the treetops. Pinecones shook free from the branches overhead. The cheerful chatter died.

Lucien's awkward, shy side was completely ripped away. This was the lycan, and to him, these werewolves weren't a family rescuing a relative, they were usurpers of his territory—and they had just announced they were taking his mate away. An unacceptable concept.

My uncles accepted the challenge with eager snarls and cracking bones. Uncle Clyde's broad frame folded into a massive russet wolf, and Knox and Angus followed, their pelts bristling as they spread out into a practiced formation.

"Okay, listen up!" I threw my hands out, body still vibrating from Lucien's growl. "This is all unnecessary! He is my—"

The word never made it out.

The moment Lucien whipped around to face them, his cheeky tail caught me full force. The impact launched me into a tree. Blood sprayed from my nose when my face smacked against the rough bark and something stung my neck. Pine needles rained on my lap and head as I crumpled down, landing on my butt, legs awkwardly bent at the knees.

"—mate." I went unheard.

My family had just witnessed someone hurt me. The damage was done. Nothing could satisfy the MacKenzies but the annihilation of the one who harmed their niece. Mate or not. Accident or not.

If I were a human, I'd probably have a concussion, but the hit was nothing my hard werewolf skull couldn't handle. Dragging myself up, I saw the insanity of my family facing off against my mate. *And all because of a tail too long and a body too cumbersome.*

"Get Yvaine!" Grandpa's voice traveled from the slope.

Lucien assumed an attack stance, head forward, tail waving steadily.

My heart drummed in my chest, my breaths shortening. Blood still gushed from my nose, spilling over my hands, hot tears joining it. That's when the swelling began. With my sweaty palm, I found my neck. There was a bump there and…a dead bee on my arm. *Oh no.* I tried to speak up but couldn't.

Uncle Clyde burst forward while Knox and Angus started to close in from either side of Lucien. Grandpa was approaching my direction, slowly, while a shotgun blast thundered through the trees. *Grandma.*

Lucien twisted at the last second, pellets ripping through his shoulder instead of his chest.

Angus and Knox leapt and tackled him to the ground, but he slammed Knox's head against a rock and elbowed Angus in the belly. Uncle Clyde closed his powerful jaws around Lucien's shoulder and ripped. Lycan blood dripped from his mouth and stained his fur.

The stench of blood was unsettling.

"Are you okay, Knox?" Grandma called from her position, gun aimed.

Uncle Knox's wolf spat out some blood and one molar but otherwise looked fine.

Meanwhile, Lucien was deadly, rabid. Slime dripped from his gums. His fur bristled. It didn't matter that he had deep bite marks on his body or that he was severely outnumbered.

He growled so loud I was sure Archie could've heard him from Italy and charged, fighting nothing like a werewolf. He stayed low, shoulders hunched, claws spread wide, tail lashing behind him like another weapon. Every strike was wild.

But my uncles had years of practice and control. Innate killers with colossal wolves.

More lycan roars. More wolf snarls. Grandpa yelled, "Clyde! Watch out!" Then gunshots.

It all happened in mere minutes. I coughed, urging my healing to work faster while my family played diplomat in their ridiculous ways.

When they parted to reassess the situation, I croaked out, "All of you! Stop immediately!"

My voice froze everyone like an illustration—my uncles ready to pounce, Lucien about to snap, Grandpa sidling up to me. All of them glanced at me for a quick moment, then went right back to their stubborn animosity, like I wasn't even here.

Uncle Clyde ducked beneath Lucien's claws.

Uncle Knox crashed into his ribs.

Uncle Angus lunged again.

With another fit of coughs, I wheezed, "This…ridiculous…" Cough. "He…ma…te…"

"Yvaine, stay put. I'm taking you to the infirmary." Grandpa's scolding tone triggered me. I was an adult, not a brat. *They* were.

Goddess, please spare me from crazy relatives in the next life…

Two uncles stumbled and fell, and Lucien whined, clutching his arm to his chest, pouring blood.

"You have a knack for trouble, *rionnag*!" Grandma pumped another shell into her shotgun.

I scrambled away from where Grandpa was coming. "*Gealaich*! Come here! Or I'll call your parents right now!" The urge to stick my tongue out at him was suppressed by the desire to stop this ridiculousness. My head was spinning at the commotion happening around me.

I picked up a big rock.

Uncle Clyde shifted back, leaving the others to deal with Lucien. Although, it was more like playing, something they always did before killing, like a pack of orcas with a seal.

He swiped some blood from his chin. “*Nighean òg*, wait there. I’ll come help you.”

The swelling in my throat eased just enough for some words to squeeze through. “Back off!”

My rock landed in the middle of their fight.

That got their attention. Lucien glanced at me, his breath labored.

“Lucy.” I coughed and stumbled forward, my shaking hand reaching for him.

“Lucy?” A familiar voice echoed. “The bloke from the phone? Rudolph? And what happened to your face?”

Lachlan emerged through the tall grass. Relief flooded me—whenever we were apart, a piece of my heart left with him. If mates were bound by destiny’s thread, twins shared the same heart, split cleanly down the middle.

“What are you doing here, Lachlan?” Grandpa barked. “We told you to stay home!”

A muscle ticked in Lachlan’s cheekbone.

“Who’s Rudolph?” Uncle Angus emerged from his shift, frowning. “Sounds like a deer to me.”

Lachlan uncrossed his arms. “That thing’s the Masturbator?”

Grandpa nudged Grandma. “I’m confused, Riona. These kids have too many names.”

“They’ve got too much free time!” Grandma huffed.

“No.” Lucien pointed a claw at his chest. “Me Lucien. Lucien don’t know Masturbator.”

The clearing fell silent. Obviously nobody had expected the towering beast to speak with an unmistakably human voice and improper grammar.

“Never judge a book by its fang length,” I croaked, massaging my throat.

“The *bhiast* swallowed a man!” Uncle Angus declared. “He’s still alive inside it.”

Lachlan pointed at Lucien. “That’s why nobody’s ever seen the Masturbator’s wolf.” His gaze shifted to me. “Yvaine…your nose. And your neck.”

“The *bhiast* attacked her,” Uncle Knox piped in and Lucien snarled.

“It was an accident!” I hissed. “Lucy, this is my twin.” Lucien’s growl eased into a rumble, a heavy bass from his stomach, like a stereo with the treble tuned down. “Come here.”

He remained planted between me and my family, unmoving and untrusting, bleeding from both gunshot and bite wounds.

"*Logan*. Come—" I glared at my family. *Let's see them deny this.* "*Mate*."

His massive body swayed. His eyes squeezed shut. When they opened again, the crimson had thinned to molten silver. "*Bunny Doc*?"

A whoosh of air heaved from my constricted chest. *Logan.*

Somehow, the human had taken control of his lycan form. He stared at his blood-slick claws in shock, rotating his hands left and right.

"L-Logan?" I stuttered. His silver gaze shot to mine. Then—

"How dare you hurt my twin!" A branch shattered on the back of Lucien's skull, Lachlan still holding the splintered end.

Logan's jaw twitched, muscles quivering.

Lachlan gripped him by the throat and shoved him against the stones, the rocks cracking under his weight.

Red swallowed silver. Logan disappeared, sucked back in.

"You come to my homeland uninvited, kidnap my sister, and then hurt her?" Lachlan snarled, his nose almost touching Lucien's muzzle. "You poor excuse of a captain. You poor excuse of a *mate*. You deserve nothing but rejection!"

I bit my thumbnail. "Lachlan, stop!"

Lucien's lips curled as his hand rose.

The cords in Lachlan's neck strained as he shouted, "You abhorrent monster!"

A black claw flashed. Then a red slash appeared from Lachlan's right shoulder to his left waist, like a bloody seat belt.

Lachlan looked down, outraged. Then he leapt backward, bones snapping, fur bursting through skin, and shifted mid-air. His paws barely touched the ground before the massive red wolf pounced.

The loves of my life collided. One, a superior species with no control. The other, an overconfident hothead with an oversized wolf.

Their claws screeched against each other. Uncle Clyde stepped forward but Grandpa held him back. "Let them fight, Clyde. A brother is teaching a lesson to a mate."

Lachlan raked Lucien's shoulder before twisting away, spinning into a kick with his paw. His black fur came away red.

"I taught him that move," Uncle Clyde hummed, proudly.

Lucien caught Lachlan by the tail and, with one savage swing, hurled him through the trees. My brother vanished into the forest but came barreling back like an angry red comet.

My heart cracked wide open. Tears welling, throat burning, I ran up to them. “I can’t stand this. *Stop it or I will*!”

My twin listened. His wolf took one final bite of Lucy’s tail, a punishment for hurting me, and backed away, glancing at me with a whine. Lucien growled low in his throat but didn’t chase. Those red eyes flickered to mine, silver expanding again…

Until Lachlan, now in his human form, opened his big mouth again. “The Masturbator’s a two-legged mutt. Fitting.”

Lucien growled in warning. Apparently, Lachlan had the ability to annoy both Logan and Lucien alike.

With the fight over, my family spoke at the same time.

“*Rionnag*, come home.”

Uncle Clyde’s hand clamped down on my shoulder. “Straight to the infirmary.”

“Bee sting,” Uncle Angus hummed.

“Oh, *Gealaich*!” Uncle Knox whistled. “We’ll need to hide all the cattle from the *bhiast* back at the pack.”

“More like the children.”

“Not if it shifts back.” Grandpa addressed him then. “Lucien. Change to your human form and accept me as your Alpha,” he said, presenting him with the standard werewolf procedure to be welcomed into someone’s pack. “Otherwise, you’ll have to stay outside my territory and won’t be able to see Yvaine.”

Those were the wrong words.

Lucien charged and knocked Grandpa down, punched Lachlan square in the jaw, and smacked Uncle Clyde clean on the face with his tail—all at the same time, like a furry windwhirl. Then one enormous lycan scooped me off my feet…and ran.

The forest dissolved into streaks of green and brown. He ducked beneath fallen trunks, vaulted streams in a single stride, and threaded between trees that had room for his size.

Lucien was a breathing missile. Wind tore through my hair until I could barely breathe.

“Lucien!” I shouted over the rush. “Stop!”

When a rock face rose before us, he didn’t slow. Black claws punched into the stone, sending debris skittering down the cliff as he climbed.

“Let go!” I tugged at the fur on his shoulders. “I want to go back to the pack!”

His arm only tightened around me.

Minutes later, he landed atop a wide ledge carpeted in moss and set me on my feet with care.

I didn’t hesitate. My palm cracked across his muzzle.

“Bad Lucien!”

His ears flattened instantly, but instead of backing away, he crowded me, one clawed hand reaching for my cheek.

I recoiled. “Don’t touch me.”

He flinched, my words striking harder than my family’s blows.

“Don’t you understand? They’re my family. They love me!”

Lucien sulked, head drooping between his shoulders. “But…they can’t take what’s Lucien’s.”

“They’re just worried about me. They didn’t know you’re my mate!” I stomped my foot. “All you had to do was acknowledge my grandfather as the Alpha. Everyone does that when they enter another pack’s territory!”

“Not Lucien nature to accept Alphas.”

“Those are the rules!”

His ears folded back even farther. “Lucien sorry.”

“Bring me back.”

“*No.*”

I threw my arms up. “Fine! Let’s just grab ass on the Highlands without a plan then!”

His ears perked. “Grab ass?” He brightened and jumped to my side, both hands landing on my backside. “Lucien like grab ass!”

We didn’t end up playing grab ass, but he had his own thoroughly kicked.



“LUCIEN BRING PRESENT FOR MATE.”

I stayed there, knees hugged to my chest, my chin resting on them, glaring at the valley below. The wind kept picking fights with my hair, the weather was as offended as I was.

Behind me, Lucien sighed. Muffled sounds followed.

Curious, I spied on him from the corner of my eye. My mate was crouched behind a gorse bush, his tongue caught between his teeth in concentration as he rummaged.

As carefully as his claws allowed, he lifted out a small bundle of purple heather. Some of the stems were bent and two flowers had been squashed. Then Lucien reached back and produced the antlers of a red deer, bits of dried blood still caked on the base.

My eyes shifted between the antlers and the flowers—without question, the most Lucien bouquet imaginable. A full smile invaded my lips.

I was still upset about the kidnapping. Still cross that he'd worried my family. And still intending to lecture him about punching my brother.

But he's trying. And he can't help his protective nature. I'll have a calm, rational chat with him.

His tail gave one thump. "Can Mate and Lucien stay here tonight? Tomorrow Lucien take Mate home? Cute please?"

I turned around, took the battered bundle of heather, and breathed in its scent. "Only if you accept Grandpa. And it's *pretty please*."

"Lucy will."

The knot that had been tightening in my chest finally loosened.

"And will you shift to human again?"

"No!" he barked. I lowered the heather from my face.

His breathing quickened. "Lucien can't! Human won't let Lucien see Mate ever again!"

Panic. Real, raw panic.

Could someone fear…themselves?

The answer stood before me. His chest was rising and falling too fast, and he was looking around as if expecting Logan to appear out of nowhere and drag him away.

"Hey!" I laid the flowers next to the antlers and wrapped my arms around his waist. "Nobody, not even you, can separate us."

He didn't hug me back, his gaze lingering on the ground. The sparks fizzing between us couldn't even compete with that fear.

“Lucy, look at me,” I begged, his sadness flooding me. Drawing me. I cupped his muzzle between both hands. “I’ll help you. I’ll talk to Logan. We’ll figure this out together.”

He searched my face.

Hope.

Doubt.

Worry.

All of it wrestled behind those crimson eyes. So I smiled and rubbed my nose gently against his.

His eyes shuttered with longing. “Mate smell perfection.”

“You too, *mate*. Like hazelnuts and autumn.”

Something primitive rumbled through him, a growl that vibrated through his chest, before he gathered me against him.

I grabbed his face again. “I love you.” His chest stilled for a moment before rising sharply. “So much. I love how sweet you are, how protective and slightly obsessive. You are Lucien, in all your intricacies.”

I considered my next statement carefully. Words were key. Words were powerful. They could restore…or destroy. “You and Logan need to make peace.”

His eyes clouded. His upper lip curled.

“You share the same body. You’re one soul. Not enemies.”

“Human hates Lucien.”

Every pout signed my end. I felt extremely protective of him. He was mine. To love, to shield, to help.

I guided him down onto the moss. “Why would he?”

Lucien looked at me sadly. But he didn’t really see me, his mind traveling somewhere else. To dusty places, locked away in an abandoned corner of his soul.

“Lucien killed our brother.”

The confession was far from anything I’d expected. I blinked, digesting the information. “Why?”

He tucked his tail in, his ears flattening. “Daniel bad. He hurt sister. He also hurt my human.”

Oh. “Your sister?”

“Trix. Trix ours. Lucien love Trix very much.” He paused, looking at the horizon. I mimicked his stance, giving him time to rearrange his thoughts.

The darkness had almost finished off the sunlight. Birds crossed overhead, hurrying to find a safe branch to spend the night.

“After…Human locked Lucien away. He despised Lucien,” he said with a weight that felt older than he was. “So Lucien hibernated…for years. Lonely.”

My heart felt as though someone had dropped it into a blender and forgotten to switch it off. I hugged my knees to my chest. There was so much to contemplate.

“So why did you wake up?”

“When we first saw Mate…Lucien stirred. Mate’s scent made nice dreams.” His claw brushed my cheek. “You were always saying my name when talking to the human on phone. Sometimes Lucien woke and enjoyed Mate’s talk.”

He hesitated, his gaze dropping.

“When Mate slept with other wolf…” His voice cracked. “The pain jolted Lucien. I took body and destroyed.”

The shine gathering in his eyes shattered me. He was referring to the time I was with Sillas and Logan felt it. Lucien had felt it too and made his pack pay for it.

“Lucy…” I shifted and took his clawed hands in mine. “I never cheated on you intentionally.” He looked up, ear twitching adorably. “I didn’t know you existed. I swear.”

“There are diamonds on your cheeks.” He captured one with his claw and held the tiny droplet up to the moonlight. I laughed and rubbed my eyes.

“They aren’t diamonds. Just tears.”

“Pretty tears.”

A watery chuckle escaped me. Only Lucien could make crying feel sweet. He had all this hidden tenderness that had gone unused for years, and I wasn’t going to waste it now.

A thought marinated as I absentmindedly stroked Lucien’s fur.

“I know who can help you.” I met his curious stare. “To navigate your relationship with Logan and be connected again.”

Someone who understood what it meant to be different better than anyone else.

I needed to call my friend Archie.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CLYDE

Half a bull landed on the hardwood floor of the veranda, splattering blood on my boots.

My lips flattened into a thin line. “I see the problem.” The right half was missing, its ribs polished clean.

“And this is just one of eight!” Farmer Drude scrunched his wrinkled face, his bulky arms crossing over his tanned chest, attesting to the years spent tending the fields. “It’s worse than the wolf raids of ’95!”

Dad and I exchanged a look.

“Five were eaten outright! Two looked like this.” He pointed at the carcass. “And one was buried. The beast’s keeping leftovers!”

I sniffed the remains. There were no other scents on it besides rot and Drude’s. “We’ll compensate you if we can prove Lucien killed them.”

“You calling me a liar?” Drude cursed. “I have bones piled up! I bet your beast’s using the rest to pick its fangs!”

Dad pinched his nose. “Easy, Drude. We know you’re honest.”

“My production’s ruined! What should I do, Alpha?”

I slapped my arm, killing a fly.

“We’ll pay for every animal. Forgive my son, we all must acclimate to the…new situation.”

Drude was the fourth worker to claim his rights after losing his animals to a colossal appetite.

“Children are afraid and the elders won’t leave the temple or attend to their duties!”

I kicked a pebble toward the tip of a pine tree. I was torn—my fists longed to crash into Lucien’s muzzle for being a foolish beast *and* into the shriveled faces of those superstitious old folks. Both would satisfy me.

Once Drude left, I glanced toward the lake. There lay the source of every headache I’d had this week, unaware of the issues occurring because of his stomach. One elbow was resting on the grass, his clawed fist on his… *cheek*, if you could call it that, a bone hanging casually from his jaw. A *bone*, not a blade of grass. He was watching Yvaine, who was sitting cross-legged, reading from one of her tomes.

Since arriving, Lucien had acknowledged Dad as Alpha, sworn not to harm anyone—*unless they threatened his mate*—and flatly refused to shift back.

“Well,” I muttered, “another farmer. At this rate, we’ll bankrupt the pack feeding our niece’s boyfriend.”

Dad watched them too. I knew he was secretly pleased that his granddaughter had a fierce mate, but…

“How could Richard ever approve of this?” he grunted. “He was never an appropriate mate or father. I warned Isabella!” Once again, all the problems were attributed to Isabella’s mate, Yvaine’s father. Dad never liked him, mostly because Richard took Isabella away.

“I still don’t understand why this Logan hasn’t shifted back,” Dad continued.

“I don’t think Lucien trusts him to protect Yvaine.”

“Until she bears his mark.”

“*Gealaich* save us from that mark!” I muttered. “He’ll bite our *nighean òg* in half.”

“As much as I love my *rionnag*, I hope they leave soon.”

“They won’t.” Mom joined us to spy on them. “Not until I meet the man inside the monster.”

“I told you arguing with the old witch Elma would bring us putrid luck, Riona,” Dad said.

“Oh, shut up. Since when does being crazy mean being a witch?”

“Well, if so, then you—”

“Don’t finish that sentence if you don’t want to sleep in the barn tonight!”

Lucien was a seven-foot behemoth that growled at anyone who, for his liking, got too close to Yvaine. Always tense, always ready to pounce, a bizarre mix of hellhound and puppy. Though Yvaine had an extraordinary effect on him—one caress or a look, and he would quiet down. He followed her everywhere, the bathroom included, until she physically shoved him back out. Apparently, privacy wasn't part of lycan culture.

Not that it really bothered her. Yvaine loved having that three-hundred-pound presence by her side.

"How many times have we told him not to eat the cattle?" I asked.

Mom sighed. "Too many."

Lucien's defense had been simple: *Lucien hungry.* Worse, after discovering cows produced milk, he'd decided they were superior food to sheep. Meat and milk in one.

Dad folded his arms. "I've been patient." His eyes never left the lycan. "If he doesn't shift back by tomorrow, he goes into the dungeons. Shackled."



LUCIEN

A gray dove buzzed too close. I whacked it with a flick of my tail and watched it drop into the grass.

Down the green hill, delicious sheep grazed peacefully, their juicy bellies swaying, unaware of how close they were to their deaths. Or my stomach. Same thing. But my beautiful mate had made me promise not to eat them. Not even one little nibble.

How was I supposed to survive? I could barely understand how she ate so little. Two tiny bowls of strange human food with liquid things over them? *Bleh.*

Yesterday, she made me eat some worms with ketchup. *Spaghetti with tomato sauce,* she had called it. I only finished it because she smiled every

time I swallowed but afterward I had to chug cow milk to send the worms away.

Mate had lectured me on my bad behavior, wagging those little fingers at me. Chewing on some farm animals here and there had earned me one last day in my lycan form, otherwise they said they'd put me in chains. I scoffed. *They can try.*

I scraped a bit of dried blood from beneath my claws with an old bone. Human cared about his hygiene, so I copied him, even though he hated me.

I peeked at my tender mate next to me, an enormous book balanced on her knees, tongue peeking out. Sighing, I covered my mouth to be quieter and not disturb her. I could watch her for hours if her neck didn't call to my fangs like a tempting piece of meat begging to be chewed.

Around us, pack members gave us a wide berth.

Good. I didn't trust werewolves. Not many, anyway. Big Feet was acceptable; Granny, too. My mate and Trix, obviously. I could tolerate my human's friends, but I found all those girls flocking around him a bore.

Human was trapped inside. Served him right. He should be grateful that I even let him glimpse our mate from inside and see how much she was loving our company, thanks to *me*. *Me*! Not him, who made her cross a whole ocean to flee.

"Damn you, Lucifer," Logan growled inside my head.

I snorted. *There he is.*

Last week, I almost let him out, but I changed my mind because he was mean to me. Always rude, like our mate had told him several times in the past. I wasn't rude. Mate told me I was sweet and gentle. Take that, Human.

"If you touch one hair on her head…"

"If Mate asks, Lucien touch."

"And don't even think about marking her!"

"If Mate wants."

"She'll never! Have you seen your fangs? You'd skewer her."

My ears dropped. A wave of sadness washed over me; it happened every time he treated me badly.

"You heard her family. You have until tonight," he said in a sing-song voice. *"Your freedom is running out. I'll throw you back into your dear lethargy den. You won't even smell her in your dreams."*

"No!" I panicked. *"Mate said she has way for us to make peace."*

A humorless laugh escaped him. *“I’ll lock you away. You’re the worst thing that’s happened to me.”* Another day, another reminder.

“Well, Mate said she won’t let you!” I growled, but then bolted up, hearing a tiny gasp.

“You scared her!” Logan drew in a breath, gazing at our mate. He was taking his fill, his heartbeat mad.

Her tiny fingers touched my arm. I wanted to lick them all. “Are you all right, Lucy?”

I nodded. Human and I quieted down, just sitting there, staring. Her eyes were so blue, a blue that soothed my soul like an ocean of gentle waves. Her angelic beauty made me forget many things.

“At least we agree on one thing, Lucifer,” Logan grumbled. *“You’re lucky. All these days, you got to spend some quality time with her. She’ll probably spend the same amount of time hitting me with umbrellas.”*

Our mate resumed reading.

“When do we mate her?” I asked, watching her tuck strands of hazel hair behind her ear.

Logan flushed. *“What did you say?!”*

“Why Human embarrassed? Human no virgin.” He’d mated whole herds of females.

“Yes. I mean, I’m not, but it doesn’t matter,” he drawled. *Our* heartbeat accelerated but I had no idea why.

“We can’t not *mate her. She’s our mate!”* I retorted.

We should also have a puppy, or, better yet, *twins*. I licked my gums. *Yes, Lucien wants twins.*

Logan grunted and, once again, I sniffed his embarrassment. *“Let me make it clear,”* he huffed. *“There’ll be no puppies for a long time! And that’s if she’ll let me be with her sometime in the next few years.”*

“Years? But Lucien’ll die!” It didn’t make sense at all.

“And our first time has to be special. Planned.”

“Planned? I don’t understand this word, but Lucien no like it.”

With a wince, I glanced back at my mate. She was stretched onto her stomach now, feet kicking through the air. For blood circulation. She made me do the same many times, too.

“No pups! We’re twenty-three!”

I pouted, my tail dropping.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Logan growled out. “*Bunny Doc, in my bed, moaning my name…ah. That picture’s haunted me since she called me Rudolph for the first time.”* He smiled.“*And I didn’t even know she was mine back then.”*

Just the thought of the kiss they shared at that party stirred him. My tail fanned across the grass.

“So, when mating?”

Human laughed. “*First, she must feel comfortable and accept me fully…and give us signs she wants to.”*

Signs?!

My confusion spiked. These odd human courtships didn’t make sense. An annoyed growl slipped out and two elders walking past flinched.

Mate looked up from her book. “Lucien.”

“Lucien not docile enough for Mate?” I wasn’t in a good mood. Signs, planning, Mate being comfortable with mating—all concepts I didn’t understand. A headache was brewing. Humans were unnecessarily complex.

“What do you mean?”

Frustrated with Logan’s new information, I scooped her up and held her against my chest. She weighed nothing more than a kitten. Not that I ever held one, but I imagined a kitten weighing like her.

It had become a ritual: her, in my arms, and me hiding her from everyone’s eyes.

Everyone, except… *“Enjoy your last few hours, cause tonight? I’ll come back.”*

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CHAPTER EIGHT

YVAINE

"Lucien not shift back today."

Those were the only words he'd spoken in the past hour. With a resigned sigh, using a finger as a bookmark, I closed the book.

Lucien was fairly occupied, gnawing on a rare steak—his version of beef jerky. After he'd tracked blood across the packhouse carpet for the second time and accidentally murdered nine potted plants with his tail, my family had banned him from coming indoors until he shifted back. Which *should* happen today.

I need a plan.

I fished my phone out of my pocket, scrolling down my contact list. "Hey, Lucy."

My fluffy mate emitted a snort…or a growl. Hard to distinguish his sounds.

"I have a special childhood friend. Well, actually, he's more like another brother." I studied the meat skewered on his black claw. *Who needs forks anymore?*

Lucien stopped chewing. "He?" His lip curled. "Lucien don't like *he*s."

I bit back a smile, pressing the call button. "I want to call him." *I am already doing that.* "To ask if he knows"—*how you and Logan can reconnect. If he can help you shift back*—"more about lycans."

Lucien narrowed his eyes. "Has this *he* found his mate?"

Ring, ring.

“Not exactly.” My palms started to sweat. “But *she* is somewhere. For sure! Everyone has a mate.”

“But—”

The ringing stopped. “Vy!” A smooth, masculine voice startled us.

I shot Lucien an apologetic smile. Archie’s face filled the screen, wind whipping at his pitch-black hair. Pine trees loomed behind him, like a crowd watching over his shoulders.

“Chie!”

“How’s Scotland? Still making honey?”

“Yes! Lachlan more than me.” My gaze bounced from Archie to Lucien. The latter bolted up, second steak forgotten, flies already descending on it.

Archie lifted a brow. “What was that?”

“Oh, that’s a *who*.” I backed away from Lucien, who was stalking closer. “Remember my mate?”

“The Terminator. Have you decided whether to *reject* him or—”

A horrific growl sliced through my eardrums.

In one stride, Lucien was behind me, towering over my shoulder in all his glory, glaring at the screen with an intensity capable of traveling through the line.

Archie narrowed his amethyst eyes in return. Unlike any other dominant werewolf, he didn’t growl back. Because he *wasn’t* a werewolf. Some lunatics claimed that when Archie shifted, the sun would flee and the sky would cry out of fear. His beast was black enough to swallow moonlight, broken only by three small scarlet birthmarks beneath one eye—tears of ancient pain.

Thank Stephen, Archie never got mad.

“And who are you, *lycan*? Why are you with my Vy?” Chills ran down my spine at his altered voice.

“Mate *mineeee*!”

The screen fogged up with Lucien’s roar. I rescued my phone before he crushed it. “Calm down, Lucy. Archie can help us.”

Goddess forbid these two ever fought…

“Lucien doesn’t like this *Archie-enemy*.” His incorrect grammar increased whenever he was agitated.

“*Archie*,” the latter corrected. “Wait. Did I hear *mate*?”

I huffed out a chuckle and, to my satisfaction, Lucien blushed. It happened every single time I laughed.

“So, the Masturbator’s a lycan?”

“It’s Lucien!” He definitely didn’t appreciate that Lachlan’s nickname had spread overseas.

I quickly explained the whole situation, unsurprised that Archie already knew lycans existed. His pack, Black Devil, attracted legends the way mountains caught storms. There, the balance between beast and human was sacred, drilled into every pack member from an early age, until control became instinct.

“I’ll speak to Dad. If Lucien and Logan have spent years neglecting each other, they’ll need some serious training.”

Lucien stiffened, fur puffing around his neck. “Lucien don’t want to go there!”

“When you’re born different, you don’t get excuses. You get responsibilities. You work harder than everyone else and learn control, for your own sake and everyone else’s.”

Hope fluttered inside me.

“I’d come to Scotland myself to help them,” Archie said, “but Dad still thinks planes are an insult to nature. You’ll need to come to Italy. In two weeks?”

“Not this time. I’ve already missed too many classes.” And I’d need to include Logan in this decision.

“Makes sense, Doctor Vy.”

“But we could maybe visit Black Devil this summer?”

“Whenever you want. When are you heading back to Montana?”

A groan slipped past my lips. Lucien peered down at me.

“Once Lucien lets Logan out. I can’t fly with him.”

Archie tapped his lip. “Maybe there’s something I could do to help. Do you mind?”

That piqued my curiosity. “Go ahead.” I directed the screen to Lucien.

My mate narrowed his red eyes, but Archie wasn’t the least bit affected. His lips curled.

“Before I proceed…” Something satanic crossed his violet eyes. “Listen carefully, Lucien. There’s no need for me to tell you to treat Yvaine well. As her mate, I know you will.” If I thought Archie was done, I was wrong. “But if you damage a single inch of my friend, I’ll personally come there. Just for you.”

He smirked, flashing a hint of his tremendous fangs. “I’ll find you, be sure of that. And it’ll hurt. A lot. Trust me on this.”

Lucien huffed. “Lucien can’t hurt Mate.”

Archie’s beast surfaced. A short black coat covered his cheekbones, his features sharpening. “Now, lycan Lucien…*shift back*.” Archie stared at him, unblinking.

Lucien bared his fangs. “No!”

“I said—” Archie inched closer to the phone screen. “*Shift. Back*.”

This time, it was the Alpha *werebeast* who ordered it.

“And Lucien said no!” My phone snapped in half.

I stared at the two pieces in my hands. “This is coming out of somebody’s steak allowance.”

Whatever Archie had tried didn’t work…

I was wrong.

But a heartbeat later, Lucien’s whole body started to shake, as though an internal earthquake was taking place, rearranging molecules and bones.



LUCIEN WAS A BOLD CREATURE THAT LIVED ON LYCAN INSTINCTS.

If he felt like licking my face clean, he did it. If my stomach growled, he’d stuff me with food until I couldn’t move. If I looked cold, he’d slaughter an entire deer family and drape the bloody hides over my shoulders, but he’d be offended for a week straight if I refused to wear them.

But beneath his rough exterior, there lived a creature starved for affection. Loneliness and his abandonment issues were his carnivorous microorganisms, gnawing at him from within.

I wanted to look after this colossal beast. Fate decided he was mine.

So when he dropped to his knees, anguish and pain distorting his features, I rushed to him.

“Lucien.” I cupped his muzzle. He panted, head jerking. His eyes wildly switched from red to silver then back again. “Look at me. I’ll help you and Logan.” I stroked his cheek. “You’re my mate. I’ll never abandon you.”

With a shaky whine, he buried his face in my neck. “You…” I felt moisture on his lashes. “You love Lucien?”

“So much.”

Tears slipped down through his black fur, falling into a world that had been unfair to him. I watched them hit the earth and disappear forever.

“Don’t want to be locked away anymore.” The voice wasn’t quite Lucien’s anymore, nor Logan’s. It belonged to both.

His body shook, ripples all over, a battle between two entities, forced to share.

“You won’t be. But you need to let Logan come back.”

A long, shuddering breath released from his parted mouth, then he pushed me away, just enough to break the sparks between us. “Goodbye, Mate,” he mumbled, head down. And just like that, his size started to shrink, his enormous frame folding inward.

Black fur peeled away in clumps, falling around him and leaving tan skin behind. Rounded ears poked through, though dark tufts clung to their tips. His nails were still pointy, and dirty blond hair streaked with black spilled over his inked shoulders. Those fracture tattoos, like bolts of lightning, looked larger now, redder, and more numerous, like the shift itself had reopened them.

Logan lay face down, as naked as the Moon Goddess had made him.

I hurried back to him, kneeling at his side.

His whole body was shivering. I did my best to ignore the muscular sight below his waist. My eyes caught on the *K* + *L* heart pierced by an arrow tattooed on his calf.

A blush tinged my cheeks. I forgot how sculpted he was. Michelangelo’s *David* was an ugly duckling in comparison.

Carefully, I brushed the tangled blond hair from his face. *Sparks.*

Longing crashed through me. It’d been a month since I’d last seen him.

“Bunny Doc?” Logan rasped.

My vision blurred with tears. “I’m here. Everything’s fine.”

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CHAPTER NINE

YVAINE

My eyes roamed over him, medically assessing the lingering lycan traits.

"Oh, Stephen!" My hand flew to my mouth. I noticed one peculiar detail. *A moving detail*.

My wide eyes bounced back and forth, following the swishing black tail, growing from right above that harder-than-diamonds butt. Lucien's tail.

"Yvaine," Logan croaked, pushing himself up on his hands and knees. "Where are you?" His hand patted around before he pitched forward and fell on his chin. "Ouch!" Blood splattered from his mouth.

"Here. I'm here."

His head snapped toward my voice. His *eyes*. They were milky white, cloudy and unfocused.

I bit back a whimper as I sank to my knees beneath the weight of this discovery.

My mate is blind. Every lecture, every ophthalmology case, every prognosis I'd ever studied tumbled through my mind at once. Blindness that severe wasn't reversible, supernatural species included.

"Logan…" My voice cracked.

He groped the air until his hand found my forearm, tugging me close. "There you are." He scrunched his blond eyebrows. "You're crying already? Missed me that much, Bunny Doc?"

I shook my head while a waterfall of tears cascaded down my cheeks.

He tilted his head, listening instead of looking. “You’ll tell me eventually.” His nose skimmed the side of my neck as he gulped in mouthfuls of my scent. “Take your time. Not in a rush now.”

How could he sound so calm? Didn’t he realize that the symptoms were permanent?

“You are…your eyes—” I choked as I gazed at his unfairly beautiful face.

“Oh.” He shrugged. “Yeah. Blind.” No concern there. “It’s done.”

My heart stopped before it started sprinting again. “You can’t say that!”

He smiled. “You worried about me?” Trapping my chin between his thumb and index finger, he tilted my face up. “Tell me.” His thumb rubbed back and forth along my jaw. “Are you?”

“I’m sorry, Logan,” I cried out. “If we…if Lucien—”

Strong arms wrapped around my middle. “Shh.” He held me tighter. “You couldn’t have known.”

How long we stayed like that, curled up in each other, on our knees, I didn’t know. My brain was too busy racing through specialists, clinical trials, and rehabilitation centers. “My hospital works with a research institute. There are stem-cell studies, neural implants, adaptive training programs…” I kept proposing options while he just listened to me, sniffing my hair, my neck, or any inch of skin available.

“That’s great, Bunny Doc. If I ever meet a blind person, I’ll send them.”

I pulled back.

His cloudy eyes were clearing, silver irises emerging beneath the haze. “I only lose my sight after shifting.” He shrugged again. “It comes back. Sometimes it takes an hour. Once it took four days.” Relief hit hard. How interesting! Science could use lycans’ regenerative properties to improve blindness!

He hooked an arm around my waist and pulled me flat against his chest. “You’re so damn cute,” he rumbled low in his throat. Sparks spread from where his nose glided over my nape and ended at my earlobe. Sparks that made me forget he had lied to me. “I love it when you gab about all your doctor stuff.”

My cheek was pressed to a firm pectoral, lips close to a hard nipple. I’d been so terrified I’d forgotten one important detail: Logan was spectacularly naked.

“Your heart’s going mad. Why?”

“I *was* worried.”

His big hands squeezed my hips. “Only worried?”

“I think…I’m not sure,” I managed to say as I felt his lips curve against my neck.

My hands clung to his protruding biceps. *Sweet Stephen!* I let go like they had shocked me, which wasn’t far from the truth.

“No, I liked that. Put them back,” Logan semi-growled. He took my hands to place them on himself again.

Remember, you’re still mad at him. Remember his lies.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get the chance to warn you about Lucien.” All of his playfulness was suddenly gone. “Did he hurt you?” He cupped my face and tilted it up, examining me.

Goddess, there were muscles everywhere I looked! Even on top of muscles, there were more muscles! Maybe I should shut my eyes so I could concentrate on why I had to scold him.

“Yvaine?”

“No. Lucien’s very sweet—” I shuddered. Something hard yet warm brushed my thigh. That couldn’t be. I knew Logan was a big guy, and proportions *should* work on him, but what I felt down there was placed too high to be possible.

“Look down!” Zelda whined.

“Don’t you dare look down!”

She made me do it, and we got a quick glance of unsolicited penis. “Do you want to go inside? Maybe we—*you* could shower?”

Capers! Stop stuttering! I took a big breath to regain some composure. Big mistake. His scent made me lightheaded.

“Yeah.” A grin morphed his face. “Want to have one with me? Not that you need one.” He inhaled deeply. “Because you smell so fuckin’ good.”

I drew in a gasp when his front pressed into me and I felt *all* his hardness.

“Hey, I’m kidding. Sorry.” Logan massaged my shoulders, his long fingers digging in. With that handsome smile, he was too much to look at. His poster on my wall wasn’t anything like this. Not at all. *I should have bought a pair of sunglasses because his beauty was blinding.*

“Are you sure Lucien didn’t…bite you or something?” he asked carefully.

“No. We got along superbly. And *we* have to talk about him.”

Logan’s eyes flashed red for a moment. A second later, my mate flinched and looked down.

I grabbed his hand. “Don’t be ashamed. Be proud of being a lycan.”

“Proud? I’m just a monster.”

“Reality doesn’t work like that. We aren’t so easily defined.”

“Does this mean you forgive me?”

“We still have to talk about it. But yes.” It slipped from my mouth, my pride kicking me in the gut. “I understand more now.” In a way, I got to know him through the part of him that he denied, that he didn’t even know. “But I haven’t forgotten.”

“Good.” His head lifted back up. “One out of two.”

I scrunched my brows. “What do you mean?”

“*I* haven’t forgiven you.”

It was like a slap in my face. “What?!”

“Don’t worry, Bunny Doc.” He leaned in until our noses brushed, his cloudy silver eyes boring into mine. “*You can work for it.*”

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CHAPTER TEN

YVAINE

"Don't act all surprised and innocent, Bunny Doc."

This had to be one of his sarcastic jokes. In what galaxy was *I* the one *he* needed to forgive?

I almost laughed. "I'm not acting in any sort of way! You're ridiculous."

"Let's see, where do I start?" He pretended to think, a finger tapping on his chin.

I planted my hands on my hips. "Maybe with the part you admit you're teasing since I didn't do anything wrong?"

"Nothing wrong? I can give you a *veeery* long list." The sung vowel irked me further.

I opened my mouth to retort, but he continued.

"You screamed at me, hit my head with an umbrella, and threw the necklace I gave you." His eyes dropped to my neckline. The moon-shaped necklace had been like a mark to him, just one without teeth. "Then you ran." He made a dramatic gesture with his hand, the muscles in his forearm swelling.

"I didn't run. I flew." My voice rose three octaves higher than usual. "I needed space."

"So much space that staying in Montana wasn't enough?" Something flickered in his eyes. *Hurt? Fear?*

"Lachlan wanted to leave too, and we both missed Scotland."

Logan scoffed. “Of course the fuckin’ Islander,” he muttered under his breath. “Couldn’t handle having his ass kicked at wereball?”

“We tied!”

“Yeah, because you distracted me during the whole damn game with those goddamn beautiful eyes.”

I squared my shoulders. *How exactly am I supposed to argue with that?*

Logan quickly leaned in and planted a loud kiss on my cheek.

“I didn’t authorize that!” I hoped I didn’t blush any further.

“Do I really need authorization when you’re already mine?” He winked.

“Delusional!”

“Still mine.”

“Shh. Stop talking!” I slapped a hand over his mouth. “What were you thinking, Logan, lying to me all that time? What was the reasoning there?”

He spoke behind my hand, tickling it. “Not fair to tell me to shut up when you ask so many questions.”

“Rhetorical!”

He glanced down at himself. “Got clothes around here?” Our eyes met. “Unless you want me to be naked when we argue. I don’t mind. But I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable.” He chuckled huskily.

I swatted his shoulder. Sparks. Both our eyes glanced to the spot. “Why would I feel uncomfortable? I don’t care about nudity.”

Still, I went to rummage behind the bushes, yanked out the emergency shorts hidden there—werewolf life meant spare clothes behind every bush—and tossed them at him.

My mate caught them one-handed, his grin still in place. “Yet you haven’t looked anywhere except my face. Worried you can’t control yourself?” He pulled the shorts on.

“Of course I’m not,” I huffed. “Why would I even jump you right now anyway? So you can forgive me for something that I didn’t do?”

“You didn’t let me expla—” He glanced back down, his blond strands covering his eyes as he tried to pull his shorts up. “Damn it!”

I started laughing. His tail refused to cooperate, swishing sideways.

“Need me to cut a tail hole, *Rudy*?”

He glared at me and ripped a hole himself, the fabric tearing easily. Finally, he snapped the waistband in place. The bulge at the front must have been equally hard to tuck in. “Where were we? Ah, you didn’t let me explain before leaving. Didn’t I ask you to meet up with me after the

wereball game?” He grabbed my chin again, his head dropping until he was only a few inches away. “Isn’t that right, *baby*?”

My breath hitched and my eyes focused on his wicked lips, which were no longer smiling.

“Don’t call me baby!” I hissed, trying—and failing—to push him away. He let me go anyway.

Logan raised a blond eyebrow and laughed. *The gall of him!* “Why? You prefer Bunny Doc?”

I was going to say no to spite him, but that’d be a lie—I adored that nickname. I decided not to answer instead and crossed my arms, then unfolded them to deal with some flyaway hairs sticking to the corner of my mouth.

Logan was hooked on my every move. I didn’t doubt that he’d catch me in a heartbeat if I fled. He had been running all his life—in a game, from himself. “*You* didn’t tell me to meet after the game. *Rudolph* did!” I hissed.

“But I *am* Rudolph.” He tilted his chin up with a smile that reminded me of a shark.

“You just forgot to mention that little detail to me.” I backed away more. The greater the distance, the easier it was for my tongue and brain to agree and make sensible comebacks.

Logan shook his head. “Didn’t a bunny once tell me to take ashwa-gaga whenever I was stressed?”

“It’s *ashwagandha*!”

“I need to take some now,” he huffed.

“I only offered it because *you* were stressed after losing your head under the bed of one of your booty calls!”

Logan’s eyes widened. “I didn’t know you were my mate!”

Someone was defensive about this.

“Too bad *you* didn’t feel pain in your chest for weeks. *I* did!” I tapped myself over that silly, stubborn lump of muscle. “Every night, because you’re a lustful beast with no other interests in your head besides reproducing!”

Guilt crossed his face for a split second, then he narrowed his eyes into slits of liquid silver. “I used condoms.”

“And *I* had to do a chest scan to figure out what was happening!” It was Tiziano, my roommate, who had checked my heart functions. Yet it had been my mate’s fault all along.

Logan remained quiet. This time, there was no pain on his face. Just *fury*.

“I felt it too when you fucked that excuse of a wereball player. I felt it so much I bled for a whole day, needed a transfusion, and, oh, had to deal with my awakened beast!” he snarled, chest heaving. “It destroyed half of my pack and hurt Dad’s guards before I could control it.”

“Don’t call *him* a beast! He’s much more gentle than you’ll ever be.”

A golden lock fell over his forehead. My fingers itched to yank it out for mocking my sweet Lucy. So I did.

“Gentle?” Logan barked out a condescending laugh. “Try more like a murderous, brainless ball of evil.”

“He only attacked rogues if they hunted us and animals for food. He never wasted any.”

“You don’t know anything. He’s a murderer!” he yelled. “And he’s always fucking starving. Once he wiped out an entire chicken factory. I’m still paying that off.”

I crossed my arms. “Lucien never lied to me.”

His arms flew out to his sides. “I never lied! I omitted details to protect you!”

We were both panting from shouting now.

“I tried to tell you who I was. Many times. Except, every time—”

“Every time?”

We were close. *It has to be this string connecting our hearts. That meddling bitch.*

He shook his head. “That Sillas mutt. You had feelings for him?”

I almost laughed. Goddess, he was *jealous*, smiling so tightly he was probably about to burst.

“Not answering that.”

“Why not?”

“We weren’t together, so I don’t owe you. And you were ridiculous, immature, and so unnecessarily violent with Sillas at the game.”

“Oh, but you can be mad because I was with girls?” he said in a low growl. “Hypocrite.”

“You were with half the female population!”

He pulled at his hair. “You had an ongoing situationship.”

“I don’t want to hear about your hookups and you don’t need to know about mine!”

“I want to know about yours.”

I scoffed, taking another step back. “You said you were about to reveal your identity many times. When?”

“At the party, which you forced me to go to.”

“Say what now? I never forced you!”

“You called me before going out with your friends, completely hammered. Of course I had to go to make sure you were safe!”

“I can drink as much as my liver allows. None of your business, Rudolph!”

Logan took an awfully long step forward. So long that he was in front of me again. “Did you expect me not to care about you going to a party, unmarked, full of horny Comet losers?” He sounded incredulous. “One of them was all over you when I found you.”

Garlic Man. His horrible smell flashed through my mind. “Right before you disappeared with three girls!”

He looked taken aback. “They were fans that wanted a pic! I can’t say no. It’d be rude.”

“Rudeness is your specialty! And as it happens, they’re always women. Always!”

Logan studied me, choosing the best strategy or the perfect angle of attack. Then he smirked. “Jealous, Bunny Doc?”

“I’m stating facts.”

“I don’t mind if you are,” he continued, ignoring me. “I love it.”

I tilted my chin up. “I’m not. Jealousy is immature, just like you were at the game.”

“Meh.” He snickered. “I wanted to tell you about me at the party, after that fucking magical kiss.” I glimpsed a trace of a blush on his cheeks. “But then you kissed me again before I could and Lucien tried to mark you, right there.”

I was about to speak but he lifted a finger. “I haven’t finished, Bunny Doc.”

The insolence! I stomped my foot. “Rude as always!”

Logan ignored that comment, too. “When we first met at the wereball conference, you chose to remain quiet next to your twin. You let the Islander insult me. He ordered me to stay away from you. Am I remembering correctly? I think I am.” The pad of his thumb pressed into my cheek. I batted his hand away. “After seeing you in the crowd, watching

me…I knew it was *you*, the girl from the phone, and I was coming to talk." His nose touched mine, his eyes holding mine prisoner. "But you weren't happy with your mate's identity."

"I…"

"You…?"

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. *Darn his dimples!*

"Oh, I see." He tilted his head, eyes scanning my face.

"I don't remember that…"

The moment I spoke, his eyes snapped back to my lips. "Oh, no?"

"No." Why did he have to be so close? His smell was all Alpha male. "You weren't…I wasn't disappointed."

He arched a brow.

"You lied to me! *You*! Not me!" I panted. "I was just surprised at the conference. I take my time to process facts."

"So I'm a fact?"

"No! I just didn't expect…*you*."

"Surprised it was me or disappointed because I'm from Dark Diamond?" he said with acidity.

"Yes, but no!"

Logan let out a sarcastic laugh. "Yes or no?"

"I was overwhelmed, okay? Not disappointed. Why do you always twist things to your advantage? You lied to *me*, Logan! For weeks, you didn't say you were my mate." I paused, catching my breath. "And if I remember correctly, I asked *you*, Rudolph, for Logan's number!" He narrowed his eyes at the memory. "And you never gave it to me! Because you were too busy being a petulant child. Asking me questions about my mate. About *yourself*!"

He rubbed his chin. "You told me you needed a ladder because I was too gigantic. Fun times."

Obviously, my stupid cheeks had to heat. He stared at them.

"You've had many opportunities to tell me! Why didn't you? It's humiliating."

All his arrogant playfulness vanished. "I wanted to speak with you in person, not on the phone. But you had the big exam coming up, and I didn't want to distract you. Then things got out of hand after we kissed—" We both blushed again and he cleared his throat. "I was really scared the beast would hurt you. I have no control over him; all I can do is hide him."

“I’ll fix your relationship with him,” I announced, fists on my hips.

He grinned, eyeing me. For a moment, I melted. “Impossible. Too much has happened.”

“You’ll see.”

“So fierce. So beautiful.” A shiver rushed down my nape as his voice dropped to a low growl and his eyes glowed. “So mine.” His gaze lingered on my face as though memorizing it. “I knew who you were from the first time you called me rude on the phone.” A slow smile tugged at his lips. “But the real version? So much better.”

He tipped my chin up, his fingers hard and warm against my skin. “I’m sorry I hid who I was. I wanted to tell you in person. Explain…why I lost control around you. Why I’m different.” He let out a quiet breath. “Guess I’ve spent so long hiding from everyone, I did it with you, too.”

My pulse fluttered beneath his fingers, then spun out of control when his eyes dropped.

He snarled, staring at the pulse on my neck. “*Fuck*. You have no idea how hard it is not to mark you.”

My cheeks flushed. “Stop being so…Logan!”

“Can’t.” His grin turned shameless. “I’ve imagined it a thousand times.” His gaze climbed from my neck to my mouth. “You expect me to stay in fucking control when you do all these damn cute things? You’re basically begging me.”

“I don’t beg!” I wrapped my hands around his neck. “Strangling you, though? Sure.”

Logan’s lips brushed mine. We never got a chance.

“*Ah, ah, ah.*”

I wheeled in his arms, hands falling to my sides.

My grandparents stood there behind us. Grandma, with a knowing smile and sparkling eyes; Grandpa, with an annoyed frown, eyes shifting from Logan’s arms around my waist to his lack of a T-shirt.

“Boy, did you notice you have your lycan’s tail?” Grandpa asked. “And you won’t be standing shirtless next to my granddaughter within this pack boundary.” He reconsidered. “Within Scotland.”

“You were right, Yvaine, his ass is great!” Grandma piped in. “Eleven out of ten.”

Grandpa and I both glared at her as Logan breathed out a chuckle. Nice way to add another layer to the Logan Ego Tower—by now it was probably

visible from Tau Ceti.

“You’ll be staying in two separate rooms. Don’t even think about sneaking around at night; I have eyes and ears everywhere! Hear me, boy?”

“Yes, sir. Ma’am, nice to meet you as a human. Um, could you excuse me? I need a shower and a change of clothes.”

“Oh no, I won’t excuse you!” Grandma jumped up. “I need to know more about the mate my granddaughter is in love with!”

At that, I blushed so hard I thought my skin would turn red permanently.

“Tomorrow night we’ll have a pack dinner to celebrate the two of you.” Grandpa pounded him on the back. “Now step away from my granddaughter. We’ll show you to the doghouse.”

“Oh, do be docile, fiancé! They’re mates.”

Grandpa Ian made a dismissive noise and turned back to Logan, who as usual, seemed to have no care in the world. “Also, do you know what wereball is, boy?”

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

LOGAN

My bare foot tapped the grass.

Patience had never been my greatest asset. Scratch that. There wasn't a single ounce of patience anywhere in my system.

Maybe when it came to *her*, though…

But she didn't appreciate my monumental effort not to smash her twin's donkey face against the cider cart over there. I bet that would improve his looks.

Damn Islander. All innocent and cheerful while sneaking me side glares and flashing side fangs whenever no one was watching.

I winked at him and was rewarded with a grimace. He scratched his nose with his middle finger and turned to answer something his grandmother had asked. *Probably whether he wants milk and a spoonful of honey before bed.* Loser.

How unfortunate that my mate happened to be his sister. Not that I was complaining. Not even a little. Because she couldn't be more perfect.

Actually, scratch that too. Perfect wasn't a big enough word.

As usual, my eyes found her. She was standing beside Uncle Clyde—or was that Uncle Angus? She had so many relatives she could spare a few to other families. She was wearing blue and green leggings and an oversized T-shirt of The Proclaimers knotted at the side, exposing a strip of stomach. Her hazel hair was tied in a high bun, accentuating her goddess-like face.

She glanced my way, probably having felt my stare. A constant stare, if it were up to me.

And just like that, I melted.

I know, it's pathetic.

I sighed, long and deep, and kicked a pebble.

I didn't know what to do. Should I ask her out? Where to? And to do what? *Help me milk cows? Roll hay down hills? Chase sheep?* Those were basically the local entertainment options, apart from pubs.

Was she a romantic type of girl? Did she expect flowers? Chocolate? That green liquid she loved? No, wait, that was only when she studied. What if she thought pubbing was a boring date idea?

I pinched the bridge of my nose. *So difficult.*

Maybe I should call her friend and gather information. Or should I just tell her that I already love her so much that the possibility of her leaving me paralyzes me more than the fright I gave that elk last month before I ate it? Technically, I already told Yvaine how I felt about her…over the phone, back when she thought I was Rudolph. *What a mess.*

When she laughed at something her uncle said, my attention snagged on her throat. *That little neck…* I narrowed my eyes on the spot, rubbing my tongue over my front canines. *My mark would fit perfectly there, along with my matching necklace.*

The thought alone had me itching to cross the yard.

I cracked my neck, the pop loud.

"Anyone that wants to play, step forward! Everyone else can go enjoy the cider. Today, it's on me!" Alpha Ian's voice thundered across the field.

I grinned. For being related to Comet, he was a fantastic grandfather and Alpha. He had arranged this whole thing to celebrate his grandchildren being home and for Yvaine finding her mate—me.

I was about to step forward when, to my surprise, my mate did too. Along with a handful of uncles, cousins, and, naturally, the damned twin.

My grin faded. There were many unmated males. Unmated, unrelated males. Worse, she was going to distract me the entire time.

What if someone hurts her accidentally and I kill them afterward? Maybe…not so accidentally?

"Who wants to be captain?" Uncle Angus (or Knox) shouted. The captains would make the teams for the match.

“Yvaine and Pamela!” Luna Riona announced. She stepped aside with her not-yet husband, claiming they were too experienced to play with us youngsters. *Wereball used to be a real sport*, she had informed me. Apparently, in the old days, instead of a ball, the captains used the severed head of the largest prey they had hunted.

Pamela was one of Yvaine’s countless cousins. Tall, red-haired, blue-eyed, freckled, and pale; she had enough Scottishness to blind you with it. Her attitude reminded me of my sister, Trix.

The moment Pamela pointed at me, I straightened. “You’re on my team, Logan!”

My eyes shot straight to Bunny Doc. Her lips tucked inward. *Excellent.*

Bunny Doc was quite the possessive type, though at first glance she didn’t look like that at all.

I grinned. Up until now, jealousy was a trait I disliked, but I found it very entertaining in Yvaine.

Whistling, I strolled over and high-fived Pamela.

“I choose Lachy!” Yvaine called out.

My grin vanished. *Of course she did.*

“Nice. They’ve got no chance, sis,” the Islander said with an arrogance that I would send six feet below the ground.

The twins then launched into some bizarre high-five ritual, complete with a coordinated spin and their fingertips meeting above their heads. My lips twitched into a reluctant smile. Sure, he irritated me on a spiritual level, but I was glad Yvaine had him. For all his flaws, the Islander was a good brother.

The teams filled up quickly, with twelve players on each side. Uncle Clyde, some cousins, the pack priest, and more random MacKenzies landed on my team.

Some guy on her team, who looked like a mop, wrapped my mate in a hug, exceeding my zero-second allowance limit.

I popped my knuckles. My eyes followed The Mop jogging away. *Yeah, smile…while you still can.*

The opposing team won the coin toss and got the kickoff. Normally, the ball had to be fought for, but this was a friendly game. *Boring.*

I glanced toward Yvaine, who was busy stretching and rotating her hips. *Should I let her team win?* Nah. I was too competitive. Mate or not, my team was winning.

I scanned her relatives on the opposing team.

Don't hurt her family.

Don't hurt her family.

Don't hurt—

My eyes landed on Lachlan. *No promises there.*

Across the line of scrimmage, he bent into position for the hike and fucking smirked up at me.

I smirked back, my fangs glinting.

Oh, it's on.

After the gong sounded, Lachlan threw the ball toward one receiver at the 20-yard line. *The Mop. What a beautiful coincidence.*

I sprinted.

The Mop shuffled back, scanning the field for an opening, but with a "*Boo*!" shouted in his face, I cut in front of him and plucked the ball straight out of the air.

My elbow snapped out, landing on breakable ribs. When he hit the ground, my foot also happened to come down on his belly.

"*Argh!*"

The sound reminded me of a kicked Labrador.

"Oops, sorry, dude." I glanced down. "Didn't see ya there."

I hauled him upright with one hand while launching the ball with the other, my eyes on it.

A perfect spiral. The ball dropped into Clyde's waiting palms, and… *touchdown*.

Pamela threw both fists into the air. "Nice one, guys!"

A girl from my team patted my arm, her nails scratching my tattoos. "You're so talented! Play a lot?"

I gave her a brief nod as we jogged back to our lines.

"That wasn't nice, Rudolph." The familiar, melodic voice slid over my skin like warm honey.

I skidded to a stop and turned, grinning. "Come on. She was just congratulating me."

"I wasn't talking about Nikita touching you."

I breathed in her scent like an addict and fought back a moan. "Jealousy isn't a good trait, Bunny Doc."

Her nose crumpled in that adorable way of hers. "You shoved poor Raul!"

“The Mop? Allegedly.”

“And we aren’t even in a relat—” Before she could finish that sentence and ruin my good mood, I reached up and stole the elastic holding her bun. I looped the band around my wrist and bolted, the image of her hair cascading and fluttering all around her flustered, beautiful face, the last thing in my mind.

“Hey!” she yelled after me. “Give it back!”

I looked over my shoulder. Big mistake.

Fuck, she was even more lethal all windswept and irritated.

“Your bun looked like an onion anyway!” I teased, running backward.

“And you’re a cheap magpie, Rudolph!”

I chuckled, dodging two players who charged me for a tackle. Her cousins. So I generously chose not to flatten them.

I glanced down at the purple trophy around my wrist. From now on, this was mine. Just like her.

Oh yeah. This is gonna be fun.



YVAINE

Nope. This isn’t fun at all.

And not because it was raining from every direction. But because Logan was so hotly infuriating. Or infuriatingly hot, depending on the perspective.

After an hour of wereball, I was soaked and panting, my hair sticking to my face, neck, and shoulders thanks to a certain hair tie thief. And across the field, only in shorts, as if the lashing weather was decorative, said thief hadn’t sweated a drop!

Watching him move was distracting. The speed. The power. The way he changed direction. I was fairly sure he was holding back, too. A wave of pride washed through me.

“Mate is incredible!” Zelda gushed. *“Look at how his fingers grip the toy!”*

“It’s a football, not a toy.”

So far, he had scored twice and, entirely by coincidence (not), injured three guys on my team. Yet he behaved flawlessly with my family members, he and Uncle Clyde already acting like lifelong buddies. *Figures.*

Down by five points, my team had just regained the ball. The only one who really cared was Lachlan, barking orders left and right. Even though *I* was the captain, I let him, since my motto was participation is the important thing.

Lachlan launched the ball in my direction, from approximately another postcode, and I sprinted toward the end zone. A girl lunged for me but I dodged her—*Anna*, who had spent the last hour watching my mate more than the ball. Zelda supplied an image of her being swallowed by a sinkhole.

The wereball field was enormous, and with only twenty-four players spread across it, finding open space wasn’t hard. At that moment, I was alone, kudos to Lachlan’s perfect throw.

I’m about to make my first touchdown! I hooted.

As if summoned, a shadow descended a few feet away, blocking my path. I skidded to a stop through the mud.

“Yvaine! Here!” Uncle Angus called, far away.

My eyes had already locked on a pair of sardonic silver ones, daring me to pass. *Where had he come from?*

I gripped the ball in my hands and deflected left, faster than expected from my untrained self. Logan guessed, shifting right, but didn’t seem to be in any hurry to snatch my ball.

I cut right. He just tilted his head to the left while rain droplets slid down his chest.

“You can always pass it to your uncle, *baby*.” Ugh, that arrogant grin with those dimples, all masculine confidence and playful allure. “Look.” He pointed with his chin. “He’s right there.”

I gritted my teeth, blinking as raindrops hung off my lashes. “I hate that nickname.”

His smirk hitched higher. “Oh yeah?”

I wasn’t sure if I wanted to strangle him, yell right in his ear not to call me baby, or kiss the cocky smirk away.

Feigning left, I shot straight instead. It felt ridiculous, because Logan didn’t even move and let out an annoyingly soft chuckle. *Stephen, he didn’t*

even uncross his arms from his chest!

I considered diving between his long, parted legs, but I didn't want to risk him sitting on me.

I huffed, pursing my lips.

Who was I kidding? I should pass the ball to Uncle Angus.

No way!

"Give Logan the ball," my wolf whimpered.

"Never!" I let out a growl meant only for her, but it slipped out. Logan arched an eyebrow.

"But look at him!" Zelda wagged her tail. *"Beautiful mate. Hand him the ball, make him happy, then kiss him."*

"Should I cook him a steak too?"

My wolf whined out a yes, oblivious to my sarcasm.

"Useless."

Frowning, I assessed my options.

Logan wasn't a wall; a wall implied the possibility of going around it. He had been the Dark Diamond captain since freshman year for a reason… but he was also my mate. And this was wereball. *There are no rules.*

Inspiration struck, butterflies fluttering in anticipation.

With the ball tucked under my arm, I lifted my chin and stepped closer to him. Logan's smirk faltered.

I bet nobody ever did this at one of your wereball games, Rudy.

Resolve hardened my heart, and I placed myself right in front of him, never breaking eye contact. His delicious scent almost made me forget my intentions.

"Yvaine, what…" His breath hitched, eyes widening. And his confident smile? Gone.

I giggled internally. *This is absolutely going to work.*

"Hello." I rose up on tiptoes and pressed a kiss to his jaw, very close to his mouth.

His lips parted. His eyes fluttered shut.

This is it.

Not wasting another heartbeat, I took off.

The stunned silence behind me lasted mere seconds.

"Come back here, Yvaine!" he snarled. Heavy yet very fast footsteps slapped on the mud behind me.

I laughed so hard I almost dropped the ball. No one could stand between me and my touchdown now. I only had an angry bull chasing after me like I was a red flag.

My whole family cheered me on, even Uncle Clyde, and cameras clicked, capturing the event.

The end zone was right there…

One foot from glory, two strong arms caught me and my world tipped. Before Logan could crush me like a bug, he twisted us mid-air and landed underneath me with a grunt.

“I got you,” he snarled out huskily, his arms a chain around me.

Poor Rudy hadn’t noticed yet. My outstretched arm, ball in hand, had crossed the painted white line.

“Touchdown!” I yelled.

“That’s my niece!” Uncle Angus bragged.

“You tricked the hunk well, *rionnag*!” Grandma shouted.

All smiles, I gazed down at Logan, too quiet to be normal. His arms tightened more around me. My breath caught when I fully noticed our position; I was basically smeared across him like I was butter and he was a scone. The sparks flaring with his touch made my heart stumble over itself.

“Yeah, you did it, Bunny Doc,” he murmured hoarsely, his eyes focused on my parted lips. “And now *I’ll* score *my* touchdown.”

With that, he flipped us unexpectedly. One big palm around my nape, he towered above me, his weight on his elbows and knees.

My world shattered when his lips fell on mine.

They fit so perfectly that, for a moment, I couldn’t believe that geometrical fact.

His hand tightened on my neck. Breathing forgotten, I instead savored the mint and sweat from his rain-wet lips.

“Masturbator, you’re so whipped!” Lachlan shouted from a distance but neither of us cared.

Someone came to get the ball, and the game moved on.

Again, neither of us cared.

We were kissing like there was no tomorrow, no past, no family, or friends to witness any of this. My hands automatically tangled with his wet locks. My obsession.

“Finally,” Logan sighed against my lips, his gray eyes hooded. But I wasn’t letting the Terminator terminate the kiss. My wolf agreed. My mouth

found his parted one again, tongues meeting and dancing. I felt so light I was sure I was about to float away.

Logan released a shuddering breath, holding me in a way that made it impossible to move.

“I’m happy you came,” I told him.

He pecked my lips once, twice, three times, lingering a little longer on the last one. His eyes were warm as they gazed into my own. “I’m happy I came too.”

I smiled.

He smiled back.

“Technically, Lucien did.”

“Same, same.” His hand brushed my hair. “Do you want to, *er*, go somewhere with me later, Bunny Doc?”

I chuckled at his word game, or lack thereof, as he kissed my cheek.

“Or we could do something else if you’d prefer.” He inched closer and kissed the tip of my nose.

“Let’s go *somewhere* then.”

“Mate is asking us out!” Zelda panted.

Logan smiled sheepishly and hopped up, taking my hands in his in the process. A second later, he nuzzled his nose into my neck and let out a soft growl that sounded all Lucien. I sighed, running my hand through his hair.

“Can you stop?” That was the needle that popped the magic bubble. “I’m trying not to throw up the haggis I had for breakfast!” Lachlan shouted.

I turned and saw him sprinting toward the end zone. His red mane, longer than usual, whipped in the wind, the ball under his arm. “Or actually, go ahead, Yvaine! Keep the Masturbator busy. We’re winning now!”

And that did it.

Logan jerked his head up and glared at Lachlan, who was getting closer and closer to the white line and another touchdown.

A gust of air made me fall onto my butt.

“Ouch,” I groaned, rubbing my lower back. *Like Lucien, like Logan.*

Logan threw a big rock and it smacked Lachlan on the lower back, knocking him to the ground. Then Logan pounced, pinning Lachlan to the muddy field with a splash. This time, Logan didn’t bother to hold his weight. On the contrary, he did everything he could to crush his rival.

“In your face, Islander!”

Lachlan flashed him a hint of his fangs. “Fuck off, Masturbator!”

The sight would have been comical had my mind not started assessing where the bruises would appear from the impact of the two wild boars wiggling in the mud.

“Aw, don’t cry now,” Logan mocked, snatching the ball from Lachlan and tossing it to a laughing Uncle Clyde. “You’re just so slow.”

I heard the *click* of a camera; Grandma took another photo. “You two are adorable! This is going straight to the family album!”

Lachlan and Logan suddenly realized their awkward position, pushing off each other at the same time.

“Get away from me!” My twin bounced up. Mud covered him from his chin to his knees.

“With pleasure, ya old sheep. You stink!” My mate wore an equal expression of disgust, waving his hand in front of his nose.

“And you like cow shit!” Lachlan kicked the mud, hitting Logan with it.

“Game’s over. We’re all hungry,” Uncle Clyde shouted.

“But who won?” Logan and Lachlan asked at the same time, then glared at each other.

I laughed. Amusing how the two behaved so alike. They could be excellent friends, opposing teams aside.

“Nobody won! It was just a friendly match,” Uncle Angus slurred, a pint of beer already in hand.

“Nobody?” Logan repeated, the same incredulous look mirrored on Lachlan’s face.

“But there has to be a winner!” The latter gritted his teeth.

I hurried to them, brushing blades of grass off my leggings.

Logan squared up to Lachlan and slammed his hand on his shoulder. Anyone else would’ve ended up with a dislocated limb.

“Since I caught you like a hen on the run, I declare *we* won.”

“This is the kind of insolence that adds to your cheating reputation.” Lachlan poked at Logan’s chest.

“Careful, *freckles*. Just because you’re my mate’s twin doesn’t mean I won’t hesitate to smash your skull in if you disrespect me again.” With that, Logan slapped his hand away.

“Is that a threat, Terminator?” Lachlan went right up into his face.

“Only if you want it to be, Highlander.”

They were ridiculous.

“Are they about to kiss?” I heard Anna ask. She sounded excited.

“Okay, enough. Shut up, you two!”

They both glanced down at me. Reaching up, I massaged the spaces between their furrowed eyebrows. “As your mate and twin”—I looked back and forth between them—“you two must become friends. I demand it.”

“Friends?” the two spat at the same time. *Again.*

“You’re delusional, Yvaine!” My name on Logan’s lips sent shivers down my spine.

“Yeah, you must’ve gotten hit in the head, sis.”

“Nah, it was my mind-blowing kiss, Islander.”

“Disgusting!”

Logan showed him his wiggling tongue.

Lachlan kicked more mud at him.

I stomped my foot.

“Shhh!” I got in between the two giants, who were glaring at each other above my head. The air was charged with electricity. “Now, hug each other!” I took a step back, gesturing for them to follow my request.

They looked at me like I had grown an extra head.

“No way!” Lachlan sneered.

“I don’t wanna catch scabies!”

“If anyone catches anything, it’d be me with all the diseases you carry!”

“Between us? For sure, *virgin boy*.” Logan’s snicker died out when he caught my bemused look.

“At least I don’t need the hands of my whole wereball team to count all the women I’ve shagged! Yvaine, shouldn’t you be mad at him? He lied to you for weeks while he slept around.” Lachlan should have studied law. My father always said, *He knows how to poke at an open wound.*

Though my mate wasn’t all that different.

“Why don’t you go call your invisible girlfriend, Islander? Oh, wait! You can’t!” Logan tapped his temple. “Cause she’s mated with my friend!”

Was Logan talking about Amaia? She and I had talked twice since I came to Scotland. Dear Amaia had left out the little detail that her mate was Logan’s friend.

Lachlan’s face turned a splotchy, angry red, a trace of pain entering his eyes. “At least I respect women! You made Ludmilla, Camilla, Priscilla, and all the other -*illas* cry!”

My lips pursed. Every girl's name, all from my pack, was another stab in the heart.

"I was honest with everyone. They knew that I—" He glanced at me and shut up.

"*Fuck and run, onto the next one*!" Lachlan sneered. "Your motto, Terminator. I remember it because you told me you'd do the same with *my* sister!"

"Enough!" I didn't need to know more. I trusted Logan, and since the moment he learned we were mates, he hadn't been with anyone else. "For now, I'll ignore this *fuck-and-run* motto and your attempts to annoy my brother," I told Logan, unable to hide my irritation.

He cursed under his breath. "It's not like that! We were what, seventeen?" He glared at Lachlan. "And I never looked for you, Yvaine, I swear!"

An idea popped into my head. "If you don't hug my twin, I won't go on a date with you, Logan."

He narrowed his eyes at me, determination filling his silver irises. His head snapped to Lachlan.

"Come any closer and I'll claw your black heart out!" Lachlan growled, fists lifted defensively.

A second later, Logan was squeezing the heck out of Lachlan, who shrugged him off and landed a punch on his shoulder.

"Was that enough, Bunny Doc?" Logan asked as he dodged a second punch.

"*Bunny Doc*? What a childish nickn—"

"Lachlan! If you don't accept Logan's hug, I'll tell Dad that you crushed the car on the way to the airport."

He gasped, a look of betrayal on his face. "You promised!"

"I never promised. I merely nodded at you."

Logan chuckled, opening his arms and wiggling his eyebrows. "Come here, big guy!"

My brother, never one to step down from a challenge, went straight for it and embraced him. Lachlan slammed him on the back. Logan slammed him harder.

"See? That wasn't so difficult. Now, Lachlan, kiss Logan on the cheek."

"Yvaine!"

"Bunny Doc!"

They untangled from each other and placed several feet between them, looking at each other with utter disgust.

I chuckled to myself, drumming my fingertips together. “Next time then!”

I was going to enjoy this. *A lot.*

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CHAPTER TWELVE

YVAINE

"Watch out." Pamela dabbed the corner of my mouth. "You're drooling."

"Hush, cousin!"

My mate was wearing the MacKenzie kilt for my family, a small gesture to fit in, hoping they'd love him even more, as though that were possible. My whole family adored Logan.

I didn't know whether that bothered me or Lachlan more. After the game, Logan seemed to have passed some sort of final test. The two enormous boars that he hunted as a thank-you gift for his imposed stay only served to put him further in their good graces. No idea how he had caught them, as he swore he hadn't shifted.

Logan also offered to repay Grandpa for every cow Lucien had eaten. Grandpa refused outright, claiming that Logan was family now. Instead, he made him awkwardly promise to wait until marriage for us to mate.

My eyes shifted straight back to Logan. I never cared about kilts before, but now I believed Logan should wear one every day of the year. Even to bed. *Note to self: get a kilt in size XXL.*

My gaze traveled down. The kilt parted around his right thigh as he crouched to tie a kid's shoelace while discussing wereball. I didn't even have the emotional wherewithal to coo at the action, because the bulge of sleek muscle looked as hard as steel. My small obsession with man calves didn't help. Especially his.

He looked like some warrior who'd marched down from the Highlands to steal a bride. Ridiculously primitive. Ridiculously handsome.

Logan met, chatted with, and charmed everyone, being a perfect guest throughout the evening. Grandpa spent an hour discussing bee beds with him, while Uncle Clyde talked about the effective ways to interrogate captive rogues.

Because of that, we never had a moment alone. The MacKenzies had no intention of wasting the little time left before we returned to Montana. Stolen glances and the occasional small smile were all the contact we had managed since the wereball game.

Live folk music drifted through the clearing outside the packhouse, a five-story Victorian manor made of granite ashlar, lovingly restored over the years, with tall, arched windows blazing with warm amber light, as if hundreds of lives pulsed within the walls. A steep copper roof crowned the manor, bristling with gables and a forest of stout chimneys, breathing ribbons of pine smoke into the Highlands sky.

In the clearing, the MacKenzie banners fluttered above food stands, the air thick with the smell of homemade cooking and heather. Rows of small honey pots, all produced by my family, were lined up for the taking—a whole new level of honey worship. Laughter rolled from every direction as pack members danced, linked arms, and shared ciders.

"Get ready for the haggis hurling!" Uncle Knox bellowed with a self-chuckle.

The crowd cheered.

I spotted Grandpa in his MacKenzie kilt. He was competing! I grinned, strolling closer, my spoon dipping into my little pot of honey.

What had started out as a joke had become a popular game—contestants standing on a whisky barrel greased with fat and hurling haggis as far as they could.

Several werewolves, including Lachlan and Pamela, lost their footing and landed on their butts, with spectators dumping cider over them. Grandpa won, of course. He punched the air with a triumphant growl, and the whole pack answered back.

Next came axe throwing. The target—a straw dummy—jerked up, down, left, and right on a moving platform.

Lachlan wound his arm back, sprang forward in three agile strides, and launched the huge axe. I watched as the weapon flew through the air,

spinning twice, before hitting its target. The dummy head dropped to the ground with a dull thud.

Logan observed with narrowed eyes. Then he picked up an axe, savoring it in his hands. Spoon hanging from my mouth, I watched as his axe split the dummy in half and then kept going, disappearing into the forest. There was a dull thud and a tall pine tree fell.

“Disqualified!” Lachlan yelled. “Damage to local flora!”

Other participants struck their own targets but didn’t succeed in beheading them, meaning Lachlan won. The crowd roared his name.

Logan returned from the forest carrying only half an axe and apologized to Grandpa, who handed him a cider and a new pot of honey. The fact that he was here, sharing honey with Grandpa, was doing all sorts of swoopy, warm things to my stomach. Or maybe I was high on heather honey.

“Golden arrow contestants! Line up!” Uncle Clyde boomed.

We had to shoot and hit a flying target, and whoever won would get a golden arrow.

“Come cheer for your bunny doc, Logan!” Pamela giggled, then blew a raspberry my way.

Handing her my empty honey pot, I grinned. Now *this* was my game. Mom had taught me archery, and apart from the year she’d shot Dad’s hand instead of the target for touching a girl’s shoulder—a scar he still bragged about—she never missed. I was her legacy.

As I wrapped my fingers around the bow, my large sleeve dropping down my arm, forgotten muscle memory settled into place.

I felt silver eyes on me. My hand trembled. I breathed low in my stomach as I let everyone else melt away, reaching for that strict focus I’d learned over the years. The flying straw wolf burst across the range and I drew.

My arrow missed.

Pursing my lips, I notched another arrow and released. The wolf’s head rolled on the grass, my arrow sticking out of its open mouth.

Pats and hugs descended from relatives and friends, and the golden arrow landed in my hand. My eighth.

I sat down between two aunts, enjoying the festivities. The sun turned its attention away, hundreds of lanterns flickered to life, and a bonfire roared. Lachlan was playing a game of wolf and sheep with a whole crew of kids high on too much candy; he was the sheep for once.

My eyes drifted past the chaos and landed on Logan. The mate pull was powerful. Logan was a magnet and I was an unfortunate coin. Every glance turned my brain into porridge, and his scent wasn't helping. We'd spent weeks talking over the phone, without any face-to-face moments, apart from arguing or kissing. The thought of a normal conversation with him made me feel…*timid*?

That's an understatement.

I slipped away for a breather and leaned against a pine tree—or what remained of it after Logan's attempt at axe throwing.

Embarrassment consumed me. Every time our eyes met, I forgot how to swallow. It shouldn't be like this, I knew. But the more I looked at him, the more there was to look at. Not only was he a powerful lycan, but he was also charismatic, *handsome*, friendly, and put everyone in a good mood—except for Lachlan.

Have I mentioned that he's handsome?

Suddenly, my wolf perked up.

Someone was behind me.

"Good thing you didn't have your bow at the wereball game or I'd have ended up like that straw wolf."

I let out a shaky breath, collecting myself before turning to face my destiny.

Logan stood a few feet away, hands tucked into the pockets of his kilt, a faded logging company T-shirt stretched across his defined chest. His blond hair was slicked back, exposing that sun-kissed forehead.

I wanted to say something but my lips were glued shut. I couldn't blink. It felt as though the moment I did, he would disappear back to whatever mountain he'd wandered down from.

I'm blaming the mate bond.

Logan coughed a little, opened his mouth, closed it again. Then he smiled. No trace of mockery or arrogance. Some would call it a normal smile, but for me, it was special. The red flush and shy look on his face reflected mine.

"Hi."

When I didn't answer right away, he scratched his head. *He's a little nervous, too.*

"Hello." I smiled back as Logan ambled closer. "You enjoying the party?"

“Yeah. Your family’s…a lot. In a good way. Very informative, too. Cousin Bernard told me everything about mushroom foraging.” He frowned. “Or was he Arnold? I forgot some names.”

I giggled. “An alphabetical system helps. My grandma’s siblings are Arnold, Bernard, Claus, Diana, and their children are—” I caught his amused look and stopped. “Sorry.”

An awkward silence settled between us.

“Do you want to—”

“Let’s—”

“You first,” I blurted, looking away.

“No, you.”

My cheeks were so hot that I wouldn’t mind those ice cubes Uncle Angus used for his cider. I breathed in before speaking. “*Um*, I was wondering if you wanted to go for a—”

“Yes,” he said immediately. “Let’s go.”

“You don’t even know what I was going to ask!” I cringed at my high-pitched voice.

He offered me his elbow. The instant I linked my arm through his, our breaths hitched at the sparks.

“Well, thank you,” I said finally after just staring at him. “Lachlan could use the extra help packing. He’s a disaster with that.”

Logan looked at me like I’d just stabbed him with a knife and licked off the blood.

I nudged him. “Can’t take a joke, Rudolph?”

He laughed breathlessly. “Thank Goddess. You got me there, Bunny Doc.” He leaned over and pecked my warm cheek swiftly. My head spun. “Another minute with your twin and I’d have started punching walls.”

I chuckled at his *definite* joke, then covered my mouth.

What if I had haggis stuck between my teeth? Panic struck. I wasn’t prepared for this.

“What’s wrong?” He studied me, knitting his eyebrows before sighing. “Look, I can tolerate him for you, okay? But being friends is too much for now.”

“No, I understand that. Men and their need to prove who’s top dog. It’s biological. I just, um, need to…grab something from my room.”

He relaxed.

“Sure.”

He walked me to the packhouse's entrance, his kilt swaying with every step. I awkwardly waved at him, eyes drifting to his calves again. Once he disappeared from view, I bounded upstairs two steps at a time, reached the landing, and collapsed on the floor.

I took a minute to calm my racing heart.

I analyzed my long-sleeved MacKenzie dress, the checkered cobalt-blue fabric fitted at my waist and loose enough to move with my every step. *If I changed, he'd notice.*

I darted to my bathroom, swiped on deodorant, and stared in the mirror, criticizing my hair, tied into a bun so tight it lifted my eyebrows. I combed it out, glaring at the stubborn short wispies around my face that always curled from the humidity. Then I flossed and brushed my teeth, washed my face, and smoothed cherry lip balm over my lips. Finally, I added a touch of mascara. Luckily, I hadn't had much dinner or I'd have thrown up from how tight my stomach was. I hadn't even been this nervous for my anatomy final.

I gnawed the inside of my cheek. *Calm down. It's just Rudolph.*

"You're beautiful. Just like your mother."

"Grandma!" I slapped a hand over my chest. "I didn't hear you!"

She nudged the door shut with her hip. "You're probably distracted by the young man pacing outside." She took the brush from me and ran it through my hair. "Let me."

My shoulders loosened. Grandma carried that special kind of safety only grandparents had. As long as they were still here, a part of you never truly had to grow up, like childhood never quite let go of you.

"Oh, the nerves of first dates!" She parted my hair into three, twisting them into a braid. "Your mother was the same. She was so nervous that she did everything to mask her feelings. So much so that at one point, your father almost rejected her."

I chuckled, looking at my grandmother's reflection in the mirror. "He'd never do that." It had to be physically impossible. His love for Mom was beyond normal.

"Isabella didn't know that." Grandma tied the braid off with a blue ribbon. "And your father! Cheeky and handsome! Rather like the blond hunk downstairs."

My heart did a somersault. And why did everyone keep specifying that he was blond?

“My *rionnag*.” She smiled. “Don’t let your nerves steal the experience. Logan is the other half of your soul.”

I threw my arms around her just as a knock sounded.

“*Nighean òg. Màthair*.” Uncle Clyde strolled in, holding a big pot, spoons sticking out of his shirt pocket. It didn’t matter the time of day or the month, stew was always ready in this house. “Didn’t see you eat, baby girl.”

After brushing my teeth, there was no way now.

“Of course she hasn’t!” Grandma declared. “She’s got a date with the Hollywood star.”

“Grandma…”

“The lycan boy looks more nervous than she does! Might throw up all those cows he stole.” Uncle sat on my checkered armchair and served himself stew.

Aunt Sarah arrived carrying a bowl. “You can’t have stew without gravy.”

Three minutes later, Uncle Knox appeared. “Oh! There you are, wife. I was worried.” As if they couldn’t communicate through their mind-link.

Grandpa barreled in with a tray of pies right before Lachlan showed up. At least he was honest enough to admit he just came to hang out.

Another knock came. I stilled, every hair on my arms standing.

“I heard the party moved up here!” Pamela’s blue eyes searched the room, and a smile erupted on her freckled face when she spotted me. “What have I missed?”

I huffed, shoving a stew bowl into her hands to shush her.

Aunt Layla, Uncle Angus’s mate, peeked through the window. “Your mate does have great hair.”

“And the kind of calves you love!” Pamela said.

Uncle Knox patted Uncle Clyde’s shoulder. “I can’t wait for Pamela to find her mate.”

“She won’t. Right, baby carrot?” Clyde grinned at his daughter. For someone who had been in a high-security prison, he had quite the arsenal of sweet nicknames for the girls in his life.

Pamela rolled her eyes. “Sure, Dad, I’ll reject my mate and live with you forever, even after Mom leaves you for never cleaning the house.”

A roar of laughter swelled inside my room.

“Yvaine.” Uncle Knox pointed toward the door. “Go see your mate.”

I chewed on my lower lip.

“He’s talking to Gregory and Angus,” Aunt Layla reported from her surveillance post. “No rush.”

“Or tell him to get lost,” Lachlan mumbled around his third bowl of stew. “You should ignore him as much as possible.”

“Lachlan,” Grandpa warned.

“I agree. Make him work for it.” Sarah glared at her mate. “Your uncle certainly didn’t!”

“You were getting married!” Uncle Knox huffed. “What was I supposed to do?”

“You punched my fiancé at the altar and said my gown looked like meringue.” Sarah shook her head. “Stole a piece of wedding cake, too!”

Uncle Knox smirked, a glint in his eyes.

“The lycan’s coming up the stairs!” Layla shouted.

Every head turned.

Right on cue, my heart started sprinting and my wolf hopped up and down.

Then came the knock.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

YVAINE

After Logan tapped the door twice, his scent invaded my lungs. Everyone in the room froze.

Layla and Pamela giggled, Uncle Clyde sipped his beer, and Lachlan glanced at me, eyes shifting between my hands twisting in my lap and my pale face. “I’ll talk to him.”

“No!” I bolted up, almost stumbling. That just made my family snicker. “Glad to be your source of entertainment.” I smoothed my yellow cardigan and took a calming breath.

My cousin shot me a smirk. “Can I join you guys?”

“Pamela, sit back down,” Uncle Clyde said.

Grandma had the audacity to scold me. “Yvaine, hurry up! Don’t make the Hollywood star wait!”

“*Rionnag*, if you mate tonight, don’t forget that human protections aren’t effective with werewolves,” Uncle Knox said.

“Let alone with lycans!” Sarah added from the armrest of Uncle Knox’s seat.

“Yeah, you are too young to bake pups, baby girl.”

Moon Goddess, please teleport me to a dimension where my family is quieter.

“*I* am ready to have great-grandpups!” Grandpa retorted. “As long as you wed first.”

“Oh, hush you,” Grandma said. I cringed, my hand on the doorknob. “Don’t pressure her, Ian!” Then she turned to me. “We are ready whenever you are, *rionnag*. But the sooner the better! Your pups will demand a lot of energy considering how many sheep your mate ate in just a few days. Better have them while you’re still young!” She looked at the door with a small chuckle. Probably because she, like everyone else, knew Logan could hear perfectly well from outside the door.

“Yeah, and who knows when our captain here will find his mate and give birth to the next wereball team?” A whole new round of teasing bombarded Lachlan. He slumped further and further in his chair now that he was at the center of our family’s intense attention.

Taking advantage of the distraction, I rushed outside and closed the door behind me, palms on the wood. I took one deep breath, then turned.

Logan was leaning with a shoulder against the wall, his head tilted just enough for that amused smile to confirm my suspicion. *He’d heard everything.*

And, of course, my foot caught on one of the thousands of rugs lining the packhouse and I pitched forward. Before my werewolf reflex could kick in, a hand was already snatching my arm, another steadying my waist.

The sparks didn’t help here. *Wonderful. Great entrance for the first time my mate and I are being civil.*

“You okay?” he asked, sounding almost as nervous as I felt.

“Sorry I’m late.” I glanced at the door. It was *somehow* ajar. “My family…dropped by to say hello.”

“No worries.” Logan looked past me. “I was talking to Angus and… Gregory?” His brows furrowed. “Or Dorian?”

I laughed. “Gregory. My second cousin.”

“Logan!” Aunt Caro’s voice rang out behind us. “Come see my collection of taxidermied weasels!”

“Aunt Caro,” I groaned, “no one wants to see your weasels.”

Logan grinned at me. “I do!”

Ten minutes and ten taxidermied mustelids later, we finally left the packhouse.

A window cracked open above us. “Oi, Yvaine!”

I stiffened.

“Make sure you mark him on the left!” Uncle Knox shouted. “Statistics say it’s more visible!”

Right. Because someone has definitely published research on mating marks.

“Has anyone really studied that?” Logan voiced my exact thought.

I pushed a stray curl out of my face. “Embarrassing nieces is my uncle’s favorite hobby.”

“We will!” Logan called back with an easy smile. When he looked back at me, it vanished. “I-I was joking…” He scratched his head.

“Oh! I know.” I laughed far too loudly and slapped his shoulder like we were lifelong buddies. He glanced at the spot I’d touched, then at me.

Could I be any more awkward?

“Want to get some fresh air?” I proposed. We were already outside.

Yes, I can be.

Logan didn’t answer, too busy staring at me, and the longer he stared, the hotter my cheeks became.

“Just kiss already!”

I sucked in a breath.

Logan grazed his thumb along the side of his nose, huffing a laugh. “I think we have an audience.”

I looked up. Half my family was squeezed into my bedroom window.

“Let’s walk.” Logan gave me a small smile. “Before they decide to chaperone us.”

I nodded profusely, trying to avoid talking and any more embarrassment.

We followed the winding woodland trail until the lights of the packhouse faded behind us. Low mist hung over the earth, swirling over our feet, and lamps twinkled from the scattered cabins tucked between the trees; some pack members preferred more isolation. We met a few of them along the way, all greeting us brightly.

The trail forked, and when we took a left, no one was in sight.

Hard muscles hauled me up, and my feet left the ground. “Finally,” Logan murmured against my hair. He inhaled deeply, as though drawing me into his lungs. “Been wanting to do this all night.” He paused, arms tight around my waist. “All day.”

“Me too.” I melted into the hug, my arms finding his neck.

Neither of us hurried to let go. When he leaned back, I tipped my face up to meet his gaze.

A choked laugh slipped from him. “You’re making me so nervous, Bunny Doc.” He smiled, almost shy. “Didn’t think anything could.”

I understood perfectly, since I felt the same.

“Because I’m your mate?” I whispered, still looking up at him.

He narrowed his eyes a little. “It’s more than that.”

When he put me down, his hands slid from my waist up my back until one settled at the nape of my neck. This close, our height difference was comical, my neck craning so far it cricked. “I could really use that ladder now,” I blurted.

A smirk broke across his face. “Oh yeah?”

I let out a cry of surprise when he scooped me up again and set me atop a boulder. “There.” Now our faces were level. “Better, Bunny Doc?” His eyes glowed a molten silver, competing with the full moon hanging above.

I nodded, my palms finding soft moss. “Much.”

Just like that, my nerves melted away, his humor contagious. Besides, mates weren’t supposed to make you nervous, even if yours happened to be the Terminator, a seven-foot lycan dipped in a pool of hotness.

Logan hopped up onto the boulder too. We sat shoulder to shoulder.

Towering firs, heavy with old lichens, wove a canopy so dense the forest floor lived in perpetual dusk. This was the sort of place where legends didn’t feel invented, only hidden, waiting for the right moment to emerge. The music from the party and the glow of the packhouse were far enough for privacy, but close enough to remind us we weren’t in open wilderness.

Logan gazed up, casually draping an arm over my shoulders. “The stars are incredible from here.”

“Like the Scottish sky caught interstellar measles.” I winced, even distracting Zelda from her constant watching of Logan.

Thank Stephen this lycan found me funny, for some reason. Maybe it was just the mate bond that made me hilarious to him.

He chuckled huskily. “That’s exactly what I meant. So many stars the sky got sick with them.”

Tucking my knees into my chest, I peered up as a solitary owl drew a straight trajectory across the sky. *Let’s try again.* “Current estimates put the Milky Way at somewhere between two and four hundred billion stars.”

Logan pushed a curl behind my ear, a spark following his finger. “Yeah? How do you know that?”

“There are approximately eighty-six billion neurons in the human brain. Neuroscientists estimate them by counting a small region of the brain and extrapolating the total. Astronomers use a similar method to estimate stars.” I smiled, proud of the research advancement. “The human brain and our galaxy are measured almost the same way. Isn’t that incredible?”

I became so absorbed that I missed the way he was looking at me, the kind of look that tangled my stomach in knots.

“You’re unbelievable. So smart. Every conversation with you is interesting,” he said bluntly. “When I realized *you* were my mate at the conference…” He sighed. “I was conflicted.”

My smile faltered. *Had he considered rejecting our bond?*

“Part of me wanted to mark you on the spot, but a quarter of me wanted to kiss you first, then mark you.”

“And the other quarter?”

He laughed. “It recognized the frustrating girl from the phone with the sexiest voice I’d ever heard.”

I snorted. I also remembered my infatuation with his voice before seeing the man attached to it, and how it had disrupted my routine.

“It was the first time I’d ever talked to someone without seeing them. I couldn’t help it! Every call left me wanting more. The more we talked, the harder I fell.” His gaze lingered on me. “The best part? When you sent me your picture without knowing who I was.”

I smacked his chest. He chuckled, catching my hand in his. “Careful.” His thumb rubbed over my knuckles. “You’ll hurt yourself.”

I ignored the sting in my hand. He didn’t need to know he was right. “What did you even do with that picture?”

He intertwined our fingers. “Printed a hundred copies. Handed them out.”

“Logan!”

He held his fist over his mouth to stifle another laugh. “I’m kidding! I stared at it for hours and made it my phone wallpaper.”

“That can’t be true.”

“Says the woman who stalked my Instagram.”

How does he know that?! Tiziano assured me that people don’t know when you check their profile!

Logan read my expression. “You told Rudolph how much you hated girls flirting in my comments.” His grin widened. “Remember?”

I groaned and covered my face with my free hand.

“Don’t.” His thumb continued stroking the back of my hand. “I’d have gone feral if it had been the other way around.” A threatening note laced his voice. “I even posted that I’d found my mate. Nobody believed me.”

I knew the one. But that didn’t lessen my embarrassment at indirectly revealing all my thoughts about *my mate* to *my mate*.

“Still unfair.” I played with his calloused fingers; they were long, thick, and masculine, the nails still slightly dark but no longer sharp, looking more human now.

“What is?” he whispered, his breath fanning the side of my face.

“That you—” I looked up and lost the rest of the sentence in his sweet but intense eyes.

“That I…?”

I waited for his mouth to descend on mine, but it didn’t. His lips deviated to my ear. “I love how flustered you get.”

“Logan…stop.” I pulled back, my cheeks so red that aliens from the sky could spot them glowing.

He laughed. “What did I do now?”

I pouted. “I can’t concentrate when you’re this close.”

His grin turned wolfish. He pressed a kiss to my hot cheek, then another. “Well thanks, little mate,” he purred against my skin.

“Thanks for helping me study for that exam,” I blurted, prolonging the conversation. I knew his lips would make the most out of the silence. I did want to kiss him, just…this shyness had invaded me since we had become civil with each other.

“Anytime. I learned a lot too.”

“No, you didn’t!”

“I did.” His finger lifted my chin, and my eyes dropped to his lips. Staring at his secret poster in my room had given me butterflies, and standing within arm’s reach of him made me forget how to breathe, but this close? My entire cardiovascular system was about to resign. “I learned that you tap your pen on your chin”—his thumb brushed the spot—“when you take your time to think. Because you never answer straight away. Like you argue with your own brain first.”

So true…

“You wrinkle your nose in that cute way whenever you realize I’m teasing you.” He looked at me and chuckled. “There!”

I rubbed my nose. “I do not!”

“But my favorite thing I learned?” He searched my eyes, taking his time. “You light up whenever you’re passionate about something—neurons, bees, the benefits of lemons. Doesn’t matter.” My pulse spun out of control when he pulled my braid a little. “You shine.”

I was speechless. He exuded so much Alpha male energy and something else—*lycan*.

He smiled, almost helplessly. “And you’re so damn beautiful. I’m so fucking lucky.”

We held our gazes for a long moment, leaning into each other.

A golden lock slipped over his forehead and my fingers brushed it back—the only thing about Logan that felt soft on the outside.

Then, muttering a curse, one arm locked around my waist, Logan had me flush against him.

And we kissed, and kissed, and kissed some more for an exceptionally long time, until rain found us.

The music from the party faltered, then picked up once more as the gentle shower fell on us in glittering droplets.

“A *smirr*,” Logan mumbled against my lips.

“You remember…”

“I remember everything about you.”

“We should go inside.”

A lazy smile tugged at his mouth. “Always so responsible.”

“One of us has to be.”

Except this time, we weren’t.

We danced under the *smirr* and the moonlight. Rain gathered on his lashes and my cardigan, on his cheekbones and my lips. Our shadows stretched and tangled over the moss, the space between us extending and disappearing.

We danced and kissed. Kissed and danced. Until the music from the packhouse stopped and the moon left too. Until only the rain, the stars above, and us remained.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LOGAN

I think I've memorized every damn detail of this room by now. From the splits lining the old wooden ceiling to the creases in the velvet curtains that made me sneeze just by looking at them. I glanced at the grandfather clock in the corner—2:40 a.m.

Still wide awake. In fact, I'd never felt so awake. *Awesome.*

Before her, I slept like a rock. Nine hours minimum. And if I didn't have classes or wereball training, I'd stay in bed until noon. Morning people? Couldn't relate. My head could merely hit the pillow, and I'd be out like a light. But not tonight. And I knew why. My brain decided to run in circles around *her*.

I let out a heavy sigh, folding my arms behind my head as I stared at the wooden ceiling—again. The way she made me nervous was downright shocking. I mean, I'd never felt like this in my *entire* life, let alone over a girl. But she was not just any girl.

She's *my* girl. Mine.

Earlier tonight, Bunny Doc and I talked for hours in the woods, mostly me asking questions while she droned on and on about medical school, friends, and family. I was nodding along like an idiot as she got all excited about a specific topic. Normally, if someone rambled that much around me, I'd straight up walk away. But her? Her voice was smooth, melodic, and everything she said was actually interesting. Even when she chitchatted, her use of words wasn't banal.

My eyes lingered on one specific spot on the ceiling, then I winced at the sounds coming from the other rooms. These werewolves thought I couldn't hear them snoring, screwing, or stuffing their faces.

It wouldn't matter if every room in this packhouse was soundproofed—my lycan ears could pick up *everything*. A kettle in the pack kitchen whistled. Someone had turned on a shower. Another werewolf, in a cabin outside the packhouse, cracked open a can of beans. The industrial symphony of cars and trucks from the A4 reached my ears. I still had to force myself not to discern the size and speed of each vehicle…a game I used to play with Dad.

But right now, I was tuning all that out and zeroing in on one room in particular, and, for once, I was happy to be different.

Yvaine's room was just upstairs, two rooms to the left of mine. I could find it with my eyes closed, her scent was *that* clear, like laying out a path just for me, her mate. In this moment, it seemed like she was asleep. But she hadn't gone to bed right away after our walk in the woods. I promised myself I wouldn't listen—give her some privacy and all that. And I did. For three consecutive minutes.

I had heard her flipping through the pages of a book, occasionally sighing or huffing. And I just lay there, listening to my sweet mate with a satisfied grin on my lips, arms behind my head, picturing her. She was probably in bed with that concentrated look, crumpled nose, and little pajamas.

"Adorable," I'd muttered, wiping a hand over my face.

All I could think about was her beautiful eyes and that smile that lit up her whole face. When we kissed in the woods, her tiny fists clung to my hair or my shirt like her life depended on it, her cute knuckles going white.

Her soft curves fit against mine so perfectly…

I glanced down at my abdomen and groaned.

My cock was straining against my checkered boxers—again.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," I grumbled, launching myself out of bed, blankets and sheets falling onto the floor. I didn't even pause as I yanked my boxers off and stormed into the shower, glaring down at my aching situation.

Lycans, man.

We had double of *everything* compared to werewolves—strength, size, appetites. It'd been weeks since I figured out Yvaine was my fated mate,

and as much as I'd sworn not to touch her until she was ready (and I mean *really* ready, confident and all with me), my body and my beast?

They didn't give a damn. They were ready to go *now*.

The last time I jerked off this much was when I was a teen. Back then, I told myself I'd wait for my mate. That lasted, oh, a couple of months. "Welcome back, sixteen-year-old me." The irony was *painful*.

With a huff, I cranked the shower to freezing and stepped under a showerhead too short for me. The joys of being a giant lycan in a world not built for our sizes. I closed my eyes and tilted my head back, letting the icy rivulets travel down my body.

Yvaine's face flashed through my mind. My hand drifted down to my erection, and my thumb brushed over the head of my cock. I hissed, imagining her tiny hand doing the same thing. *Would she need two hands?*

My breaths came out in low growls as I pressed my free hand against the wall, already picturing how she'd look—wide-eyed and all flustered. I picked up the pace, squeezing harder as a tightening feeling emerged in my lower abdomen, my muscles bulging as I neared the edge.

Before I knew it, I was grunting and coming all over, decorating my hosts' shower with my pent-up desire for their granddaughter. It took me a few moments to float back down to reality, blinking through the post-orgasm haze.

Goddess.

If jerking off to thoughts of her was better than any blowjob I'd ever gotten, I didn't even *dare* think what it would be like when we finally—

Shut the fuck up, you perv.

I felt a little guilty, like I'd somehow tainted my cute little mate by thinking of her in such depraved ways. But I was running out of options here. I rubbed my face, groaning into my palms. This was all new territory and I really wanted to do things right. *If only I knew how the hell I was supposed to do that.*

I could ask my friends for advice. Nope, not that group of horny mutts who'd just make hardcore jokes about how whipped I was. My sister? *That could work.* I couldn't wait for her to meet my bunny doc. And Gran, too. Hopefully introducing Yvaine to her would get Gran to stop nagging me about that girl she kept trying to set me up with. Gran was pissed when I bailed on that dinner with them.

I stepped out of the shower without bothering to dry off or grab a towel. Why was it so damn *hot* in here? I started scratching at my shoulders, hissing at the itch that spread across my skin.

This is strange.

The fact that I was a crazed lycan might have something to do with it. It had to, because holy hell, I was burning up, horny, and itchy all at once. What if male lycans had *heats*? I could ask my beast, but that meant, you know, *talking* to him. I'd rather stay irritated and confused than interact with that furry ass.

My ears perked. Something caught my attention. Yvaine was up, padding around her room. I glanced at the clock—3:10 a.m. *Is she having trouble sleeping too?*

I heard a door creak open and soft footsteps move out into the hallway. My eyes narrowed. *Where's she going?*

Yvaine descended the stairs. *Maybe she's thirsty. Yeah, that's it.*

I pressed my ear to the door and took a deep breath, her scent stronger now. Exhaling, I let out a low growl. Instead of heading downstairs, her steps continued onto *my floor*.

My breath caught. *Is she coming here?*

Panic mode: *activated*.

I glanced at the mess in my room—dirty clothes, unmade bed, pillows all over the place, and, well, all the wet tissues I used after thinking about her. The taxidermied weasel that I had tucked inside the fireplace was definitely judging me. I flew across the room, kicking clothes under the bed and trashing the tissues. I had no time to rescue the weasel, before diving back into bed. The second I buried myself under the tangle of blankets, I realized that was a *huge* mistake. I felt like I'd just wrapped myself in an oven.

I lay perfectly still, hoping the soundproofing worked for werewolves so she couldn't hear my heart flipping and flopping around like a fish out of water.

I cursed, then froze completely. She was *right* outside my door now. My lips twitched. *Is she hesitating? Is my little bunny doc worried about waking me?* So endearing. I could hear her tiny breaths and count her frantic heartbeats from here. If I concentrated enough, I could sense the blood rushing through her veins. "She smells so good," I groaned softly and

closed my eyes, inhaling her scent before snapping them back open. *Hold on*. *Why* was she here?

"Mate wants to mate," Lucien chimed in.

"*Shut up,"* I grunted. I usually kept him locked away, but Yvaine had been grilling me about letting him out, so as long as he didn't take over and murder everyone, I let him be. But now he was planting ideas. What if…she really *did* want to mate?

Damn. I didn't even have condoms. *"Those plastic things are useless,"* the commentary in my head continued.

"That's why you use more than one, you pup," I shot back, locking him away again. Goddess help me, what if she *actually* came in here to—

I took another deep breath and tried to calm the hell down. This was Yvaine. Sweet, adorable Bunny Doc. There was no way she was outside my door at 3 a.m. because she wanted to jump me…right? *Right?*

Oh damn, *boxers*. I wasn't wearing any! I almost bolted out of bed to grab something—*anything*—but then I remembered the state of the bathroom. It currently looked like the locker room after a wereball game or practice.

My used boxers were chilling on the wet floor with a bunch of soggy towels I had used over the past few days, along with probably a whole puddle of water. I'd never been neat; everyone knew that. I grew up with a grandma and pack staff who took care of all the cleaning. Back at the apartment on campus, one of the freshmen picked up for extra cash and beers.

"Logan?" Yvaine whispered, soft as a feather, but to me, it sounded like a scream. "Are you awake?"

Awake? Bunny Doc, I've never been so awake in my entire life. My eyes flicked down to my lower abdomen. *So fucking awake.* "Yeah," I croaked out. And before I could say another word, the door handle jiggled.

Shit. A second later, there she was—my adorable little mate. I zeroed in on her lips, which I definitely hadn't kissed enough yet, but then I noticed her outfit. *Oh man.* She was dressed in a small pink camisole and flannel pajama bottoms with sheep on them, her bare feet peeking out beneath the hem. Cute, tiny feet that I bet I could fit right in my mouth, like the perfect snack. *Yum.*

She bit her lip, and our eyes met. "Hi."

"Hey," I breathed out, gulping. The blanket was glued to my chin.

“Would you, um, mind if I slept here tonight? I-I can’t sleep.”

If I minded? Was this a test from the universe? If it was, I was failing hard.

She’ll think I’m some creep when she notices I’m not wearing anything. I held my breath, panicking and sweating like one of the fucking pigs Lucien had devoured.

“Sure you can.” I laughed nervously, glancing at the space next to me. *She definitely can’t fit without touching me.* “Can you just…” I cleared my throat. “Wait outside the room for a sec?”

“Why? I don’t mind if you’re only wearing boxers.” Yvaine blushed, and for a second, I forgot about my plan. She was so damn cute and so… mine. How did I get this lucky?

“Logan?” She snapped me out of it.

I blinked like a clueless fool. “Yes? Ah, yes. Er, I prefer wearing sweatpants,” I lied through my teeth, because no way I was about to admit I was naked.

“Oh, all right.” She glanced around the room. “I can grab them for you.”

“Oh no, don’t worry about it. I, uh, left a pair in the bathroom.”

“It’s okay, I can just go and—”

“No!” I blurted, a little too loud, because she stiffened, looking back at me with wide eyes.

“Maybe I should just go back to my room…” She lowered her chin.

Oh, fantastic. Well done, Logan. You’ve officially made your mate sad. I sighed, realizing I hadn’t felt this stressed in…maybe ever.

“No, no.” I sat up, one hand clutching the blanket to my chest. “The truth is…I didn’t clean the bathroom. It’s, uh, kind of a disaster.”

Her face softened, and she gave me this little smile. *Thank the Goddess.*

“Really, just give me a second, okay?” I whispered, like I was trying not to spook a baby deer. She nodded and slipped out the door, all sweetness and grace.

My nostrils flared and I stared at the door without batting an eye. Every part of me wanted to chase after her. My fists clenched. *Calm the fuck down.*

I threw off the blankets and bolted to the bathroom. Grabbing a few towels, I wiped the floor like a madman, chucked my used boxers into a plastic bag, and fished out a clean pair.

I walked back into the room and pulled on sweatpants and a checkered T-shirt I borrowed from Yvaine's uncle. I opened the window a little and grabbed a decorative pillow from the couch, also checkered, strategically placed it over my lower half, and yanked the blankets back over me. I couldn't even think about what she'd do if she realized my *condition*.

"Bunny Doc? You can come in," I said, my voice hoarse.

She practically sprinted in, then halted like she'd hit an invisible wall, took a couple more steps toward the bed, and stopped again. "Are you sure it's okay if I stay?" she mumbled, avoiding my eyes. "I can just go back to my room." She tugged at the hem of her tank top, trying to pull it lower while I straight up stared like a complete creep.

"Of course it's okay. I like your pajamas. You look cute." To hell with that, she looked *edible*.

"Thanks." She rubbed her arms like she was trying to shake off the intensity of my gaze. We both remained there in awkward silence for a few more heartbeats.

"What are you waiting for?" I spread my arms wide and gave her a grin. "Come here."

She took a breath, gave me a smile, and crawled into bed.

The second she snuggled into my arms, all my stress and that scratchy feeling evaporated. *Magic*. *She is my spark of magic in the world.* I hugged her close to my chest, feeling like I'd been missing her for a lifetime even though she'd only been gone for, what, a few minutes?

"L-Logan," she squeaked, coughing a bit. I glanced down and chuckled. I could only see the top of her head as I squished her with my overenthusiastic hug.

"What?" I tried to sound innocent.

"I…can't breathe!" Her voice was muffled.

I quickly loosened my grip, though I wasn't about to let her go completely. "So…couldn't sleep, Bunny Doc?" I asked after a beat.

"No, I couldn't." She exhaled, resting her head in the crook of my neck. Instinctively, I tilted my head to rest it on hers, my eyes closing as a stupid smile spread across my face. "What about you?" she asked in that inquiring voice I loved.

"Sort of." I kept it vague as I felt her eyes on me.

"You seemed *quite* awake to me," she grumbled.

I sniffed her hair, then pressed a soft kiss to her head. “Better now?” I mumbled, fully enjoying having her curled up next to me. I was realizing you couldn’t sleep without your mate after meeting them. The Moon Goddess was clingy.

“Yes.” She yawned. I could almost feel the tiredness washing over her.

“Yes,” I echoed, and it wasn’t long before I passed out, too, having the best damn sleep of my life.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

YVAINE

For a werewolf, I was in terrible shape. The more time I spent with Logan, the more obvious it became.

Comparing my kissing stamina to a wereball captain's didn't help. *But still.* I had to peel my lips away from his, desperate for oxygen.

"Wait." I laughed softly. "I need to breathe."

Ever since I'd gathered the courage to knock on his door two nights ago, every restraint had fallen. At least for Logan. The second we were alone, he would pull me into his arms and kiss me. And not sweet pecks either—no, the kind of kisses that stole your breath and scattered any coherent thoughts. I'd started brushing my teeth at every opportunity, just to be ready. In the last three days alone, I'd probably kissed Logan longer than everyone else in my life combined.

He cracked one eye open. Silver drifted lazily toward my swollen lips. He licked his own and inhaled slowly, making me blush. For a reason I simply called *the mate bond*, our gazes locked.

Something sizzled between us, a line of heat snapping back and forth, like a damaged wire sparking. My lashes fluttered, and a whimper lodged in my throat as I tried to work out how I should manage this overwhelming feeling.

His fingers instantly hooked my chin, lifting it back. "I'm not done."

"Done with what?"

“*Staring*.” A growl threaded through the word. So we stared. Another new habit.

“Caught your breath?” he murmured after a few minutes.

“Logan!” I playfully chastised.

He leaned back, folding his arms. “What? I’m your mate! After all this time, don’t you wanna do some kissing? It wouldn’t be fair to them.”

“To whom?”

“The kisses!”

I giggled at the big pout on his face. “I do want to kiss you. But we should also talk. Get to know each other.” Judging by the sun’s position through the pub windows and the different crowds around us, we’d already spent at least an hour doing very little talking.

Tomorrow, we’d fly back to Montana. Thanks to a special acquaintance of Grandpa’s, we got an emergency passport for Logan, who had brought nothing with him. I had classes waiting, Logan had wereball, and Lachlan had no more excuses to stay in Scotland.

“Fine.” He straightened. “Let’s talk.” Before I could ask what his favorite Studio Ghibli movie was, he settled me on his lap, the opposite of a soft place to sit. His lips brushed my ear. “So, when do we kiss again?”

I dissolved into helpless giggles, batting his hands away.

“There are people here!”

“They understand the importance of kissing their mate. Especially a beautiful one like you.”

“Some of them are human!”

“Humans kiss, don’t they?”

I escaped his lap and tied my hair into a ponytail, mostly to give myself something to do. He still made me shy and awkward; I often said things completely out of place, but he always enjoyed it. *Thank Goddess mates are a thing, otherwise I’d die alone.*

The next thing I knew, he was sucking on my neck.

I yelped. Nearby patrons glanced over.

“What?” He lifted his head, half-lidded eyes never moving from my throat. “You can’t dangle your neck in front of me like that and expect me not to do anything.”

I covered my throat with both hands. “My neck does not *dangle*!”

“Hey, *lovewolves*!” Pamela materialized with a pint—pear cider, my favorite—and set it in front of me with another steaming portion of chips

and gravy.

Family friends owned this pub in Inverness, the Prancing Unicorn, and my cousin worked here part-time. Food and drinks were hearty, the crowds friendly, and above the bar hung a sign—*BEST OSTRICH EGGS IN THE HIGHLANDS*.

I raised an eyebrow at the drink. “We didn’t order this.”

Pamela tilted her chin toward a table across the room. “They did.”

A handful of werewolves from McDougal, a neighboring pack, lifted their glasses in acknowledgment.

“But why?”

Logan plucked the pint off the table, long fingers wrapping around the glass. “Because they want to fucking die.”

Never taking his eyes off them, he tipped back the cider—his Adam’s apple bobbing—and downed the whole thing.

“Logan, I thought you hated cider,” I said with a small smile.

Pamela snorted. Logan slammed the empty pint on the table, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, then lifted it toward the McDougals. “Thanks, dudes!”

If he had meant to smile, something failed along the way. One corner of his mouth had retracted, showing his white teeth. *Hold on. Were they always that pointy?*

Pamela swiped away a tear from laughing too hard. “Relax, they probably don’t know you two are mates.”

After chatting with my cousin a while longer, I slipped toward the bathroom, weaving through the crowd.

“Hello there.”

One of the McDougals sat on the pool table, elbows on his knees. He looked familiar. Short-cropped beard, reddish hair, a freckled face. He was wearing a wereball jersey.

“Can I help you?”

“You don’t remember me?”

I cast an imaginary fishing line into the sea of my memory. Nothing. “Sorry, but no.”

“If we play pool, you’ll remember.”

I tilted my head. *Who is he?* “I can’t. Bye!”

The stranger was still there when I left the bathroom, one foot up on the wall. “Shall we get married now, MacKenzie?”

Before I could answer, he bowed and caught my hand, brushing a quick kiss on it.

I snatched it back. “Excuse me!”

“I’m heartbroken you forgot me.” Then he sauntered off.

Realization hit. *Paul!* When we were twelve, he’d floated love notes to me inside little glass bottles down the river separating our packs. It was all innocent until Paul proposed to me while kissing my hand, and Uncle Clyde chased him out of Scotland.

“You won’t believe who I ran into,” I said once I slid back into the booth.

I told Logan the story. He didn’t laugh.

I kept chatting, only realizing how quiet he’d become when I looked up. He was deep in thought, frowning. The sight made me smile a little, until his next words. “So, how does this work?” He gestured between us. “Are we…”

“Yes.” His brows lifted. “I mean, since we’re mates, that implies we’re in one.”

“I was going to ask if we’re okay.” He hooked his arm around my waist, easing me onto his lap again. “After everything. My lies. Lucien.”

I shuffled to get comfortable. “That’s what I meant too. Yes, we’re good.”

“But that’s not what you said.” Logan inched closer with that lopsided grin of his.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You didn’t mean to say we’re in a relationship?”

I shrugged, but my heart swelled.

“I do mean that too.” His fingers tipped my chin. “I want us to be official, like mates usually are.”

My lips parted.

His eyes widened. “Not because we have to!” He lifted his hands. “And that’s not what I…I didn’t imply that we…” He scratched the side of his neck, sighing. “I mean…” He cleared his throat. “There is nothing more I want than to brand you—I mean mark you! Yes. But *we* can wait until you—*we*—want to finish this thing. Actually, we never have to, if you don’t feel like it.” He stopped, cursing.

He was so cute, and it was so new to see him struggle.

“What do you mean? What *thing*?” I smirked as I leaned forward, never breaking eye contact. I knew what he meant—completing the mate bond.

His Adam’s apple bobbed. “You know…the marking and the…other part.”

“You don’t say! The legendary Terminator is shy? I’m calling you *Shyinator* from now on.” I chuckled at my joke.

He exhaled a breathy laugh and poked me in the ribs. I yelped, moving his hands away.

“Sometimes,” he said, smiling at me, “you make me a blubbering fool.”

“Finally.” I poked him back, finding nothing but hard layers of fibrous tissues. “A little balance. You make me nervous all the time.”

“But you already have all the power, little mate.”

I beamed. I loved when he called me that.

“You just forget because you’re too busy blushing.” He pecked my parted lips.

“Logan!”

His head jerked back. “What?”

“You’re doing it again!”

“Doing what?”

“Making me blush on purpose!”

His fingertips stroked my cheek. “Not *always* on purpose. Anyway, before you distracted me with your cuteness, I was saying that we can—”

“Yes, we can be real mates. A real couple.” I grabbed his shirt and pulled him forward. “And not just because we have to be.”

For once, Rudolph was right. We’d talked enough. Time to resume the kissing.



WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF ANOTHER INTENSE *RECOVERY SESSION*, AS Logan called it, when he went still.

He lifted his head, leaving me with tingling lips, and rose in one smooth motion with me in his arms. “I need the bathroom.” He placed me back on the seat.

“But you just—” He smacked my lips—the second time he’d used that trick to silence me. I should’ve been irritated, but instead, I was graciously exasperated.

My gaze followed his broad shoulders through the crowded pub. *That isn’t the way to the bathroom.*

I lasted all of five minutes before slipping after him.

The metallic scent of blood filled my nose, and I panicked—my mate’s blood was mixed with someone else’s. I hurried outside, searching for a certain blond lycan. Across the street, he rounded the back of a red pickup, wiping his knuckles with a napkin. His white T-shirt was dotted with crimson, his hair disheveled, and a satisfied smirk tugged at his mouth.

“What are you doing?”

His head snapped up. “I needed air.” Red flickered through his silver irises.

I closed the distance between us and took his clenched fist. Though already healing, his knuckles were so scraped that the tattoo across them—*DOOM*—was barely visible.

It didn’t take a detective to solve this: Logan had punched something. *Or someone.*

“Care to elaborate?”

“No. Not particularly.” He shrugged and tried to hug me.

“Omitting details again?” I wriggled free and folded my arms.

“It’s a fine art.”

I sniffed the air and started around him. Instantly, two strong arms scooped me up. “Hey!”

“Come on.” He turned to the pub. “I’m starving.”

“No, Logan.”

“Oh, tired?” He adjusted me against his chest. “I’ll carry you. But don’t get used to it. My transportation services are paid in kisses and it’s not cheap.”

I tugged at his T-shirt. “Put me down! Now!”

His lips tightened as he stopped. “Must you always be this difficult? Just leave it.”

I bit the side of his neck. Not hard enough to break the skin, but it had its intended effect. Logan moaned, shutting his eyes. “Yvaine…”

Smiling to myself, I wriggled free of my lycan cage, landed lightly, and bolted around the corner.

I stopped like I’d walked into a murder scene. Which I basically did.

My hand flew over my mouth.

Three of the McDougal boys lay sprawled across the asphalt. Motionless. Limbs at unnatural angles, eyes disappearing into swollen faces.

The fourth one, Paul, was mysteriously missing.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

YVAINE

You're grown up when you no longer want the window seat on a flight, so I supposed I wasn't.

Ever since I could remember, I'd loved flying and everything associated with it—the sun peeking through those tiny windows, the catwalk of strangers united by a shared destination, the detachment from reality forced by the thirty-five thousand feet separating us from everything down below.

And, of course, the view. Just you and the clouds building giant floating castles out of imaginary fluffy bricks.

Some people still called flying a miracle. Thanks to many sleepless nights buried in my first-year physics book, I knew better. Bernoulli explained how airplanes stayed in the sky—flying was a physical equation where magic had little to do with it.

What *was* magical was what the flight awakened in us…if only we remembered to look out the window.

And I would, if two hundred and fifty pounds of giant lycan wasn't blocking it.

Wedged in the middle seat, I was missing my favorite part of flying. And missing both my armrests.

Lachlan had claimed the aisle. "I have an easy escape if I can't endure the Dark Diamond stench for thirteen hours."

If my twin's frown could technically be considered a trench with how deep it was, Logan scratched his shoulders, neck, and arms so hard our entire row shook.

"We had showers at the packhouse," Lachlan huffed, glaring over my head. The werewolf barrier—me—was proving remarkably ineffective.

"I'm sure my socks would look just as good in your mouth if you don't shut the fuck up," Logan shot back, cracking his big, shoeless toes.

"Sis, we should move. I think the lice have returned to their ancestral homeland."

My elbows ached from nudging the two overgrown pups.

"Twelve more hours," I muttered, rubbing my face before returning to the book on my lap. *Jane Eyre.* I never studied on flights, another personal rule. *Jane…I wish I could go for a walk with you right now.*

Unfortunately, my eyes skimmed the page without absorbing a single word of Mr. Rochester telling Jane how he thought of fairy tales when they met and asking if she was waiting for the men in green.

I was distracted. Disappointed. Sad.

Though saying that I was disappointed after discovering Logan's massacre was an understatement. I wrinkled my nose, the memory barely one day old…

"It was Lucien," Logan said with a shrug. "He took over. Nothing I could do."

I cast my best disapproving look at him. His hands reached for mine.

"Let me get this straight." I slapped his hands, and the sparks, away. "Lucien took control because he overheard these guys making mean comments about me and my pack, dragged you outside, and then beat them half to death?"

"Yeah." He shrugged again. "The beast came out of nowhere. I told you he's rabid."

For a split second, black veins crawled around his eyes, red flickering through the irises. Logan blinked hard. Was that Lucien protesting the accusation?

"If Lucien shifted, how are your clothes still intact?" Surprise flashed over his face.

"Sometimes he can take over without a full shift."

I gestured at the bodies. "So this had nothing to do with Paul?" Logan's jaw flexed. "Or the story I told you?"

Another shrug. Not a yes, not a no.

“And you didn’t follow them outside because you were jealous?”

“No.” He kicked a pebble. “But you followed me.”

“I wouldn’t need to if you behaved!”

“You don’t trust me?”

“I do! But this isn’t about me!”

A muffled groan interrupted us. Logan narrowed his eyes like a butcher realizing his merchandise was still moving.

I stepped forward. “I have to see if they’re okay—”

“Touch them,” he said quietly, “and I’ll mark you.”

My own mate? Blackmailing me?

I glared, clenching my fists as he folded his arms, one eyebrow raised that said, Go on. I dare you.

I could almost hear those broken bones knitting back together all wrong under the werewolf’s rapid healing, so I took a deep breath and tried to reason with the unreasonable apex predator huffing next to me. “I need to set their bones before they heal crooked.”

“If these idiots end up limping for life, good. Then they’ll stop bothering women.”

“Logan.” I pointed a finger to the wall. “Go sit over there.”

“I’m not a dog.” His voice dropped.

“Well, you’re certainly acting like one.”

More pained groans. Shaking my head, I walked over and kneeled beside the victims, the giant shadow hovering, watching my every move.

Had this really been Lucien? My instincts said otherwise.

Three tibias and two femurs later, I reached for the cuts.

Given the snarling behind me, Logan had had enough. “They can heal the rest on their own.”

“The cuts might get infected.”

I was swept off the ground. Logan’s big hands held me up like I was a baby. “Unless you want to miss your family’s farewell dinner and probably tomorrow’s flight too”—he brought his face inches from mine—“stop patching them up. My bite’ll put you down until next week.” I caught a glimpse of his fangs and the burning fire in his irises.

“Your jealousy is ridiculous. You’re ridiculous.” I held his gaze. “And I can’t be with someone so violent. Now put me down before my rejection puts you *down.”*

We had barely spoken since.

The more I ignored him, the duller the sparks became. I felt hurt, restless, and miserable all evening and well into the following morning.

I wondered what happened to Paul, but every time I brought him up, Logan sidestepped the subject with the same skill he used to avoid my twin. Between saying goodbye to my Scottish family and preparing to leave, the question eventually slipped to the back of my mind.

A nudge jolted me back to the present. Logan's elbows and arms jerked, shaking my seat again.

"What's wrong with your arms?" I had to ask. His relentless scratching stopped, leaving me feeling like a tossed salad.

"Oh, we're speaking again." He scoffed, eyes remaining shut, his blond lashes resting against his cheekbones.

As I studied the personification of stubbornness, I accepted a simple truth: concern for his health had been written into my genes. The Moon Goddess must have equipped me with antibodies against acute obstinacy.

I slipped my hand in his, locking away the growling pride that insisted he should beg for my forgiveness.

"She just doesn't want to waste her words on you," Lachlan muttered, flipping through his copy of *National Geographic*.

I squeezed Logan's hand before his insults could start again. The last thing this plane needed was two overgrown wolves wrestling in the aisle until the aircraft tipped sideways.

"You sure you're okay?"

Logan cracked one eye open and peered down at me. We held our gazes for a moment before he sighed and closed it again. "I didn't sleep a wink last night." The pout that followed was hilarious.

The doctor in me took over. Logan tanned easily, but all that redness streaking his forearms and neck wasn't from the Scottish sun. Inflamed skin meant excess blood had flown to the surface to fight irritants and encourage healing. This was true for a normal patient, but for Logan? That was harder to pinpoint, as lycans weren't in any of my medical texts.

I decided to use the oldest remedy in the books: my touch. A mate's touch.

"Sleep deprivation doesn't explain why you're scratching yourself raw." I studied the long red lines his nails had carved into his skin.

“I just feel…” His voice was hoarse, like he had been growling the whole night. “Tense and in a bad mood.”

“You know, airplane seats are made in a way that forces your spine into a sad shrimp posture.”

Logan glanced at me like my words had just assaulted him.

I leaned forward, rummaging through my bag beneath the seat. “Here. This’ll do.” I showed him my folded jacket.

His frown only deepened. “I didn’t say I was cold.”

“You said you were moody. If you align your back by placing something behind your thoracic spine…” I tapped the center of his chest, his gaze flickering down to my finger. “Right behind your heart, you’ll sit more upright.”

I motioned for him to lean forward, and when he obeyed, I balled my jacket and stuffed it between his back and the seat.

“There.” I patted it into place when he reclined back. “The sad shrimp has been linked to lower testosterone levels and more depressive memories than usual. Better posture can improve your mood.”

“So now I’m a sad shrimp?” He cocked his brow. “First a reindeer, then a rabid dog, now a crustacean.” He counted on his fingers. “Wow, thanks. I’m basically a zoo.”

We remained quiet. Then—

“Listen, Logan—”

“Listen, Bunny Doc—”

Logan scratched the back of his neck, bicep flexing. *Don’t look.*

“Please look!” begged Zelda.

“I didn’t mean what I said yesterday.” He met my eyes. “I’d never, *ever* mark you without your consent.” He sighed. “I just…”

As I listened to him, all I wanted was to kiss his furrowed forehead. Yes, he’d been an immature troll, but he was aware of his mistake. He was apologizing…or trying to.

“Look, I’ll be honest. I can’t stand people talking about you behind your back.” He mulled that statement over. “Or in front of you. Or *with* you.”

I let out a dry laugh. “Thanks for telling me.”

“Thank you?! Well, I’m not saying you’re welcome, Bunny Doc.”

“You can’t break every bone of every guy who talks to me.”

“Watch me.”

“I need more time to figure out how to explain this to you.” Logan turned fully toward me. I pinched the bridge of my nose. Lack of sleep and his scent combined made things hard. “But let’s put your jealousy aside for a moment.” Before he objected, I continued. “The way you spoke to me was wrong. I’m not your doll. Or one of your wereball teammates you get to order around.”

“No, you aren’t.” One heavy arm settled over my shoulders, an equally heavy sigh leaving his lips. “I just can’t stand the thought of these”—he lifted my hands and pressed them against his chest—“on someone else’s skin.”

Heat rushed to my face, matching the rashes over his arms.

“I’ve never had a problem sharing before.” His brows drew together. “But with you…it isn’t jealousy, Bunny Doc.” His silver eyes searched mine. “It’s worse. It’s something mad. Maybe possessiveness, maybe protection, maybe just my fucked-up genetics. I don’t know. But it’s all for you. Every instinct in me says you’re mine to protect. Mine to cherish.” His thumb brushed over my knuckles. “*Not to own*. I know.” It didn’t look like he knew. But this was a start.

“I’m going to find a barf bag,” Lachlan grunted, darting away. We ignored him.

“But I’ll be a doctor.” I smiled despite myself. “How am I supposed to treat patients if I can’t touch them?”

Logan looked troubled, his nostrils flaring. I’d just presented him with the greatest dilemma.

It was clear that the Terminator wasn’t used to hearing the word *no*. In fact, I was certain that he and *no* existed in two different universes.

“You’ll have to change jobs,” he announced. I giggled. “Or you can be my private doctor.” His voice grew deeper, intimate.

“You never get injured during games.”

“I will if you’re my doctor.”

I laughed. “If I became your team’s physician, my brother would have a heart attack.”

“And that’d be a bad thing because…?”

I smacked his chest.

“But no, you aren’t getting anywhere near my teammates.”

I opened my mouth to ask whether he knew Gentle Eyes, but a large hand unclasped my seat belt.

“Logan! Safety—”

“Shhh,” he grunted in my hair. “You don’t need it. I’ll hold you.”

Judging by the muscles surrounding me, I believed him. But I was the kind of person who kept their seat belt fastened for the entire flight. Logan hadn’t even bothered wearing his during takeoff.

“We do need to work on your anger and jealousy management, Rudolph.”

“I’m a beast.” He shrugged unapologetically. “Can’t help it. It’s in my genetics to be territorial.” His silver eyes held mine. “And you, Bunny Doc, are my territory.”

I arched an eyebrow.

“Look, I’m sorry for my jealousy. I just go rabid whenever someone sniffs around my mate. I promise to work on it and try not to beat people up for looking at you.” He paused. “That’s the most I can do. If they touch you, I’ll destroy them.”

“Logan…”

“What? You said relationships are about compromise. I’m compromising.”

There was still some work to do, but this was progress.

“Can we kiss now?”

“My brother’ll be back soon.” Though my hands had already palmed his biceps and my tongue had wetted my lips.

“Don’t think so. He’s probably jerking off in—” My palm slapped over his indecent lips. His eyes danced with mischief before he bit me.

I squealed. Then Logan cupped my face and kissed me. Not a kiss. A *Kiss*. My lips parted on instinct, and the deep, approving rumble vibrating through his chest was so strong I almost mistook it for turbulence.

My fingers sank into his hair as we savored each other after a day—too long.

“I hate it when you don’t let me kiss you,” he mumbled against my neck.

“If you hadn’t behaved like an insanely possessive animal yesterday, there would’ve been no kissing strike.”

His chuckle sounded deadly, but he stroked my cheek tenderly. “A possessive animal, hmm?”

The cabin lights dimmed around us as passengers snored, and the shadows sharpened every angle of Logan’s face, his smile wicked. He

pecked my swollen lips and brushed his nose against mine. “Oh, Bunny Doc. You haven’t seen animal yet.”

Oh, I had. And he was fluffy, cuddly, and answered to Lucy.



LOGAN AND I TALKED FOR THE REST OF THE FLIGHT. SINCE LACHLAN HAD returned to his seat, to Logan’s profound displeasure, we had to refrain from kissing. Or *I* had to stop Logan from doing it.

“It’s funny.” I sighed, tracing invisible patterns over the broad wrist resting on my lap. “My favorite book as a kid was this Scottish fairy tale about a Highlander turning into a lycan every blood moon to protect his people. He rescued his human princess from a vampire and turned her into a lycan too. Then an evil wizard cursed them because the Highlander had killed her lover.” I paused, my fingertip drawing tiny stars over Logan’s forearm and, for a fleeting moment, sadness tugged at me. These stars would never know ink or paper; they’d vanish the second my fingers left his skin. “I used to draw stars like this whenever Grandma read it to us,” I murmured. Logan hummed, watching every constellation I drew. “The prince was trapped in his lycan form during the day and could only become human again at sunset. The princess had the opposite curse—she was human during the daylight only. Their love was impossible, as day and night separated them.”

“And then?” Logan mumbled into my neck.

“They defeated the wizard and lived happily ever after.” I smiled, stroking his arm. Since we started snuggling, he hadn’t scratched himself once.

“Good.” He kissed my cheek, looking at me expectantly.

“Gran read us all sorts of stories. *Princess Mononoke*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*. We loved it. Though some of those princesses needed too much saving.”

“And did little Bunny Doc dream of being the princess rescued by the Highlander?”

Something brushed through my hair. His nose? Lips? Cheek? Hard to tell with the sparks clouding my brain.

“Nah, I wanted to be the lycan! He was cool, standing on two legs and everything.”

“What?” He chuckled at my expression and adjusted me in his arms. “So…you’re saying you want to be treated like a lycan instead of a princess?” He raised a finger. “Careful what you wish for.”

“I want to be treated like both.” I met his gaze without flinching. Something predatory stirred in those pools of liquid silver.

I didn’t like that evil delight.

“What do you mean when you say Grandma read the stories to *us*?” he asked.

“She read aloud while we made heather honey together. Usually in the afternoons. At night we were always too exhausted.”

“Yeah, yeah.” He waved his hand. “But you said *we*.”

I glanced at Lachlan, asleep, headphones on, unaware that I’d just handed confidential information to his enemy.

“The Islander loved *Cinderella*?” My silence condemned my brother. “And he made honey?”

“He still does.”

Logan threw his head back, choking on his own laughter. “This is gold! Thank you, my little rabbit!” He planted his lips on mine, leaving me breathless. “I knew this trip was the best.”

“Logan…men are allowed to love fairy tales too.”

His smile shrank, and he avoided my eyes like I was the evil wizard. “I do love fairy tales. I just…appreciate having any intel on Lachlan.”

“Don’t say anything. Please?”

“Fine.” The word came out as a reluctant growl.

“And there’s nothing wrong with making honey.”

“You kidding? I’m obsessed with honey! Not just because your hair smells like it.”

I frowned and lifted a lock to my nose.

“Grandpa Ian gave me four jars of MacKenzie honey to take home.” He stole the lock. “I’ll only share it with you…and my sister.”

Now it was my turn to have a wicked smile. “*Loooogan*! You have a *sisterrrr*.” I nudged him.

“Yeah.” He looked at me with suspicion. “And she’ll love you.”

“That’s not what I meant!” I sang.

His expression soured. “No way.”

“They could be mates!”

“I’ll kill him,” Logan snarled.

“Come on. That’d be amazing!”

“You mean horrible.”

“We could go on double dates.”

“I’d rather go out with you, a sheep, and her mutton.”

“Think of all the Sunday family dinners.”

“I have wereball training on Sundays.”

“And we could have babies at the same time!” No snarky comeback this time. “And they’d all grow up together, like my cousins and I did!” I bounced on his lap. “We could live next door. I’d pass things to Lachlan with a basket hanging between our balconies.”

Logan stared at me strangely, a small smile curling his lips.

“What?”

“You’re thinking about having pups with me?”

My face burned. “It was hypothetical!”

“Sure. Tell me more about these hypothetical pups of ours.” His face inched closer until my breath caught. “Got names picked already?”

My blush answered for him.

“Would they hop around like bunnies?”

“Stop!”

“Why? Are you shy?” he cooed, squishing my cheeks between his hands like I was the future baby we’d have.

He chuckled when I batted his hands away. “But imagine! If my brother and your sister are mates, then we—”

“They aren’t!”

“They might be!” I tapped his nose. “And now, be quiet.”

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

YVAINE

Logan and I emerged from the arrival gate and my attention snagged on a tall girl holding a cardboard sign that read, *WELCOME BACK, BABY THOR!* Two pink heart-shaped balloons bobbed above it.

She'd inherited the unmistakable Draven traits: impossible silver eyes, ash-blonde hair in a high ponytail, and fiercely beautiful. She was wearing an oversized Dark Diamond T-shirt with the number 3 on the front—like Lachlan's!—sparkly blue leggings accentuating legs that went straight to heaven and back, and a golden snake bracelet coiled around her toned bicep. She had to be at least five-foot-nine.

"There's Bellatrix," Logan said.

I glanced up just in time to catch the faintest blush warming his cheek. "Aww." I poked it. "Baby Thor."

Logan scowled, a hand on my backpack strap swinging from his shoulder. "Yeah, my pack calls me that, minus the baby."

"I'd rather call you Loki."

"Call me *Loki* again and Bunny Doc is gone forever."

I gasped. "That's my official nickname! Actually, there's too much history attached to it, so you wouldn't, *Loki*." I yelped when both his index fingers jabbed my ribs before he stole a quick kiss.

Our eyes locked. His head tilted to the left.

I'd started noticing little things Logan shared with Lucien. Both tilted their heads to the left, never right; their upper lip curled on the left corner;

and whenever something bothered them, a tiny twitch appeared under their right eye. My sixth sense told me it was too soon to bring Lucien up again. I'd missed Lucien this past week, but my promise to him was tucked safely in the folds of my heart.

A shriek distracted me. Bellatrix catapulted herself on Logan, who caught her with both arms.

She bombarded his face with kisses. "Missed you, Baby Thor!"

Logan shielded himself from the attack but failed.

My cheeks ached from smiling. Seeing them together uncovered another piece of him I'd never met. That genuine affection from his sister and the slight embarrassment in Logan, the little brother? Yes, one heart was definitely not enough to hold all my emotions.

Logan peeled himself free with a sheepish smile, Bellatrix's arms still clinging to his waist. "Trix." He patted her head. "This is my mate. Bunny Doc."

I blushed. *Couldn't he have introduced me with my actual name?*

Bellatrix looked at me.

I looked at her.

Logan's anticipation disappeared. "Well? Speak!"

More silence. This reunion wasn't unfolding the way he'd imagined.

"This—is—my—sister"—he pointed at Bellatrix—"and—this—is—my—mate." His hand landed on my head as he accentuated each word, as if we'd suddenly become deaf and couldn't understand him.

Recognition struck us at exactly the same time. Two strong arms wrapped around me, one giant snake earring smacking my cheek. "Oh my Goddess! I'm so happy it's *you*! I knew we clicked that night! I knew it!"

"You've met my mate before?" His gaze bounced between us."How? When? Why?"

"You spilled my drinks!"

Trix's face broke into a grin so large it crinkled the corners of her eyes. "I told you I'd introduce you to my brother, but that he was a complete slut, undeserving of someone nice like you!"

"You did!"

We hugged again, tighter. I already loved her.

"Care to elaborate?"

My mate hated being left out and I had the impression he'd been looking forward to introducing me to his family. Bella and I already

meeting had robbed him of the full experience.

I waved to dismiss it. “Oh, we just met at a bar once.” *A bar…while I was on a date with Sillas. The same guy you beat unconscious because your jealousy has the emotional maturity of a rabid badger. The same night Bellatrix bumped into me and spilled the drinks I’d gotten for him.*

Amazing what I could omit after learning from the master himself. *Karma, Rudy.*

“Yeah!” Bellatrix winked. “And you owe me.”

I laughed loudly. Logan wasn’t laughing at all; his arms were folded over his chest, brows pushing together.

“That poor guy never stood a chance.” Bellatrix was unaware of the landmine she’d just stepped on. “If I’d known you were my brother’s mate, I’d have dumped the whole glass on him!”

Silver eyes pierced the side of my face. *Uh-oh.*

“And crap, you two almost met that night, but Logan was late as usual—”

“*Which. Guy.*” If voices controlled the weather, we’d have a blizzard inside the airport.

Bellatrix chewed her lip. “Oops!”

Logan’s right eye twitched. “Explain.”

I fumbled with my gloves, and one landed on the floor. That night was also when Logan had felt the pain through the mate bond because I slept with Sillas, a pain much bigger than what a normal werewolf would feel. Lucien had taken over then, uprooting trees, overturning cars, and causing injuries. A sour memory.

“Just a date.” I touched his chest. “Before we met.”

Logan glanced down at my hand, then up at me. Our gazes held as I smiled. The left corner of his mouth lifted. *Good.*

Lachlan chose that moment to join the were-party, headphones on, hoodie up, mid-yawn.

My heartbeat tripled. Logan must’ve heard it because he rolled his eyes. “Not going to happen, Bunny Doc.”

Still, we both looked back at the giant werewolf dragging his feet across the terminal.

Lachlan’s blue eyes landed on Bellatrix. Her mouth parted.

And then…

Nothing.

No growls, no declarations of *Mate mine!*, no electricity tingling the air.

Disappointment dropped over me like a rain-soaked blanket.

“MacKenzie.”

“Draven.”

Far too polite.

“Told you.” Logan broke out into a smug grin. Only when he poked my cheek did I realize I was pouting. “Oh, come on.” He pulled me into his side. “You’re not upset, are you?”

“Upset about what?” Lachlan plucked my backpack from Logan’s shoulder and slung it over his own. Bellatrix suddenly found her rainbow-painted nails fascinating.

“Nothing.”

“Something extraordinary.”

Logan and I answered the question in unison. I glared at him, and he kissed my cheek.

“Whatever. Let’s go, sis.” Lachlan looked like he wanted to be literally anywhere else. “Masturbator. Bellatrix.” His eyes lingered on Trix, his jaw tightening. Bellatrix blushed.

I blinked.

“Hold the fuck on.” Logan had noticed too. “How do you two know each other?”

Bellatrix huffed. “Drop it. It was just a hookup.”

I already adored her, but she had a life-threatening lack of filters, just as her brother had no control over himself.

“What the actual fuck?” Logan exploded. Half the terminal turned to stare. “A hookup? With *my* sister?”

Lachlan ran a hand through his red, tousled hair. “She has an identity outside of being your sister.”

“We were drunk. And *I* wanted to. Not him.” Once again, Trix’s words only added more fuel to an already raging fire.

“You didn’t *want* my sister?”

This was absurd. “Logan…”

“That was obviously to get back at me!”

Bellatrix threw her hands up. “Couldn’t a guy or girl like *me* for *me*?”

“You’re my sister! A target!”

“Give me a break, Masturbator.” Lachlan looked bored. “I haven’t mentioned it to anyone, have I? Would you have kept quiet if you’d fucked

my sister? Like you threatened to?”

The tension rose. My arms slithered around Logan’s waist. He took a step forward, carrying me along.

His fist closed around Lachlan’s hoodie and he shoved him against a wall. “What did you just say?”

Lachlan bared his fangs. “Only the truth.”

“Enough.” I squeezed between the two growling mountains. “Lachy, wait for me outside.”

He nodded once.

“Logan, please.” My palms flattened over his Tennent’s Lager T-shirt.

He glanced down at me, and something softened. With one final shove, he released Lachlan, who shouldered him hard before walking away without another glance.

Logan cursed, looking at Bella, who was still watching Lachlan leave. “Can’t believe those freckled hands were all over my sister! Yuck.”

I slipped my hand in his, smiling. “You’re cute when you’re overprotective.”

Sometimes I was a fire extinguisher, while Logan and Lachlan alternated between match and gasoline.



AFTER KISSING ME BEFORE THE EXIT, AFTER THE EXIT, AND AGAIN IN THE parking lot, Logan wrapped me in a big Lucien-like hug, the kind you disappear into, like a living lycan coat.

I closed my eyes and breathed him in.

The late afternoon sky provided a shifting color palette of salmon, pink, crimson, and ivory against a royal-blue canvas, but I barely noticed the free spectacle.

Logan pulled back, broad hands sliding down my arms. His silver eyes held mine for a second, hesitant. “I’ll call you later?”

I nodded, biting my lip, the thought of separating unpleasant.

His expression mirrored mine. “I’ve got wereball training that I can’t skip, but I can come see you beforehand.”

The workload waiting for me rivaled the Comet wereball arena in size. “I have classes and a family dinner at seven. After?”

His smile faltered. “The guys planned to grab drinks afterward.”

My family did too. “Oh. That’s nice.”

“Come! They’re gross but fun.”

“Your campus is almost an hour away…” I mentally flipped through my schedule. I’d only just returned, yet my life had already slipped back into its old rhythm, the Highlands a beautiful dream.

“You can stay over,” Logan offered too quickly.

A red tint spread over my cheeks. A dimple appeared on his face. “Or I can drive you home afterward if you want to sleep at yours.”

His hand squeezed my waist when I didn’t answer. I jerked. “O-okay! I’ll stay over.”

We lingered there, just looking at each other.

After one last kiss, Logan jogged toward his car, Bellatrix already inside waving at me, and I already missed him.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LOGAN

Killian slammed into me with a chest bump. “That was fuckin’ awesome, T!”

The boys piled in, laughing and growling, all pumped up and drenched in sweat. We’d just played a friendly game against some small pack—I called them the Gollums because they looked half-starved and fought over the ball like it was the One Ring.

Not to brag, but—actually, fuck it, I played exceptionally. The blood on my knuckles and the rival team’s chorus of groans were proof enough.

A proud smirk curled my lips as they whined like little bitches. It wasn’t that they were terrible, but my boys and I chewed them up and spat them out.

I had too much pent-up energy, and they just happened to be my punching bag.

My mate was to blame.

Ever since I last saw her two days ago, hot flashes kept rolling under my skin, along with this fucking itch over my shoulders, arms, and neck. The game dulled it for an hour, but now it was back. Part of me knew this had to do with my fucking genetic lycan bullshit.

Folks loved judging me because I broke bones during matches. They said I was unfair, my game style brutal and violent. Did I write the rules, or rather, the *lack* of them? Nope. Was I allowed to punch, kick, tackle, and break? Hell yeah.

And werewolves healed. Worst case scenario, a doctor had to shove a bone back in where it belonged before it set crooked.

What nobody understood, since they were all werewolves, was that to me, wereball was a pressure valve.

Werewolves played because they loved the sport. I played because I needed to release that wild part of myself.

Being a lycan wasn't like being a werewolf. It was like you were born to dominate everything around you. Destroy. Fight. Win.

Every lycan was an Alpha. No Betas. No Gammas.

Alphas.

There couldn't be many of them, or who would they rule? I'd heard stories about certain lycans, hermits who lived in the mountains beyond Yukon because they weren't satisfied living among inferior species—aka, humans and werewolves.

I refused to be like them, instead growing up surrounded by other species. I didn't mind humans; they were basically giant ants who had invented TV, barbecue grills, and junk food. Before meeting Yvaine, I even dated a human girl that had my same kink—primal play—and who knew about werewolves. Let's just say she was accidentally hospitalized, with me paying for her hip replacement. *Oops.*

I was the only lycan I knew. Did it feel isolating? Not really, because I had gotten used to it. I managed myself the best way I could: by suppressing.

Every night, I used to sit on my windowsill and pray to the Moon Goddess to make me normal, a *werewolf*, to be like everyone else, able to shift into a normal-looking wolf and run with the pack. At least I had Killian and Callum—they always remained in human form so I wouldn't be the only one when everyone else shifted.

The Moon Goddess had never listened to me, so I cursed her instead… until she gave me my bunny doc. Then I shut up and worshiped her.

"Terminator! Oi! You, *boy*!"

Boy?

My fingers curled. I shut my eyes, flexing my fists to release the tension.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

I'd spent half my life doing exactly that.

Suppressing. Holding in my true nature. Building tall dams around my tsunami of a personality, letting just enough out through wereball, sex, hunting, and the occasional idiot who deserved it.

Calling an Alpha—a lycan Alpha—*boy*… That was like calling a king a court jester.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

When I reopened my eyes, everything had a red tint to it. I shook my head and blinked until the world settled.

"Yeah?" I ground out.

I heard a gulp, then this fruit fly of a referee cleared his throat. "You can't cause permanent damage in a friendly match. Rules or no rules. The nurse says you damaged the other captain's pharynx and larynx." He hesitated. "You'll be benched for the first twenty minutes of the next game. Now…pass me the ball, boy. Please?"

I sneered, exposing my elongated fang.

Think about Bunny Doc.

Her face filled my head and, damn, the itch on my skin came roaring back. *What the hell?*

Without bothering to turn around, I lobbed the ball behind me, smacking the referee square in the chest.

I should've aimed higher. Maybe snapped the weak werewolf's neck, showed him what happens when you disrespect an Alpha.

But my teammates were here; half the pack had come to watch. And Dad had spent a full year drilling one thing into my skull: *Killing is forbidden.*

Forbidden, forbidden, forbidden.

Breathe in.

"Hey, T!" Greg slapped my shoulder. "Forget the bench. Next game's against the Petariak pack."

Breathe out.

"Those guys are toothpicks," Tank Man barked, high-fiving me.

The crowd kept shouting my nicknames. *Terminator. Thor.* But all I wanted to hear was Rudolph.

I popped my neck and rolled my shoulders. *I'm calm.*

My team and I migrated to the locker room. I slouched on a bench, crushing a water bottle in my fist the same way I'd crushed the other

captain's neck. He'd punched me, but that wasn't the problem. *Your mate's hot stuff*, he had said and laughed. *Bet her pussy is as good as her face.*

The damaged larynx was deserved.

Speaking of mates…had she texted me? I'd already checked twice in the last hour—I'd jogged back to the changing room mid-game to look at my phone.

I grabbed my phone from my front pocket. Many notifications littered my inbox, ignorable messages from ignorable names. I swiped the screen twice, the sweat dripping from my neck not letting me unlock it at first, and opened Bunny Doc's chat.

Nothing.

Fuck.

I grimaced, my brows furrowing.

How's this supposed to work? Do I text her again? Why isn't she texting me? She's supposed to want to hear from me all day long, right?

I counted on my fingers—three hours and forty-two minutes. The last message was mine, confirming tonight's plans. She was going to come over after class and after meeting with her human friend. We'd missed yesterday because she'd been buried in work, her schedule jam-packed. I had to share her with too many people.

The itch flared again, and my nails raked over my arms, leaving angry red welts.

"What's gotten into you?" Killian asked, hands on a towel around his neck. "Can't still be pissed about the ref."

"You're a lucky bastard, T," Greg interjected between gulps of water. "Anyone else would've been disqualified for the whole game."

"Refs are scared of our captain." Tank Man laughed, rubbing a towel over his shaved head, the octopus tattooed on his scalp moving with it. He then used it to clean the inside of his belly button—something weird he always seemed to do.

"I don't give a shit about the suspension." My eyes never left my phone. I typed, deleted, typed again…deleted it.

Killian watched me. "Then what the—"

"He's in *looove*!" Callum sang, swaggering in with the most punchable grin. "But his *maaate* isn't giving him attention."

Ever since he'd found his mate, happiness leaked out of his every pore like sweat. I watched with a frown as he pulled out his own phone, read

something, and grinned like a buffoon. I huffed when he started typing, probably to his mate.

“Phones aren’t allowed in the locker rooms.” I snatched it.

“Give it back, dickhead!”

I wiggled my brows. “Come get it.”

He lunged, but I tossed it to Killian.

“*Amaaaia*!” Killian blew kisses at the screen. Callum punched him hard in the stomach and reclaimed his precious possession.

“Jealous bastards.” Callum glared at his twin. “You because you don’t have a mate.”

“Aunt’s tits saved me from being this whipped!” Killian headed for the shower butt naked, a gun tattooed on one cheek that said, *HEAVY ARMORY, BEWARE*.

“And *you*”—I lifted my eyes to meet Callum’s—“because yours isn’t texting you back.”

Damn right.

I tore my shorts and boxers off, leaving them where they landed, and stepped into a shower. I turned it to an Antarctic temperature and let the jets soothe the damn itch. *Finally.*

“Man.” I scrubbed shampoo into my hair, eyes shut, head tilted—showerheads were the right height back home. “Has C always been this annoying?”

“Yeah! He’s worse now!” Killian shouted from the next shower. “Gets laid once, and he nags like a relationship guru.”

I snorted.

“But it’s true, right, Thor?” Killian’s lips quirked. “Mate’s ignoring you?”

I huffed. “Apparently.”

He whistled. “Shit, I’ve never seen you like this. You’re really down bad for a girl?”

“That’s why he spent all night at the gym,” Callum called.

“Probably jerking off to her pictures.”

I considered wiping the floor with their faces.

“Hey, T,” Greg hooted from another shower. “Your mate got any hot friends?”

I snorted. “I don’t think they’re your type. Probably a bunch of nerds.”

“They can’t beat that girl I saw at the Comet campus,” Killian sighed. “She had perfect tits. Like the Moon Goddess sculpted them.”

“Nice ass?” Tank Man added.

“Better than fresh bread.”

The showers erupted in laughter.

“What’s her name? Maybe Bunny Doc knows her. I can get you her number.”

“Don’t know.” Killian shrugged, wrapping a towel around his hips before shutting off the water—he liked staying warm until the last possible second. “I just call her Sweet Pea. Jokes aside, I’d never introduce her to you animals. She doesn’t seem the type to fuck around.”

“Ah, that sucks,” Greg pouted.

The conversation rolled on, drifting into the usual comments about girls. I just chuckled but didn’t join in. Speaking about other chicks couldn’t be a good thing if you were in a relationship, right?

Water streamed down my chest, over the half-moon pendant and my abs, as I reached for a fresh towel.

“Thor.” C nudged my knee with his while pulling on a pair of DD socks.

I looked up.

“You’ve got a mate now.”

Something inside me tightened. “Yeah, so?”

“I’m just saying…the Matenapper’s been laying low. They were never caught. Dad thinks they may have moved overseas with all the cash they made from matenapping, but that’s not been proven. And now you got something they might want.”

My brows furrowed, right eye twitching. “My mate?”

“Your mate. And the Highlander’s sister.” Callum counted on his fingers. “She’s the perfect target. Two top teams go down with one matenapping.”

I rubbed my temples. *Fuck.* “Nobody would dare. They’d stop existing.”

“She’s unmarked,” Killian chimed in. “If she’s taken, you won’t be able to track her.”

Rage detonated through my system, my mind going to my beautiful, intelligent mate and this random bastard touching one strand of her hair.

“She told me her dad already has patrols watching her and her twin. They’re the Alpha’s pups.” I paused. “But that’s not good enough.”

“Then we’ll keep an eye out for her too. And Amaia,” Killian added, glancing at Callum.

“If they’re still here, we’ll make sure their next move is permanent.” Tank Man cracked his knuckles, eyes glowing.

“Five feet underground,” Greg agreed, his wolf surfacing.

My mood soured despite their reassurances. How the fuck had I not thought about this before?

A huge hand landed on my shoulder; Callum had a silver band on his ring finger now. “It’s going to be fine.”

Killian mimicked him from my other side, his hand landing on my opposite shoulder. “You don’t have to handle this alone.”

I looked at both of them. My hands settled over theirs, and a small smile pulled at my mouth.

“I know.”



KILLIAN, CALLUM, AND I LIVED TOGETHER ON THE EDGE OF CAMPUS. OUR apartment wasn’t far from the arena, provided nobody stopped us every two minutes.

But tonight, pack members intercepted us all the way back, talking wereball or tonight’s barbecue, though I had no idea we had invited them. Dark Diamond had over ten thousand members; it was impossible to host everyone.

Laughter spilled from our balcony. The place was already packed with teammates, friends, and girls from the women’s wereball team. Conversations paused the second Killian, Callum, and I walked in, dumping our sports bags by the door.

There was a hierarchy in every pack, and ours wasn’t exactly a secret.

“T!” Dylan, a packmate from Kochi who had dated Greg last semester and was now a good pal, called from the couch. A football match blared across the massive TV.

I dropped onto the seat and cracked a beer. Cans already littered the coffee table, and pizza boxes were stacked everywhere, some with slices,

some empty.

He elbowed me. “Congrats on finding the one!”

“Yeah.” I smiled at the cheers, then snorted when the room erupted into wolf howls.

“Still can’t believe your mate’s the Islander’s twin,” Killian said, sitting next to me and taking a swig of beer. “I wasn’t really sure he even had one.”

“Nobody was.”

“You think the Islander was keeping her hidden because of the Matenapper?” Dylan asked, eyes on the TV.

“Partially.” I scratched my abs. “But she also doesn’t give a damn about wereball.”

“Show us a picture, come on! Her Instagram’s private,” Killian whined.

The only photos I had were screenshots from our calls. Absolutely fucking not.

“You’ll meet her tonight.”

The moment Killian stood up, two girls materialized—one with long braids, perched on my armrest, and the other, with cat paw tattoos all over her cleavage, slid onto the cushion at my other side.

“Hey, Captain!” Braids smiled over a can of Coke.

“Heard you destroyed them today.” Cat Paws smiled too.

Cat Paws touched my forearm and Braids leaned in. Just like that, I felt like I had cheated on my bunny.

I panicked and launched to my feet. “Stay back!”

Braids fell on her ass with a yelp and Cat Paws stumbled back, on the verge of tears.

“Ah…sorry.” I scratched my neck. “Didn’t mean that.” I helped her up.

“Smooth, T!” Killian lifted his can to me, and Callum had a big goofy grin on his face.

I smiled awkwardly at the girls. “I’ve got a mate now. You understand that, right?”

They nodded. But they clearly didn’t care. Braids grabbed my hand and pressed it against her stomach, while Cat Paws wrapped both her arms around my neck.

What. The. Fuck.

Lucien surfaced, my vision flashing red. “*Bite their heads off. Use them for bowling. Mate likes bowling.*”

I shoved him back, hard, fear surging. Fear of Lucien bursting out and murdering them. Fear of my mate thinking I'd cheated on her.

Heart hammering, I untangled myself from the giggling pair, who were looking at me like I was their favorite toy.

"*Leave*." I used my Alpha voice, with a glimpse of fangs. "Don't come back."

They bolted.

My stomach churned, their touch repulsive, and I collapsed onto the couch.

"That was hilarious!" Killian wheezed. My eyes fell to the burger in his hands. I stole it, stuffing half of it into my mouth.

I was starving. Fear always stressed me out, but hunger was quick to follow.

Two pizzas and twelve chicken wings later, I felt *mildly* satisfied.

I glanced at the time on the TV, then checked my phone again. My small smile exploded into a full-blown grin at a particular text from a certain someone, grasshoppers hopping around my belly. People called them butterflies but Gran always said grasshoppers. She never trusted worms that flew.

Hey, sorry for my lateness, my phone died. On my way now.

I grinned at *lateness* and replied immediately.

No worries, didn't even notice ;) Text me when you pull up so I can come get you downstairs

I hit send, then typed another text.

Drive safe, Bunny Doc. And don't forget to change gears

I still didn't like the idea of her driving a manual for fifty minutes, but the stubborn she-wolf hadn't let me pick her up. Called me a misogynist for offering, too.

Her response was quick.

You didn't notice? :(And I already told you, Grandpa taught me to drive when I was ten! I'm pretty sure I'm a better driver than you.

I scoffed. Then frowned.

Are you texting while driving? And yeah, I noticed. A lot. Missed you

Of course I'm not driving! I'm just sitting in my car, Rudy.

I was about to tell her to get moving when another text popped up—a selfie with the caption,

See?

A sigh left me. That bright smile and those blue eyes. My hands and arms itched.

Beautiful. Now put the phone away and hurry up. But don't speed

She answered with

Yes, Rudy, 🦌🦌🦌🦌

I shot back ten bunnies.

Only one thing left to do. *"Listen up!"* My voice boomed through the pack mind-link. *"My mate's coming over. Yes, she's from Comet. Yes, she's the Islander's twin. But she is also* my *mate."*

You could've heard a pin drop.

"You look at her the wrong way, you'll be banned from the arena and every game. You touch her, I'll break your good leg. If you're a girl, Bellatrix will deal with you. Understood?"

I tapped my foot once, my eyes scanning the room. *"Oh, and be friendly."* Then I reconsidered. *"But not too much."*

Some people saluted me. A couple of them looked paler. My friends? Just cracking up.

When I sat back down and grabbed a joystick, the chatting resumed.

"Killy, still free Friday?"

"Yep. Remember to moisturize your arm, and no sun for twenty-four hours."

"Yes, Mom. Make sure you've got the ink ready."



GRANDPA IAN

It was late afternoon, the weather angrier and more resentful than usual. A heavy rain flooded the Scottish Highlands and all its inhabitants. A chorus of howls filtered through shuttered windows, wild wolves daring real werewolves to join them under the storm.

"Riona," I called from my seat at the head of the table. "Remember that boy, *Paul*, from the McDougals?"

A member of that pack had just reported the astonishing news, but I already knew. It was written on the *Herald*, first page.

"Oh, that kid who sent bottles to our *rionnag*." Riona chuckled without looking at me.

I watched her pluck a fresh pheasant—her version of crochet.

"They found him two days ago." I studied my soon-to-be wife's strong, calloused hands at work. "Dead."

She inhaled sharply. "Moon Goddess! Poor soul! I swear it, sooner or later we will have to deal with that infestation! Rogues are getting braver again."

I shook my head. "Here's the weird part."

"Which is?" Her bird forgotten, she rested her bloody palms on the wooden table.

"It looked like he had a heart attack," I told her through our mind-link while I sipped my apple cider.

Riona frowned. "Oh come on, a strong young boy like him? Maybe he's got other wounds—"

"He's already had the autopsy done. Zero injuries. His heart just gave out." I pointed to the *Herald*'s page. "He was found some miles away from the pub. His friends said they'd gotten into a brawl earlier that day, but Paul'd run off."

For a moment, silence fell in the main living room of the packhouse, strangely empty. Even the wild wolves halted their laments.

“I wonder what the cause was.” Riona leaned back and gazed up at the ceiling. “For a werewolf to suffer a heart attack…it must have been something traumatizing.”

“Or *someone* traumatizing.”

Just then, lightning cracked somewhere out there in the distance, as if it wanted to confirm my words.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

YVAINE

After three hours of advanced pathology, I darted home and took the fastest shower ever recorded.

I loved the detective work of running tests to uncover what kind of evil was waging war inside the body. Pathology was that bridge between science and medicine; had it not been for neurosurgery, it would've been my specialty.

"Dinner together?" Lachlan called through our mind-link. *"The boys are ordering pizzas."*

With a fluffy towel wrapped around my torso and one in my hair, I pulled my backpack from under the bed and left it open on the mattress. *"Sorry, I'm seeing Logan tonight—"*

An exaggerated groan made me pause and smile.

"The douchebag's coming here? I'll prepare the eggs."

I giggled. Ten-year-old Lachlan used to pelt the neighbor kids with eggs. It got so bad that the packhouse cook started hiding them or she'd have nothing left for Omelette Day.

"No. I'm driving there."

"He isn't even picking you up? What an ass."

Biting my lip, I assessed two pajama options—one cute, with small pineapples, and the other more lace than fabric. Pineapples won.

With a sigh, I explained that it had been my decision, that Logan had offered to pick me up, but I turned it down.

“Fine,” he grunted. *“I’ll come with you.”*

“To watch you two bark at each other all night? No thanks. If I wanted that, I’d volunteer at a kennel.”

I glanced at my planner. *ER—9:15 a.m.* Since I’d be heading straight to the hospital from Dark Diamond in the morning, I packed tomorrow’s clothes, textbooks, and lentil soup for lunch.

“Here you go.” I set down a bowl of raw beef and apricots for Zeus. My baby trotted after me everywhere, sensing me leaving.

“Please,” Lachlan scoffed. *“I can manage one night after fourteen hours on a plane.”*

“The Dark Diamond players will all be there. Logan lives with some.”

“Of course he does,” my twin said in his condescending tone. *“Mind-link me when you get there.”*

“Love you too, Lachy.”



BASS THROBBED ONTO THE STREET FROM A MODERN GRAY BUILDING, ITS walls scored with deep scratch marks. Didn’t they use stairs here? A large banner with a heart made of tiny diamonds hung above the entrance. On the third-floor balcony, guys leaned over the railing with beers in hand, everyone smelling of Dark Diamond.

I checked my GPS. *This is it.*

I pulled out my phone to text Logan when two girls rounded the corner. Eavesdropping wasn’t my habit, but a certain nickname made it impossible not to.

“I hope Thor’s here tonight,” one sighed dreamily. Zelda wanted to bite her head off and play pool with the bits of her brain. “I’ve only seen him from a distance.”

“He’s a monster in bed,” her friend replied, eyes glued to her phone. “Leah said neither she nor her cousin could keep up.”

Something inside me winced. *Has Logan always had sex with multiple women at once?*

The first girl giggled. “I always carry my lube with me.”

Locking my car, I slipped my phone back in my pocket, the message for Logan unsent. “Excuse me.”

They both turned.

“I was invited, but I’m not sure which apartment it is. Mind if I come with you?”

“Sure.” Phone Girl smiled, her red-painted nails clutching an official Dark Diamond purse. “Want some gum?”

Her friend pulled out a compact mirror and added another layer of lipstick.

“Do you know anyone here?” I asked as we climbed the stairs.

“The best players on the team.”

“And our captain,” Lipstick Girl added with a smile that made my jaw twitch. “I heard he found a mate, but nobody believes it.”

“Why not?”

“We think he made her up to keep girls away. No one’s ever seen her.”

“What about after the Comet game?”

“We heard that story. Just some jealous fan.”

“And he isn’t marked,” Phone Girl added. “If he’d found his mate, they’d both be marked by now.”

Soon. My hands balled, then unclenched. *Be mature. Don’t let your emotions control you.*

Assaulting two innocent women and ending up in jail because my mate was a walking hormone imbalance seemed like a poor return on my parents’ investment in med school.

Logan’s amber scent drifted down the stairwell, soothing me.

“The captain’s really here!” Phone Girl said. “Don’t worry, we’ll introduce you.”

And goodbye calmness.

“Maybe we can all take a picture together!”

We stepped in.

My nose followed his scent until I spotted five guys. It was obvious they were wereball players, all tall, broad, and much rougher than the average werewolf. I wondered if the apartment floor had been reinforced. But my gaze specifically landed on a lycan wearing jeans and a white tank top revealing thick shoulders and tanned arms hard enough to bounce a tennis ball off of.

“These she-wolves’ skulls would bounce just as nicely.” Zelda’s killer instinct hadn’t calmed down after spotting our mate.

Today Logan wasn’t sporting his trademark grin. He looked…restless, checking his phone every two seconds, sighing, running a hand through his unruly blond hair. Beer halfway to his mouth, he stopped, brows drawing together, and sniffed.

A heartbeat later, his head whirled my way.

Phone Girl gasped. “Moon Goddess! He’s looking at us!”

Logan narrowed his eyes at me in accusation, shoved his beer at his friend, and strode toward us. A smile began to tug at his lips, growing into a grin that probably matched my own.

The girls fretted.

“Crap, he’s coming over!”

“Put on deodorant. Quick!”

My smile hitched higher.

Studies showed that the hormonal changes in a woman’s monthly cycle encouraged them to advertise ovulation, urging men to notice. Women didn’t fling poo like hippos or spray urine like cats but they would sometimes wear more revealing clothes, sway their hips, and become more sexually responsive.

My own mate proved that theory wrong.

Because women—humans and werewolves alike—were in permanent heat around Logan.

So I came up with my own theory: Logan simply drove women crazy. Whether it was the testosterone levels of a male lycan, those cheekbones, or that voice capable of lowering IQs, I couldn’t say.

It just happened.

Without a word, Logan wrapped his arms around my waist and lifted me clean off the floor in a hug. His amber scent surrounded me. By the time he finally set me down, I was still a little dazed.

“Look at the cute bunny I found wandering around.”

“Hello, Rudolph.”

“You look beautiful.” His lips pressed a soft kiss to my cheek.

“You too,” I said brilliantly.

“I thought we decided you’d wait downstairs so I could pick you up.” He cocked his head. I unintentionally mirrored him.

“I would have, but I met two of your *fans*. They showed me the way.”

We both looked at them.

Their eyes bounced between Logan and me, mouths hanging so wide I could easily see their tonsils from here.

“Thanks for bringing my mate up.” He didn’t spare them another glance.

I winked at them, proud of my control. *See? Violence isn’t necessary, Rudolph.*

“Jeez.” Logan hefted my bags onto one shoulder. “What do you have in here? Bricks?”

“My laptop. My night reading. A change of clothes.” And half my bathroom.

“Why? Where were you planning on sleeping?”

A blush spread over my cheeks and I averted my eyes.

“I’m just kidding!” He nudged my chin up and I gave him a dirty look.

In retaliation, Logan stole a quick kiss. Too quick. I needed more—so much more.

“Ready to fraternize with the enemy? Don’t worry, we’re nicer than your pack.”

I nodded with a grin. His large hand landed on the small of my back and guided me through the crowd.

“Want a drink? Warm milk?”

“Warm milk?!” I scoffed. His laugh rumbled through his chest. “Is that your opinion of me, Logan?”

“*Weeeell*.” His eyes danced. “Last time you got drunk, I heard you were kissing hot strangers at parties.”

A wistful smile tugged at my lips. “Only one.” I slipped my arms around his waist. “And he was so shy he didn’t say a word.”

“Was he?” Logan’s eyes shuttered, his hands settling on my hips. The room disappeared…and then I noticed it.

The music kept playing, but conversations had died, dozens of eyes fixed on us. I shifted my weight from foot to foot.

“Want a picture?” Logan snapped and conversations resumed, like he had pressed play again.

As we passed through the living room, nobody held my gaze; werewolves looked away quickly, some smiling, others…nervous.

In the kitchen, I spotted a familiar head bent inside the fridge.

“Hey, Killian, I want you to meet—”

“Gentle Eyes?”

The giant straightened with a packet of frozen sausages in one hand. His eyes rounded, then his face split into a massive grin.

“Holy shit! Sweet Pea? Whatcha doin’ here?”

I collapsed into a fit of giggles.

His gaze bounced from me to Logan. “Thor! Thor!” He pointed the sausages at me. “This is her! The girl I told you about! Sweet Pea!”

I half-turned to Logan.

My smile faltered. Those small but alarming signs were there—right eye twitching, head tilted left, fingers curling into fists, veins thickening.

Gentle Eyes noticed too because he backed behind the kitchen table.

“What,” Logan asked with eerie calm, “did you just call her?”

“How was I supposed to know she’s your buddy?” He held up his hands.

Logan grabbed me by the shoulders and placed me to the side like a small piece of furniture, not looking at me. Reddish irises fixed on Gentle Eyes as Logan prowled over.

“You said if you never found your mate, you’d marry this *Sweet Pea*!”

The kitchen table scraped across the floor as Killian kept it between them. “Oh, that!” He laughed heartily. “I was joking!”

“You weren’t.”

Logan halted, then. His eyes widened, veins filling with tar.

“You said her ass was fresh bread!” A snarl erupted from him. “In front of the whole fucking team!”

Killian snapped his fingers. “Oh! Right! I did!”

I blushed and patted my butt—never heard anyone compare it to food before.

The table was thrown sideways. Beer bottles toppled, and a chair spun on the tiles. Logan vaulted over the island instead of going around it. “Oh, come on, T!” Killian bolted but was caught by his shirt and pinned to the fridge, hard enough to rattle every magnet; one fell on my shoe.

“She. Is. My. Mate.” Each word came with another shove. “Mine!”

“What?!” It looked like someone had just told Killian that Santa Claus really existed. “She is…” Killian opened and closed his mouth. Instead of cowering, he barked out a laugh, slapping Logan on the shoulder. “Man! This is absolutely amazing!”

Logan didn’t think that, at all. Gritting his teeth, he struggled to keep Lucien in. His nails lengthened, and blood trickled from where his fingers were digging into Killian’s neck.

I stepped over the fallen chair and laid a hand on Logan’s forearm. His muscles remained rigid for a heartbeat then softened beneath my palm. “Lucien. Hey. Killian was joking. Let go.”

With an annoyed huff, Logan released Killian and glanced down at me, eyes narrowing. “So *you* are *Sweet Pea*?” He bared his canines and scowled at Gentle Eyes, again grabbing him by his collar. “Call her that again and I’ll kick you off the team.”

Killian grinned wider, adjusting his crumpled shirt. “Didn’t say anything that ain’t true!”

“You said she was the most beautiful girl you’ve ever seen.”

He winked at me. “Which is true.”

“You said you wanted to fucking marry my mate, Killian.”

“Also true. Sweet Pea, would ya marry me?”

“Shut the fuck up, K, if you don’t want me to shut you up.”

“Look.” Killian gave Logan a wide berth. “If you choose me, I promise I’ll never be rough like this beastly—” A fist sliced through the air where his face had been; Killian had leaned away just in time.

Logan grabbed his fist with his other hand and pulled it back.

“My T-man, I thought a mate would be calming for you, but it looks like your blood pressure only rose.”

I stifled a laugh. “That was Lucy.” *Gentle Eyes is Logan’s best friend.* It made so much sense. “If Rudolph here doesn’t behave, I’ll consider your marriage proposal.”

Logan huffed, steering me to a chair, ignoring Killian’s whistles. “I can’t believe you met my sister and my best friend before me.”

My string of fate had a strange sense of direction. Instead of leading me straight to my mate, it had wandered, taking detours, circling around Logan, and making me collide with his people first.

Coincidence? Maybe.

I giggled, leaning over. “Jealous, Rudy?”

He folded his arms across his chest. “Why should I be?”

“You’re jealous.” I pinched his cheeks. “It’s cute…sometimes.”

His scowl deepened while Killian kept laughing, pounding Logan’s back.

This will be a good night.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

YVAINE

"You slept at her apartment," Logan repeated.

Killian cracked a beer. "Yeah, but I slept with that lioness, Mariana." He curled his fingers into claws. "*Grr*! Wouldn't mind going back for more."

"Makena," I corrected him.

"And Sweet Pea, we met again at the wereball match, right before you smacked Thor with an umbrella. Legendary, by the way. There are memes about it."

I clapped my hands. "We did! You told me to go to the changing rooms to meet your captain!"

Killian threw his head back and laughed.

Logan, sandwiched between us on the couch, rolled his eyes. Until something flashed across his face.

"Bunny Doc!" He turned to me. "I ate your lunch that day! The one Killian brought back from Comet."

"You did?"

His grin lit up his face. "I didn't know it was yours, but I loved that weird concoction! Made me happy for the rest of the day."

The memory resurfaced—Killian in my kitchen, leaving with my lunchbox. "So that was the first meal I cooked for you…"

Logan leaned in to kiss me.

Killian gagged. "Somebody give me a bucket!"

Without looking away from me and smiling sweetly, Logan punched his shoulder. “Fuck off.”

“Rudy!” I nudged him. “Don’t be rude!” Logan paved a trail of kisses from my left cheek to my jaw.

“I can’t believe she calls you *Rudy*.” Killian *tsk*ed. “If I’d known a mate would turn the Terminator into a wagging puppy, I’d have organized a search party years ago.”

“Maybe we should organize one for your mate!” I told him.

I wondered what kind of woman would end up with someone like him. Another wereball player? A quiet bookworm? Whoever she was, she was going to have her hands full. I should invite Killian to my campus in case his mate was there.

“Hey, Yvaine.” A tall guy with a small smile, black nail polish, and a fresh mark on his neck that screamed Amaia all over approached. *Callum.* “About time we officially met.”

He dragged over a chair and offered me a beer. I politely declined but hugged him. “You’re the famous wolf who got my best friend to look up from her books. Congratulations!”

Logan chuckled.

Callum rubbed the back of his neck, a cute pink flush creeping over his cheekbones. “Not really. We study together. When I’m done, I just…watch her.”

My heart swelled.

“Two doctors for mates!” Killian slapped Callum on the shoulder, almost propelling him into the wall. “I’ll settle for your nurse friends, Sweet Pea. Have any?”

Logan narrowed his eyes, the tic starting again. Taking his hand, I leaned forward and looked at Killian. “All the female nurses I know are married.”

He spread his arms over the back of the couch. “I like sharing. Don’t I, Greg?”

“Hell yeah!” They high-fived.

The evening blurred into introductions. Teammates drifted over one after another, curious but welcoming. Logan’s thumb drew circles over my hand while I met everyone, all overly polite with me, even a guy with a massive octopus on his scalp. These boys weren’t serious, always cheerful,

with that strong friendship created by many shared experiences, interests, and personalities.

At some point, Logan disappeared to grab us drinks, Callum was on the phone with Amaia, and Killian was in an animated argument with a dark-haired girl that snarled every time he opened his mouth. That left me with Cedric, a backup on the wereball team.

“You’re a real doctor?” he asked.

“Still studying to be.”

“My mom’s a doctor, too. She works at our pack’s hospital.”

My eyes lit up. “How nice! What kind?”

Cedric blushed a little. “N-neurosurgeon.”

“That’s my field! Where did she do her residency?”

“In the pack, Luna.”

Luna—something I was fairly certain I never wanted to be. That was definitely a conversation to have with Logan if he ever decided to be the Dark Diamond Alpha.

Cedric and I chatted a little longer, and I was pleasantly surprised to learn how extensive the neurosurgery department at Dark Diamond was. Not that I planned on moving here anytime soon. Still, knowing the option was available felt strangely reassuring.

A shadow blocked the kitchen light. “Hey, Cedric.”

Cedric’s face drained of color. “I-I should…go.”

“You’re welcome to stay.” Logan sounded…*friendly*.

“Really?” Cedric relaxed, his shoulders dropping.

Logan laughed. “Yeah, I don’t bite…often.”

When Cedric left, a giddy smile on his face after chatting with us, I turned to Logan. “You were nice.”

One eyebrow climbed. “You sound surprised. I’m *delightful*.”

I chuckled. “Good to know I don’t need to fix Cedric’s bones.”

His lips curled into a smirk. “Don’t think I’m not still watching, Bunny Doc. I know who talked to you—and how they talked to you.”

I rolled my eyes.

“The apartment is full of wolves.” Logan shrugged. “I have to protect my bunny.”

“I’m a wolf, too.”

Logan chuckled. “You’re a bunny pretending to be a wolf.”

“Logan!”

He scooped me up and set me on his lap. “I love it when you squeak my name like that.”

“I don’t squeak! Rude!”

“Thank you. My gorgeous mate always calls me that. It’s my favorite word now.” He handed me a drink. “Here. I got you a cider.”

“He made a freshman drive to three supermarkets looking for it,” Killian announced around a mouthful of hot dog.

I gazed at my mate with severity. “That’s not nice, Logan.”

“Why?”

“You bullied younger wolves!”

Logan took a sip of his beer, watching me with half-lidded eyes. “I wouldn’t use the word *bullied*. We don’t make fun of them.”

“Right. I’d call it weaponized seniority.”

“But the ciders were for you! You don’t like beer, I had no time to get them, and the freshman asked if I needed anything,” he semi-whined.

Logan wasn’t arrogant because he wanted to be; he was simply used to people doing things for him. It was how he’d been raised.

“So?” I settled down into another chair. “Whenever you don’t have time to do something nice yourself, you’ll just send someone else?” A rhetorical question, the answer obvious.

“I’ll always find time for you, Bunny Doc.” His expression softened before he leaned forward, elbows on his knees. “If you really want to know, before training I needed to get your favorite matcha for your breakfast tomorrow. But the only shop with that brand was on Golden Fur territory.”

“You snuck over there? That’s an hour away!”

“I cut through the woods. Don’t worry, I got enough to last six months. Matcha doesn’t expire for at least a year. I checked.” He planted a loud kiss on my cheek to close the matter. “Next time *I* can go get cider for my bunny. See? Problem solved.”

He had crossed into another territory without permission to buy me breakfast and sent a freshman on a multi-supermarket quest for cider. Why did he always make me want to hug him and scold him at the exact same time?

“Want to call it a night?” he asked.

I took the longest sip, the cold drink cooling my throat. “Let’s call it.”

“Behold!” Killian shot up, spreading his arms. “The first litter of pups on the way!”



THE APARTMENT HAD FILLED UP. EVERY CORNER SEEMED TO CONTAIN A wolf, and it was just a Thursday night. I imagined Lachlan's apartment looked similar right now.

The more time I spent with Logan, the more similarities I found between him and my twin. Both thrived in a crowd but kept only a handful of true friends, competition flowed through their veins, and there was something about them that made them the shepherds and everyone else the flock.

Stubborn enough to build a pack from nothing, strong enough to tear it apart. And then there was wereball, their greatest love. The image of them facing each other on the field made my smile fade. Maybe them becoming friends was nothing but delusion.

Logan guided me upstairs, stopping every few steps as packmates called his name. He greeted every single one without a hint of annoyance. I was impressed.

"The bedrooms are up here," he said as we climbed a spiral staircase. "It's quieter."

He pushed open a door, flicking on the light.

"So…" I looked around. "This is your room."

"Yeah. I cleaned up." His ears reddened. "Just don't open the closet."

I chuckled, circling the room.

A humongous bed dominated the space, custom-sized by its look—Aunt Elena had ordered one like that for Archie. I imagined Logan lying there, texting or chatting with me for weeks, and I smiled. A desk sat under the south-facing window, a nightstand bore deep scratches, and the forbidden closet was next to that.

"The bathroom's there."

I followed his gesture and my breath caught. An almost naked cowgirl smiled down at me from a calendar on the wall.

"I know it's not, um, decorated. I don't spend much time—" He followed my gaze. "I'm going to dismember them." Logan crossed the

room and cupped my face. “I swear that’s not mine. One of the mutts put it there.”

Relief washed over me and I giggled, his worried face priceless. “I believe you.”

When Logan went to the bathroom, I itched to peek through the papers and notebooks piled on his desk when a photo drew me in. It was of Logan carrying Trix piggyback, younger and more innocent, with *L+T against the packs* scrawled underneath it.

Another on his nightstand had the siblings flanking their father, their colors a contrast. The man was not blond and didn’t have silver eyes. A third showed Logan, Killian, and Callum on a beach, sunburnt, tattoo-free, and laughing so hard as they leaned on each other.

No sign of another female presence in his life…until I spotted a poster on the bedroom door.

Big. That was my first thought. *I couldn’t hug it with both of my arms.*

It was a screenshot of me from one of our video calls, complete with the date, time, and Wi-Fi icon.

I wanted to strangle myself there. My tongue was sticking out and green from matcha, my hair looking like a horrible bush on top of my head, and—I gasped. There was a pimple on my chin. *Crap.*

Two arms snuck around my waist, and a chin settled on my shoulder. I was too busy glaring at my poster, hoping my gaze would burn it, that I hadn’t heard him approach.

“Gorgeous, isn’t she?” His whisper was laced in laughter.

“If by gorgeous you mean *filthy*, she is.” I was irritated and happy at the same time, a common state of feeling with my mate. “Did you have to print this one?” I turned in his arms, tilting my neck back several degrees.

“Like you don’t have a secret poster of me in your room.”

I squinted at him. “How do you know that?”

Logan lifted a brow, a mind-numbing grin cracking his lips. “Ah-ha! You really have one?” He leaned in, our noses touching. “Can’t wait to see it.”

I whined.

“Am I bare-chested?”

I shielded my eyes.

“Knew it.”

“Stop it!”

He took my hand and pressed a kiss to my knuckles, silver eyes holding mine. “We’re mates. Soulmates.” As if that made things right. But somehow, it did, my embarrassment melting away.

“I adore that picture. You weren’t posing or anything; you were just talking to me.” His lips left a trail along my neck, mapping familiar paths. A faint scrape of canines brushed the mark spot.

“Please mark us,” Zelda purred.

Fingers curling around his shoulders, I tipped my head back, eyes shutting, shivers rippling through me… *It’s happening.*

When something cold settled on my skin, my eyes fluttered open and my fingers found the half-moon necklace.

He’d fastened it around my neck.

A mark, just not the one I needed the most.

“I’m sorry for throwing it at you.” I twirled the pendant. “I love the neck—”

His mouth claimed mine.

Strong hands cradling my face, he deepened the kiss, his tongue delving past my lips. I welcomed him, tangling my tongue with his, losing myself more and more.

More. I wanted more of Logan. Of us.

My mate breathed heavily. The wave of lust that stirred inside me grew exponentially, the sparks turning into actual fireworks. He ran a hand up my back, tracing the dip of my spine. I shivered when he touched me around the band of my ribs, his thumbs dragging along the underside of my breasts.

I wanted him. I wanted to mark him as mine. I wanted to seal our bond in the most ancient but natural way for us werewolves.

Though, he didn’t do any of that.

With a low growl, he pulled back and looked away.

“Do you want to get changed?” He cleared his throat. “I’ll give you some privacy.”

Still dazed, I nodded.

Not letting my bitterness ruin our evening, I rummaged through my bag. Logan scratched his arms and neck again.

“Oh shoot.” I’d left my pajamas in my third bag…in the car.

“I can go get it. Or give you a shirt.”

“I’m from Comet. I might burst into flames!” I joked. “I’d rather sleep naked!”

Logan’s eyes darkened, his voice dropping to a rough murmur. “That also sounds good.”

After minutes of us blushing, smiling, and me explaining the benefits of flossing while getting ready for bed, Logan, in pajamas that looked new, went to fetch us some water. All giddy, I sat on the massive bed with a book in my lap.

His phone vibrated on his desk for a minute. I returned to my reading as a second call came through.

I didn’t want to peek, but when it buzzed a third time, curiosity won.

The screen displayed three missed calls from DON’T CALL HER.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

YVAINE

I tilted my head at my cappuccino and the coffee art on top—little white hearts framing a teddy bear's face.

"That's almost too cute to drink." *Who knows how long it took the barista to make?*

"I can always take a picture of you and the cappuccino before you destroy it."

I looked up, grinning at Teresa over the rim of her chai latte. "No thanks." Two minutes earlier, we'd mildly laughed about three students who had spent twenty minutes photographing their drinks. Their hot coffees had probably become iced coffees.

I wrapped both hands around the mug, letting the warmth seep into my numb fingers.

The smell of roasted coffee and the familiar two o'clock rush settled my tired nerves. Students, professors, nurses, and doctors filled the Laugh But Work café outside the pediatric center where we volunteered. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves covered the walls between framed degrees and anatomy sketches, giving me something new to inspect every visit.

Teresa scooted forward, her chair scraping softly against the floor as she reached for the menu. "They added vegetarian options."

"That's great. You can order something more than fries."

For a moment, I imagined Teresa mated to a werewolf. *A vegetarian human and a carnivorous beast.*

Werewolves couldn’t live on soy and tofu alone; our inner beasts demanded meat. I managed having it a few times a week, but most werewolves I knew ate it daily. Then there was Logan, combining venison, beef, and chicken into one meal and calling it balanced nutrition. *Who does that?*

Teresa and I had just finished a double shift. We were sweaty, exhausted, and still in pale-blue scrubs and messy buns. But nobody had died today—that alone made it a good day. We were catching up after my trip to Scotland before I had to disappear into my three-hour lecture.

“Tell me about this new boyfriend! I can’t wait to meet him!” Teresa leaned back in her seat. “I’m sorry about Sillas, though. I hope he didn’t take it too badly.”

She’d never even met Sillas, yet she worried about him.

That was Teresa.

Barely five feet tall, with strawberry-blond hair and enormous doe eyes, she looked downright huggable. Between medical school, working to pay for said medical school, and volunteering, she somehow still found enough kindness for everyone else.

I gave her the condensed version of Logan, naturally omitting Lucien and every supernatural detail.

“Poor Mrs. Tina!” Teresa giggled. “She’ll be devastated.”

“So devastated! She really wants to set me up with that grandchild of hers.” I took another sip of my cappuccino. “But the way she describes him? Skipping lectures, always fighting, girls showing up at her doorstep to ask for him?” I shook my head. “She’s describing *obnoxiousness*!”

Teresa made that adorable little piglet snort of hers. Then she reached into her bag for her oversized pill organizer and popped open another compartment. It looked like her fourth tablet of the day. I resisted the urge to read the label, though a flicker of worry stirred in my chest.

“I’m just relieved I can finally use my boyfriend as an excuse.”

“He can’t be *that* bad.” Teresa smiled. She never said a bad word about anyone. “Mrs. Tina is delightful.”

She really was.

“What about you? Any news? Your mom?”

“She was supposed to come back this summer but had to postpone again.” Though her news was devastating, her grin was still bright.

“When did you last see her?”

“Four years ago.”

“…Oh.”

“As long as I know she’s healthy, I’m fine,” Teresa murmured, almost reassuring herself.

I reached across the table and squeezed her hand. “You must be incredibly proud of her. Special Forces isn’t exactly easy.”

“I am.”

“So, what are your plans for the summer then?”

She shrugged. “More volunteering? Maybe catching up on some sleep.”

We both giggled.

Just then, my phone vibrated inside my white coat. My face split into a grin.

“Chie!”

“Hey, Vy!” Archie’s amethyst eyes lit up the screen.

Then Aurora, Archie’s twin, bounced into view. “Vy Vy!”

My heart squeezed. Seeing them felt like home.

Aurora was wearing her hair in a braid, glasses perched on her nose, wrapped in a green sweatshirt and scarf. Archie? A thin tank top. Winter seemed irrelevant to the werebeast.

“Did you check the dates?” I asked them.

I’d already sent them possible summer flights to Europe. This year, I was absolutely visiting the Black Devil pack. And Logan was coming with me.

I hadn’t technically asked, but he was. I’d promised Lucien I’d helped them. And this was me helping.

“Dad agreed to work with Logan and Lucien…under certain conditions.” Archie pushed a hand through his thick dark hair. “But they’re all *reasonable*.”

“And your dates work! We’re both off from college.” Aurora beamed. “Is Lachy coming too? Please tell me he’s coming!”

While she continued, I mouthed a silent *Sorry* to Teresa. She smiled softly, showing me a book in her lap. With a thumbs-up, I turned back to the screen.

“You busy now?” Archie asked.

“I’m at a café with a friend.” I narrowed my eyes at Teresa’s book. “*Frankenstein*? Really?”

She blushed and shrugged.

Archie smiled. “One of my favorites. Your friend has taste.”

“Thank you,” Teresa mumbled, more to herself. Archie tilted his head. Even through the phone, Teresa sitting opposite me, and the background noise, his hearing had somehow caught that.

“I can’t wait to meet Rudolph!” Aurora chimed in, launching into questions about Logan, our visit, future camping trips, hiking routes, and every possible activity we could manage in the time we’d be there.

Archie sighed. “I can’t guarantee that I can take many days off.”

“Oh, don’t be such a party pooper!” She nudged his shoulder. “You’re always working.”

“I’m not like you,” he grumbled. “Always free to do what you want.”

“Excuse me! I cook. Sometimes…” she huffed. “Besides, I deserve a holiday more than you.”

She was finishing a PhD in biology. Archie was completing his master’s degree while training hard and performing his Alpha duties. Busy barely covered it.

He’d become Alpha once he found his mate, and his parents would step down. Their rules.

“Guys, I’ll call you back. I don’t want to ignore Teresa.”

“Teresa. Right, sure,” Archie said, black brows knitting together.

Neither Aurora nor I paid it much attention as we hurried through our goodbyes.



“ARE YOU WEARING MY HOODIE?” MY FAVORITE VOICE INVESTIGATED through the phone. Judging by Logan’s smug grin, he already knew the answer.

“Maybe it’s my brother’s.”

“Nah, Freckles doesn’t own cool clothes.”

I rolled my eyes, burying my nose deeper into the hoodie. Yes, I had stolen it.

It’d been three days since I slept at his place, and I still hadn’t asked about who he *shouldn’t call*. Part of me wanted to, but the other part wanted

to trust him enough to wait until he told me, even with the occasional image of some gorgeous ex-girlfriend popping into my head.

I checked my phone—10:23 p.m., so we were one hour, twelve minutes, and forty-five seconds into our ongoing call.

Unfortunately, I had a seven o'clock shift tomorrow. "I should sleep," I sighed, snuggling deeper into the blankets.

"Already?" He pursed his lips.

"Some of us work." I yawned. "Then I have to study before meeting my mate at night."

Logan was traveling for an away game and would be back tomorrow. I had invited him to spend the weekend at my house, in my pack. I wanted to introduce him to my favorite person in the world—my little brother Ian.

Logan didn't look happy. I could hear the wheels in his brain drafting an evil plan. "Can I come with you to the library?"

I knew it. "You don't study."

"Who? Me? Of course I do, Bunny Doc. How do you think I passed all my exams?"

"Having the *nerds* do your work and all the teachers be your fans!"

"Who told you that big lie?"

"Killian." I giggled at his groan. "And *you*. I mean, Rudolph."

"I promise I'll let you study." He pressed a big, veiny hand to his chest. I loved veins. In forearms, legs, and hands—especially hands. "In fact, it'll be your best study session ever. Better than with your nerdy—" He cleared his throat. "Than with your *roommates*."

"Did you just call my friends *nerdy*?"

"Did you just call my veins pretty?"

We both paused, just staring at each other, and then laughed at the same time.

"I really do need to study."

He huffed. "Same! Why is that so hard to believe?"

Very tempted to see him four hours before our planned meeting time, I relented. "Fine, you can come." I was already regretting it. I'd just study over the weekend at dawn, before everyone else woke up and distracted me. I did that a lot.

A new voice boomed through the speaker. "Can I come too?"

"Nope," Logan deadpanned. "Go away, Killy." His right eye twitched three times in a row. *Lucien didn't like that interruption.*

"*Hellooo,* Sweet Pea!"

I giggled when Killian's face filled the screen. "Rudy here is miserable without you! He talks about you. Like *all the time*."

Killian glanced behind his shoulder. I heard Logan cursing and my smile widened.

"And he's so excited to spend the weekend!" His smirk grew, a cheeky glint in his eyes. "He even went shopping for extra large condoms—" Killian vanished with a yelp.

Logan reappeared, his cheeks as flushed as mine, eyes panicking. "I didn't buy condoms! I swear!"

The corners of my lips dropped. *Why doesn't he want to mate?* "I know," I said flatly.

He studied my face and opened his mouth to say something, but someone called his name off-screen. "I've got to go now. My boys are waiting."

"For your night run?" Logan would remain in his human form; Killian and Callum, too.

He nodded once. "Yeah. See you tomorrow at the library?"

"I'll send you the address."

A slow smile spread on his face. "I know how to find you."

Of course he did.

If he'd found me all the way in Scotland, a library wouldn't be much of a challenge.



"TERMINATOR!" MAKENA HIGH-FIVED HIM. "JOINING OUR STUDY SESSION today?"

"Yeah." Logan grinned, one hand on the shoulder strap of his rather light-looking backpack, the other around mine. "I've got loads to do."

Makena nudged me. "I recommend the third-floor bathrooms. The official makeout spot."

Logan's lip quirked. "Noted."

“No making out in the library,” I warned as we stepped through the revolving doors. “Just studying.”

He gave me a crisp military salute. “Yes, ma’am.”

Makena’s voice slipped into my mind. *“I think he wants to study anatomy. Yours.”*

“Hush.”

“Two more words?”

“I’m sure I’ll regret this but…go ahead.”

“Bruised. Cervix.”

Heat rushed to my cheeks. “Possibly.”

Logan glanced at me. “Hmm?”

“We talked about the possibility of Yvaine needing a cervical replacement after you—”

I covered her mouth with my hand. “Makena made a doctor joke.”

Logan grinned at me, eyeing Makena nodding from behind my hand. “Oh yeah?”

We reached our usual table where Amaia was typing furiously beside Tiziano, who hugged me and ignored Logan.

“Remember what we talked about,” I told him.

“And remember he cheated on you.”

My smile faltered.

Tiziano huffed and acknowledged Logan with the enthusiasm of someone seeing a foot with wet gangrene. Logan winked at him and sniffed in his direction. “You smell like dead rats.”

“I spent all morning dissecting lungs from cadavers,” Tiziano deadpanned. “And there’s a mouse living in the morgue.”

“Knew it! My nose never lies.”

“Easy to say when that’s the only sense you have.”

Logan patted his head. “Aww, the cadaver wasn’t good?”

“I’d rather have the cadaver for a mate than you, cheater.”

I almost swallowed my tongue.

“Everyone would cheat in wereball if they could.” Logan shrugged, pulling out a chair for me. “Some people are too stupid to do it right.”

“Oh, I’m aware you’re a cheating expert. Especially with *Yvaine*.” *Crap.* Every time someone brought me up, Logan flipped. “Did you know she had chest pain for weeks? We kept running tests, and couldn’t figure out why.”

I sighed. “We didn’t know we were mates. Either of us.”

“Lucky for you,” Tiziano said sweetly. “At least you had fun with our tutor.”

Logan growled, the twitch back in his right eye.

“Logan, ignore him.” Amaia finally looked up from her laptop. “He’s being overprotective and *stupid*.”

Tiziano took her honesty with passive hostility by getting up and leaving.

That could’ve been worse.

With his thumb drawing lazy circles over my hand, Logan watched Tiziano’s retreating back. *Probably plotting how to turn him into a cadaver.* Amusement replaced his scowl when he glanced down at me, taking in my worried state.

“I’m fine, Bunny Doc. Let’s make sure you study.” He leaned forward, pecked my lips, and brushed his nose against mine. “I’ll be right back. I need a snack.”

I settled into my work.

Buried in my notes, I didn’t notice Logan had never returned until I stretched and realized the chair beside me was empty.

I headed for the bathroom, but halfway down the corridor, I stopped.

“…you’re distracting her! Some of us actually need careers,” Tiziano snapped. “We’re not all spoiled rich kids like you.”

“Look, *dipshit*.” Logan’s voice dropped to that dangerously calm register. “Yvaine’s the love of my fucking life.” I sucked in a breath. “And for whatever reason, you’re important to her. So do us both a favor and stop upsetting my girl every time you open your mouth because it keeps outrunning your brain.”

Tiziano shifted. His clenched fists rose.

Logan didn’t move an inch. “Go on.” He tapped his jaw. “Hit me. Do it with those puny hands.” His smirk was scary now. “So then I can beat the shit out of you.”

Tiziano lowered his arms. “Yvaine won’t stay with a fraud like you once she learns who you really are.”

Logan’s smile dimmed. “She knows what I am.”

“Does she?” Tiziano laughed. “Does she know about Francisca?”

To my shock, Logan shut up.

A cold knot formed in my chest. *Francisca…Is that who’s named Don’t Call Her?*

Tiziano’s grin sharpened. “That’s what I thought.” He stepped closer. “You’ll *terminate*, Terminator. I’ll make sure of it.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

YVAINE

I love what I studied. With all my heart.

So much that, for a while, I almost forgot about Francisca. I wasn't going to ask Logan. At least, not yet. I'd wait, give him time to adjust to being in a relationship—he'd never had a serious one before me. He told me back when he was just Rudolph.

Since the others had left a while ago, Logan and I had moved to a small table for two. His knee brushed mine, leaving crackling sparks behind. Not even denim could stop a lycan's sparks.

He pulled out his laptop, rummaged through his bag, and fished out a crumpled paper, smoothing it with his hand.

"What's that?" I winced at how the innocent sheet had been treated.

"My assignment."

Between my laptop, three enormous textbooks, a notebook, and a rainbow of sticky notes, I'd colonized almost the entire table. He had to resort to using the remaining corner above his shut laptop.

"Need help?" he asked, watching my fingers race across the keyboard.

"You have your own work."

"Yours is more important." His gaze drifted to my notebook with interest, then he squinted. "Wow, for a second I thought you could write in Arabic."

I snapped my notebook shut. "Logan, I care about your grades. You should too."

“Why? I already learn loads from Dad and our Beta. Business isn’t brain surgery. It’s easy.”

“You’ll only excel if you love what you do.” Life was too short to spend most of it doing work you didn’t love. Everyone deserved a career that fulfilled them, matched their passions, and made them happy.

“I like business, I just don’t care about grades. I listen in class—”

“You skip half your lectures!”

“Between wereball, Alpha work, and you, something has to give.”

“But—”

He held up the crumpled paper. “It’s basically finished! I just have to fix up some things and change the name.”

“Someone did your assignment? That’s cheating!”

He wasn’t remotely guilty. “He offered first! Wanted a photo and tickets.”

“What if you get caught?”

“Your question insults me, Bunny Doc! I had no time for this assignment. Got an exam on Monday.”

“You do?” I sent him my best disapproving look. “You can’t spend the weekend at my pack then! You need to study.”

“Nah.” His thumb stroked the back of my hand. “I just need to pass.”

Before I could argue, he nodded toward my books. “For someone with so much studying to do, you sure do talk a lot.”

My cheeks heated and, thinning my lips, I turned back to my loyal friend—my anatomy encyclopedia.

Ten peaceful minutes followed.

Logan started twirling a strand of my hair. A minute later, our fingers were intertwined. Another minute, he kissed my knuckles, staring at my little finger with a silly smile. Eventually, he started nibbling it while he kept doing whatever he was doing with his crumpled paper.

I was halfway through a paragraph on gastric surgery when the table started to shake. I looked down. Logan’s knee was bouncing.

I jabbed him in the ribs, and the vengeful lycan nudged me back, making me squeak.

“*Shhh*!” came from somewhere behind us.

I ducked my head and returned to my reading.

Tap.

Tap.

Click.

Click, click, click.

I glanced up. Logan had abandoned his assignment and was drumming his fingers and clicking a pen.

“Stop it, Logan.” I attempted a stern look and failed.

Logan glanced at me with guilt, inhuman eyes blazing. “I’ve got several diagnosed tics.”

I narrowed my eyes, unable to tell whether he was joking.

“You can treat me if you want,” he murmured, voice all intimate and husky. “I’m sorry, I’m distracting you. I’ll behave. Only for you, Bunny Doc.”

He did. For exactly twenty minutes.

“I’m taking a nap,” he announced, stretching his tree-trunk arms over his head.

I glanced at the pendulum clock on the wall. “You studied for…thirty-two minutes.”

His lips twitched into a devilish little smile. “A personal record.” His arms slipped around my waist and he lifted me clean off my chair, settling me onto his lap. His face disappeared into my neck as he peppered me with tiny kisses.

I squealed when blunt canines grazed the spot meant for him.

“Shhh!” That same voice from earlier semi-yelled. “If you want to make out, do it outside. You’re disturbing everyone.”

My face went from pale to scarlet. At least Logan was excellent for my blood circulation.

Logan turned his eyes to the culprit. “What did you say?”

My eyes scanned the tables until they landed on a petite girl with glasses thicker than Logan’s skull.

Surprise flashed across her face as Logan kept looking at her.

“Daisy?”

“Oh. Yvaine, right?” Recognition lit Daisy’s face. She nudged her glasses higher, her lashes so long they bumped against them. We hadn’t seen each other since I’d made her confiscate my phone in this very library so I’d stop texting a certain reindeer.

Actually, the only two times we’d met, she’d shushed me.

I slipped off Logan’s lap and into my own chair, though his arms stayed looped around my waist. “Classmate of yours?” he asked, attention drifting

back to my neck.

I pushed his face away. “Daisy, this is Logan, my mate.”

She swallowed. Did she know who he was? Or was he just naturally intimidating?

“Heya!” Logan grinned, flashing his white teeth. “Sorry about the noise. Bunny here is squeaky.”

“Me too.” She blinked. “I mean, I need to go anyway.” Daisy collected her books, rulers, colored pens, and Post-it notes. “Nice seeing you again.” Then she fled, like she’d just experienced a tornado.

“She looked like a terrified hamster.” The tornado himself snickered.

“You intimidated her.”

“Who? Me?” He nosed my neck. “Can we take a break now?”

Break meant kissing.

I gripped his face, squeezing it. “I need two more hours.” I pulled him down toward my lap. “Now hush, lie down, and be a good boy.”

His eyes melted. “Yes, Master. *Woof*.” With a masculine sigh, he lowered his head, face against my stomach. “Sorry if I distract you, Bunny. I’ll be better, I promise.”

I gave him a pat.

Logan liked the position so much he actually fell asleep, with me as his pillow. I’d discovered the perfect way to study with Logan and even took a selfie—me trying not to laugh, my giant mate snoring peacefully in my lap—and sent it straight to Gentle Eyes.



“MASTURBATOR.” MOM DRAGGED HER ORANGE SUNGLASSES DOWN HER nose and looked at Logan over the rims. “Good to finally meet you!”

She smacked his shoulder with enough force to stagger most wolves. Today she sported a loose Iron Maiden T-shirt over a leotard, her hair braided into a crown.

Logan didn’t react to the nickname anymore. “Likewise, ma’am.”

She wagged a finger at him. “Call me *ma’am* again and I’ll slice your—”

“Mom!”

She smirked. “Alpha or Isabella. Your pick.”

Logan barked out a laugh. “Alpha Isabella, then.”

We chatted a little longer until Mom promised to see us at dinner.

“Your mom’s cool,” Logan said as we walked hand in hand. “Sure the Islander’s her son? I’m convinced he was adopted.”

“Don’t be fooled. Mom’s the personification of competition and would do anything for the Comets. She’ll charm you into revealing Dark Diamond’s full game plan before the next match.”

“Seriously?” A grimace deformed Logan’s face. “She sounded genuine!”

“Nothing personal. Everyone falls for it.”

We rounded the corner and my stomach dropped faster than a stone off a Scottish cliff.

Lachlan stood outside Ian’s bedroom, his forehead against the door. Eyes shut, shoulders shaking. At our footsteps, he straightened and scrubbed a sleeve over his face.

His bloodshot eyes met ours. Years of practice kicking in, he shoved his emotions behind the mask; he definitely didn’t want his mortal enemy to see him broken.

“Lachy…” My own eyes watered, tears gathering.

Logan said nothing.

“I’m fine.” Lachlan forced out a tight-lipped smile that never reached his eyes. “I’ll…see you later.”

“But—”

“I want to be alone,” he said quietly. He gave us the briefest nod. Logan returned it. He dragged his feet away, shoulders slumped like someone had tied a stone to his back.

I started after him, but Logan’s arms slipped around me. “Let him go,” he said, his voice gentle. “He wants to be alone.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek, my eyes glued to Lachlan’s retreating form. “Please don’t tease him about this, Logan.”

“I would never.” His lips brushed mine as if sealing a promise, and goosebumps erupted over my chest. He cocked his head toward the bedroom. “Now, are we going to meet the little man?”

With my hand in the warm comfort of his, I pushed the door open, trying not to notice the damp mark Lachlan’s pain had left on the wood.

“Yva!” Ian chirped from the Ferrari-shaped bed, face lighting up. His cheeks flushed when he spotted the giant looming behind me. “Who’s that?”

“This is my mate, Logan.” I was at his bedside in three strides. “Logan, Ian.”

Logan’s eyes swept over the tubes and monitors pumping both life-saving fluids and poisons into my brother. But he didn’t flinch, like he was used to seeing kids hooked up to high-tech machines every day. “So you’re the famous Ian.” He stretched out his hand. “Heard loads about you, buddy.”

Ian shook it with both of his tiny hands. “Have you kissed already?” I did *not* expect.

Logan glanced at me with a ridiculous grin. “When she lets me.”

My face heated up faster than pudding in a microwave on full power.

“When are you going to have pups?”

Logan’s grin widened. “Again…when she lets me.” And oh boy, did I feel that stare.

I had to change the topic. “Do you know Logan plays wereball too?”

Ian’s face lit up. “You do?”

Logan confirmed with a proud smile. “Do you like it?”

“Yes! My brother’s the best player ever!” Ian squealed, causing the nasogastric tube patch on his cheek to wrinkle. Playing wereball was Ian’s dream, but it was probably going to remain just that—a dream.

Logan barked out a laugh. “You haven’t seen *me* play yet.” He ruffled Ian’s hair.

“Which position?”

“Quarterback.” *Did Logan just…puff out his chest?*

“I thought you’d be in defense. You’re a mountain!”

“Well, I do enjoy crushing players.”

My little brother *giggled*, despite the sporadic cough. “My wereball’s over there!” Ian pointed to his toy shelf.

Logan retrieved the soft plush ball, spinning it on his finger.

“Want to play catch?” Ian asked, brightening up. “Lachy never does because he thinks I’m too weak. He cries a lot too.”

My heart fell. “He doesn’t!”

“He thinks I don’t notice.”

Logan glanced at me, waiting for approval.

I swallowed hard. Ian's body was so frail, too frail for anything. "Ian…I don't know if that's a good idea."

"Please, Yva," Ian whispered, the next words a hammer to my heart. "I'll die soon anyway."

Tears pricked my eyes. The way he said it…accepting his fate long before any of us ever could…

"Don't say that." I took his hand, careful of the IV taped to it. "You won't die." Even to me, the words were hollow. The truth was, his body was tired, the disease relentless, feeding on him. As a doctor, I knew exactly what his scans showed, what the blood tests meant. As a sister, I refused to believe it.

"Sorry." His pale lips dropped into a frown. "It's okay, we don't have to play."

I couldn't say no to him, to those big eyes.

"I don't know if the ball's too heavy. Maybe we can play a board game—"

Thunk.

The plush ball smacked me square in the face.

I blinked, my eyes darting to Logan.

"See?" he said. "Light as a feather."

All sorts of insults danced on the tip of my tongue, but they dissolved when Ian absolutely lost it. "You look so funny!" His giggles turned into wheezy little coughs. "You should see your face!"

I peeked at Logan, sensing that this was his way of easing the situation. Hiding my smile, I threw the plush ball at Logan and watched it bounce off his chest.

Ian snorted. "I bet you didn't even feel that."

Logan winked at him.

Faking my best affronted look, I lunged. "How dare you!" My hands hooked around his stupidly broad shoulders.

Logan cocked an eyebrow at me. "Is this supposed to be an attack?"

I leapt up, hands around his neck, and wrapped my legs around his torso —a baboon clinging to King Kong.

"Baby, you'll hurt yourself." His laughter sent shivers through me. "But it's so cozy here."

He swathed his arms around me, planting a kiss above my right breast.

"*Eww*!" Ian covered his eyes. "No kissing!"

Logan laughed harder, handling me like the plush ball, and gently set me back on my feet. “Let’s play, Captain Ian.”

My anxiety spiked. “Watch it, Logan. Don’t throw it too fast! Aim low.”

“It’s just a toy, Bunny Doc. And my aim’s flawless.”

“Yeah, but the monitor can—”

Logan cupped my face, brushing his nose against mine with that look of adoration only he could pull off.

“I’ve got this, Bunny Doc,” he murmured.

I rested my hand on his, where he still held my cheek. “I trust you.”

“*Bunny Doc*?” Ian piped up, eyes scanning me from head to toe. “Yeah, you do look like a bunny.”

“That’s what I said too!” Logan smirked, high-fiving him. My nose scrunched up in fake irritation, but I couldn’t hold it in.

“You’re funny, Ian, for someone within my range…”

Ian blinked. “Range?”

“Kissing range!” And I pounced.

Ian squeaked, dissolving into laughter as I peppered his cheeks, forehead, and nose with quick little kisses.

I leaned back, beaming. Logan watched us with the softest smile. Ian looked up at me, still snickering. I tucked both their smiles away like little treasures, like seashells gathered from the shore; they were far too precious to leave behind.

“Come on.” I pointed at Logan. “Let’s see if Mr. Bulgy Arms is all muscle or if he can actually throw a ball.”

“Bulgy Arms, hmm?” Logan swelled his bicep. Ian and I giggled.

For the next hour, the room echoed with happiness. Logan, being Logan, was perfect in his own way—it became a challenge for him to make us laugh, and he never backed down from one. He exaggerated every catch, pretended every throw nearly knocked him over, and celebrated Ian’s passes.

Every so often, Logan would touch my hand or send me those soft, reassuring glances. Little gestures, a reminder that I wasn’t carrying this alone. I didn’t know how it was possible, but I loved this lycan even more. I hadn’t just fallen in love with the man who teased me, kissed me senseless, and drove me insane.

I’d fallen in love with the man who could make a dying little boy forget he was dying.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

LOGAN

I glanced at my phone. DON’T CALL HER was calling. Again.

A familiar ache stabbed my chest.

I always blocked her numbers, every single time, and I had even changed my own. It never mattered. Francisca kept calling from new ones. Who cared how many times I’d told her I didn’t want to talk?

With a grunt, I declined the call.

A message popped up.

Please, Logan. I need to see you.

“Yeah, right.” I deleted it.

Two more appeared.

If you don’t answer, you leave me with no choice.

I know you have a mate now.

A vein in my forehead throbbed. *How dare she.* Everything—the trees, my phone, the sky—bled into a distorted red.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

My favorite motto.

A familiar vibration stirred right below my skin.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Think about Yvaine.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

My mate's smile.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

The vibration dimmed. Slowly, my lids parted, and the world regained its rightful colors.

When more messages littered my screen, I sent a *Fuck off*, blocked her number, and switched off my phone.

Persistent lunatic.

I shoved my phone into my pocket as I scanned the Comet forest that stretched out before me.

The sky looked as irritated as I was with those heavy clouds rolling overhead. In the last few days, the temperature had dropped and everyone was complaining about the sudden cold. But I was burning alive.

Standing on the balcony in shorts and a tank top, hands planted on the railing, sweat soaked my skin in a sickening flush.

"Damn it." My grip tightened around the iron railing. "Calm the fuck down."

Never in my life had I caught a virus. Fair, since I was already doomed with a *parasite* for life. But what did I have now?

This wasn't an illness. No.

It was *hunger*, pure and undeniable. An urgency to pounce on my mate and sink my fangs into her soft flesh. Every instinct screamed to bind her to me, to make her mine in any way I could. *She's going to feel so perfect when I—*

I moaned, eyes squeezing shut, trying to erase the image of her tiny frame under me.

The fact that I was burning myself alive, that my skin felt like it was crawling with a fucking ant colony, wasn't a good enough reason to mate. I could never rush her.

With a lifetime of practicing self-control, or more like denial, I was confident I could keep these feverish needs in check. I only cracked under extreme situations—Yvaine running to another continent, Yvaine with another guy, Francisca in general, Lucien murdering my brother and damaging Killian's hand. Those were situations that shall never be repeated.

I really, *really* didn't want to screw this up with her, given how I'd almost lost her. Honestly, it was a miracle that she hadn't rejected me, omissions or not. She was so much better than me. I was a full package of

trauma, violence, and a shitload of problems; meanwhile, she was walking perfection.

And since I had absolutely no idea how to do it, I decided to let her choose the pace.

The iron groaned underneath my hands and I looked down, letting it go. The railing had bent inward, two cracks splitting the metal where my palms had been.

Without batting an eye, I slid the flowerpots over them.

My body heated again.

"Fuck…" Nausea folded me in half. *I want to peel my skin away! Every inch of it.*

So, I did just that. My claws dug into my neck, then my shoulders and my chest. Relief came for half a second. Then I clawed harder. Fabric tore, and warm blood soaked my skin. "God! What the fuck is happening?" I groaned, scratching harder.

"Logan?"

That angelic voice relaxed my whole body. Yvaine had gone to check on Lachlan, and within just twenty minutes of her absence, my temperature had climbed. I'd even stolen a few ice packs from the kitchen. They hadn't done shit.

"There you are." Her little arms slipped around my torso from behind—a feeling I'd never stop craving. The fever instantly eased.

Ah, she is my ice pack. As long as I had her close, I was going to be fine.

My hand covered hers while I marveled at how cute it looked. Her ring finger was almost the same length as her middle one. It'd look even prettier with my ring on it.

"Ready to go?"

My bliss evaporated. A night at the bar with the Islander and their father. Not my idea of fun.

"Can't wait," I lied. She walked around to face me. My eyes dropped to meet hers, and as usual, something inside me melted at the sight.

Her delicate brows furrowed. "We don't have to stay long."

I sighed, closing my eyes for a second. Anyone else inviting me to meet their family? I'd have laughed. But Bunny Doc loved hers.

"Nah," I reassured her with a smile, though my nostrils flared—*she smells delicious.* "I'm ready."

A grin brightened her face, and my heart with it. *See? Totally whipped.*

"Thank you, Rudolph!" She rested her chin on my chest, distracting me a bit. *A lot.*

Goddess. I was biologically incapable of saying no to this girl. I didn't think it was a mate thing, just an Yvaine thing.

"You get to choose next weekend."

That got my full attention.

"Hmm…" I tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, biting back a smile when her heartbeat skipped. "You'll come to my game wearing my jersey." I paused. "That's the first demand."

A manic grin overtook me as I watched her reaction. She laughed and clasped her arms securely around my neck. "Deal." She tilted her head. "Is…that an ice pack?"

I'd thrown the others into the bushes, too lazy to take them back to the kitchen.

"What did you do with it?" she asked.

With a smile, my arms tightened around her, lifting her effortlessly so I didn't have to bend. Not that she was short—I didn't have to break my neck with her, after all—and she was so light that I could pick her up and carry her around. If it were up to me, she'd never leave my hold.

My mouth found hers and we kissed until she had to steal a breath, her little fists tangled in my hair and T-shirt so tightly, her knuckles turned white. For a second, I imagined those little hands around my—

Shut the fuck up.

My lips drifted to her neck, placing a soft nibble, a lingering kiss. A shudder ripped through me at her startled moan, so I bit down hard enough to leave the faintest bruise, then licked the spot.

Her fingers tugged my hair until I looked back up. "What is it?" I murmured, my eyes half-lidded.

"Kiss me, Logan."

I grinned. "I *am* kissing you."

I left a trail of kisses around her mouth. Every time she leaned in, I inched away. She made the cutest sound of protest and ended up kissing my nose by mistake.

My chuckle dimmed when her hands framed my face. Those impossible blue eyes captured mine, a tiny pout tugging at her lips.

With a defeated sigh, I let her do whatever she wanted.

The instant our lips connected, every intention of behaving disintegrated.

Patience and delicacy flew off the balcony when her tongue brushed my upper lip, and coaxed me deeper. She caught my tongue, sucking it into her mouth, and her fingers slid into my hair and gave an experimental tug at the back of my head.

With her lips exploring mine, my hand drifted down her spine, tracing each vertebra until it settled at the small of her back. I marveled at how much my palm could cover.

A quiet moan blended with the wind as it slipped lower, fingertips close to her ass. I grunted, licking the inside of her mouth.

I was about five seconds away from carrying her into the forest and begging to bury my face between her thighs when a badly timed presence approached behind me. Dominance rolled off the newcomer in heavy waves, along with aggression. Not enough to make me stop kissing my sweet mate, though.

“Yvaine.”

The single word carried command. Bunny Doc stiffened before wriggling in my arms like a trapped eel. She pushed her hair away from her face and looked up at me with unmistakable panic.

I sighed and set her down, discreetly adjusting myself inside my shorts.

Eventually, I looked at the newcomer. Dark eyes already fixed on me, hazel hair, and familiar features—my future father-in-law. Which also meant…this was the Comet Alpha and *my* father’s greatest rival. And judging by the way he had his arms crossed, the dislike hadn’t faded. A rivalry between Alphas wasn’t something curable, it was deliberate.

Great, he hates me already. I’d never cared about impressing anyone, but this was my mate’s father, and I knew she wanted this weekend to go well.

But shit, she never ran out of family! So far I’d met half of Scotland and enough relatives to start another wereball league. Yvaine also mentioned a future trip to Italy to meet some childhood friends and an extended family. *Of course she has* another *one.*

“So, this is him.” The Comet Alpha gave me a long, critical once-over. “He’s blond.”

With a sigh, I braced myself to endure another relative. My new motto was *don’t attack first, but if they do, defend yourself like you started it.*

Future father-in-law or not, his wounds could always heal.



YVAINE

How had I not heard Dad coming?

Finding us in that position was the worst possible timing. I tried to catch my breath, willing the extra blood to leave my cheeks before looking up.

Dad stood with his arms folded, feet planted shoulder-width apart. *Oh no.*

His narrowed gaze traveled over the tattoos on Logan's forearms and the ones sticking out of his shirt. At least Dad couldn't judge that, since he possibly had more than Logan. Pack tattoos of his lineage, and full constellations of the night sky from the day he was born, covered his arms and legs.

"Good ink, kid." That sounded approving. "Now remove your arms from my pup before I do it myself and introduce your face to the wall."

Never mind. "Dad!"

Logan loosened his hold on my waist but didn't step away. "You can try…*sir*." The pause before *sir* ruined any chance of it sounding respectful.

Dad caught it too. "Are you challenging me, kid?"

Without missing a beat, Logan shrugged. "No, sir. If I challenged you, we'd already be done. But that'd upset my mate."

"Logan!"

He blinked down at me, scratching the back of his neck. "Sorry."

My father smirked, satisfied. "Come hug your old man, honeybee. You stink of the enemy."

I scowled but hugged him anyway. "Logan's my mate. He'll be the father of your future grandpups, Dad." Logan sucked in a breath but I ignored it. "Are you saying your *grandpups* will stink?"

Dad visibly paled. "Of course not! They'll be part Comet…with hopefully a lot of Comet in them."

I shook my head. “Let’s go. I booked a table for four.”

“And you too, Lachlan,” I told him through our mind-link. I knew he had heard us from down the corridor.

“Do I have to?”

“You promised.”

“Fine. But only because watching Dad interrogate the Masturbator will be fun.”

“He doesn’t need to masturbate anymore.”

Silence. *Point to me.* Lachlan deserved the jab.

I marched toward the stairs, refusing to let any of them ruin my mood. “Your ignorant wereball rivalry won’t stand in the way of my big happy family!”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

YVAINE

"Do you have to eat her face constantly?" Lachlan scoffed.

"Do you have to do it in front of me?" Dad added over his whisky, no ice.

I giggled. "So dramatic. He kissed my cheek!" I'd just returned with another beer for Logan—he'd insisted on paying again, but this round was on me. "You're just bitter because Mom never lets you kiss her in public," I told Dad, then glanced at Lachlan with a grin. "And you just secretly want more kisses."

"Who would, with that beard?" Logan muttered, peering at the human football game on the big TV. Lachlan hadn't shaved or cut his hair since Scotland, looking more Highlander than ever.

"Only real men grow beards," Dad drawled. "Your father never managed one."

"He shaves."

"Blond men aren't real men."

Logan didn't seem affected, immune to any form of insecurity. "What about ginger men?" He nodded his chin at Lachlan. "Lucky the Leprechaun's boyfriends?"

To my surprise, Dad barked out a laugh, and even Lachlan's mouth twitched.

A sign of hope…until my father threw the first question from his imaginary list.

“So, Dark Diamond, have you mated my daughter?”

I rubbed my forehead; a thin layer of sweat covered it. A father who would ask a mate that kind of question was a nightmare that haunted every daughter’s dreams. Especially when the said mate had not even accidentally brushed the said daughter’s butt.

“I have not,” Logan answered evenly. But any kind of answer wouldn’t have satisfied my father.

“And why not? Don’t you think my daughter’s beautiful?”

I gaped at my father in complete shock. Even Lachlan stopped eating his nachos.

“I don’t have all day, Dark Diamond.”

For the first time, Logan looked uncertain. “Of course she is. The most beautiful.” His hand found mine under the table, his thumb brushing my palm.

“So?”

My ears were about to catch fire at any moment. “Dad! You can’t ask that!”

“We’re all adults here, Yvaine.”

“Are we?” I asked the child trapped inside my father’s body.

“No, it’s fine.” Logan sighed before he looked my father in the eyes. “Sir, I’m not a werewolf. It didn’t hurt her in Scotland, but I don’t trust it with her or anyone else.” He turned to me, different emotions swirling in his silver depths. “Also, when she’s ready—”

“Right!” I cut in. “It’s time to order you some water, Dad!” Part of me burned with curiosity. Almost two weeks had passed since Scotland, and Lucien had to be an excuse. But discussing that in front of my brother and father? Absolutely not.

Lachlan licked barbecue sauce off his fingers. “Well, you should mark her before somebody else does.”

Logan’s shoulders tensed. “They can try.”

“I’m not cattle!” My fingers drummed on the table. “The decision is mine.”

Dad sized Logan up over the edge of his glass, taking a sip, which amounted to more than half of the drink. “I heard you’re a lycan.”

I sympathized with him. It must’ve been hard to be a werewolf father, hoping she’d find her mate one day, yet dreading the moment she finally did.

“Tell me about your family. We all know who your father is.” He muttered *pain in the gut* under his breath, but everyone heard it. “What about your mother?”

A trace of pain tinged Logan’s eyes, so fleeting I almost thought I’d imagined it. “She’s not in my life anymore.”

Dad took another pull, draining its contents, with no discernable impact on his speech…*unfortunately*. “Why?” he probed.

“She left when I was a kid. Pack life wasn’t entertaining enough for her.” His voice had cooled.

“Your father raised you alone?” His surprise mirrored mine. Logan once told me his parents had divorced when I asked, adding he’d tell me more another time, yet he never had.

“Him and my grandmother.”

Dad patted his shoulder. “Well, they didn’t do an awful job.”

“Thanks, sir.” Logan returned the smile.

“Lachlan, another round.”

My twin rolled his eyes but headed for the bar.

The evening was going well. My three favorite men had somehow settled into talking about wereball, and, to my amusement, Lachlan and Logan agreed on far more than either of them realized.

Dad noticed, too. “You know boys…” He set his empty glass down with a thunk. “Your rivalry started long before you became captains.”

The *boys* in question frowned. “And?” they both said at the same time.

I giggled, my smile turning into a full-blown grin.

“I think”—Dad’s eyes bounced between them—“Logan’s always been subconsciously attached to Lachlan.”

Logan nearly choked on his beer, coughing, and Lachlan recoiled, moving his chair away from him.

“Hear me out.” Dad chuckled. “The mate bond is powerful. Logan felt a pull toward Lachlan, being his mate’s twin. It has happened in the past. Twins can create a kind of connection between their mates too.”

Oh. I tilted my head with interest. “And Logan has channeled his inexplicable affection for Lachlan into antagonism!”

Lachlan smirked. “So you’ve had a secret crush on me this whole time, Masturbator?”

“Yeah, freckles are my weakness.” Logan’s lips curled into a grimace. When Lachlan tried to pat him, he growled. “Fuck off.”

Dad barked out a laugh, and I joined in. “Well, that explains a lot!”

I bolted up and hugged them both, my arms barely extending to both of their shoulders. “See? There’s a fine line between love and hate.”

I squealed when Logan poked me in the ribs and Lachlan ruffled my hair.

That moment, a loud crowd of rowdy werewolves barged into the bar. Lachlan’s wereball teammates. Of course they had to come back to the pack this very weekend.

“Evening, boys,” Dad greeted. They saluted their Alpha with that reverential tone that Dad loved, threw Logan murderous looks, and exchanged handshakes with Lachlan.

“I’m sure you all know the Mast—*um*, the Terminator.”

“Logan,” I corrected, pursing my lips.

He gave them a lazy once-over before his lips quirked. “Yeah, we met in the arena.” He cracked his knuckles, then gestured to a thin scar on Gaius’s arm. “Looks familiar.”

A chorus of growls answered him, like a gang of dogs.

Dad chuckled. “Easy, boys! We aren’t in the arena and the bar owner is a good pal. He’s fond of his furniture.” There was a glint in his eyes that I didn’t like one bit. “How about a game of pool instead? You know how to hold a cue, Logan?”

Grinning, Logan laced his hands behind his head. “Dad taught me.”

“Of course he did. Okay, kid, you’re on my team. Losing isn’t acceptable.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Call me Richard.”

My father patted his knee and strode to a vacant pool table, dropping the balls.

“Is irking people your favorite hobby?” I asked as the wereball boys crowded around the pool tables.

Logan squished my cheeks with a laugh. “Top three! Thanks for noticing, Bunny Doc.” His tone changed, eyes shuttering. “Your thighs suffocating me is my number one.” I knew he was referring to when I’d jumped on him in Ian’s room, but still…

I was busy blushing when he bent, kissed the tip of my nose, and trotted to the pool table. He whistled, too!

The bar door swung open again, and rain swept in with a familiar scent. “Sorry I’m late.”

Sillas lowered his hood and ran a hand through his damp hair.

He tensed when his eyes found mine.

And he wasn’t the only one.

Oh capers.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

YVAINE

"Lachlan…" I admonished. When he glanced over his shoulder, I tipped my chin toward Sillas.

"I didn't know he'd be here! Any of them. They were supposed to stay on campus this weekend."

"You sure?"

"Do you seriously think I want to lose a good player because of your Godzilla mate?" Lachlan snorted. *"I'd rather not unleash that beast. We have no cows around here to feed that thing."*

My protective instincts flared. *"Lucien's not a beast!"*

"True. More like Gollum. Yvaine…my preciousss*!"*

"Lachlan! Apologize now."

His shoulder dropped. *"Sorry."*

Dad intervened. *"I invited them."*

"Why?"

"Aren't you and Sillas friends?"

"No, Dad. We dated and it didn't work out." But he already knew that.

"Good. Your mate can make sure Sillas understands that. And I can assess how he handles tough situations."

This was comical. It all felt like one big role reversal, where I was the adult and my father the kid.

"Logan already made that very clear." I snorted.

Dad seemed impressed. *"Has he?"*

The requirements for a modern werewolf father to approve their daughter's mate were ridiculous; I swear, medieval dads were more open-minded. The ideal son-in-law had to defend his *territory* from potential attackers and play wereball. Coming from a high pack was not important.

Despite their worries, Sillas kept his distance, chatting with the other Comet players and somehow ignoring the lycan, whose presence was very hard to ignore.

Logan, with his never-fading grin, behaved almost…too well. Memories of unconscious Scottish werewolves scattered on the ground flashed in my head.

As if sensing my thoughts, Logan looked up and winked at me before leaning over the pool table and lining up his stick. He and Dad were demolishing Lachlan and Gaius. Dad was the wall dividing the two fronts, and I was grateful that he was here.

I erased that thought right away, though, considering the Comet players were here in the first place because of him.

"Shut up, Gaius. He's my sister's mate now," I heard Lachlan defending Logan when the latter went to the bathroom later on. *I must have earwax.…*

"Hey Ivy."

Lost in thought, I hadn't noticed Sillas pull up a chair.

Right then, Logan returned from his *pit break*, as they called it.

"Will he bite my head off if I talk to you?" Sillas didn't need to specify who he meant as he sat on the stool next to mine.

I glanced over at Logan, watching us like a hawk across the room. "No," I assured Sillas, my eyes lingering on the furrows on my mate's forehead, assessing their depths. "He's *confident* in our relationship." I spoke loud enough for Logan to hear.

Logan's turn came, the cue striking the ball so hard it shot off the table.

"So, how have you been?" I focused my attention on Sillas. "How's university?"

We could have a normal five-minute conversation. We were adults, though there was no need to push my luck too much.

"Well, I was promoted to full-time professor."

"Sillas, that's amazing!" I grinned at him. "Congratulations! When do you start?"

"Thanks! Next seme—"

Snap.

We both swiveled on our stools.

A broken cue rested in a large, familiar pair of hands. Shocked, my eyes climbed from the splintered halves to a face filled with rage and betrayal.

I folded my arms. *Unbelievable.*

Logan dropped the cue on the floor and sauntered over with apparent ease.

"I, *um*…" Sillas cleared his throat. "Not going to steal her from you, man."

"As if you could." He let out a humorless huff.

"Sillas, I'm sorry for—"

"Don't. Look. At. Her." Logan's eyes never left mine. A chair scraped loudly across the floor as he brushed past it.

I folded my arms. "Apologize to Sillas for what you did at the game."

His incredulous look was photo-worthy. "No way!"

"I should fetch another beer. Talk later." Sillas almost squeezed my shoulder, thought better of it, and retreated in the opposite direction.

Logan came right at me and leaned down, hot breath in my ear. "Listen to me." He gently strummed his fingers against the side of my neck. "Just because I'm giving you time doesn't mean I have the capacity to let other guys—"

My hands clenched into fists. "What makes you think I need time?"

His silver eyes widened then narrowed. "If I marked you right now"—his lips pressed on my weak spot—"you'd let me?"

My eyes shut, my pulse stumbling, and I nodded once.

He sucked on the mark spot, grazing my skin. *That's it. He's going to—*

"And you'd be fine missing out on classes? Your hospital shift?"

"Huh?" My eyes flew open.

He was evaluating me, his nostrils flaring. "Little doctor, a lycan mark can put you on life support."

What?! "How do you know that? That can't be true!" I smacked his hands away from me.

"I don't," he grunted viciously. "But I'm not risking you because of my fuckery."

"I see…" I rose onto my tiptoes. "But *I* can still mark you though, can't I?"

A look of disbelief came over him. "I…you…you want to…?"

He took two steps back and I followed. "Aww, are you blushing?"

Logan hit the wall behind him, regarding me like I was a dangerous animal.

"*Ohhh*, you don't say! Is the mighty Terminator lost for words?"

His shock lasted two more seconds, then something darker replaced it, his front pressing into mine. "Careful, Bunny Doc."

I cocked my hips. "Of what?"

"If you mark me with those cute fangs"—the pad of his thumb skimmed over my lower lip, pulling it out a little, breathing labored—"you'll have to finish the whole mating process." His voice dropped to a rough whisper. "Are you ready for that?"

Every considerate thought I had got lost at his hotness. *Literally.* Logan was boiling.

"Oh Stephen!" My palm pressed to his forehead. His skin was on fire and sweat gleamed across his temples and neck.

When I touched him, he let out a low, shaky moan and sniffed my hair, until…"Hello, mate."

I gasped. "L-Lucien?"

His eyes were like two red headlights. His hair grew and turned black as though someone had poured black ink all over his head; only the tips remained blond. His jaw parted, canines throbbing, visibly elongating.

"Missed you." His special voice warmed my insides. "Mate more beautiful."

My heart swelled. "I missed you too."

Somehow, Lucien had taken control without fully shifting. Logan's features were sharper, broader, wilder, and…completely inhuman. Amazed. I was amazed. Every time I saw this complex creature, he stole another breath, another heartbeat.

Lachlan huffed somewhere behind us. "Get a room!" It took him a beat to notice, then he reconsidered. "Actually, don't."

"It's your turn, kid." My father clapped Logan's shoulder, unbothered by our proximity.

Everything happened at once.

Logan's head snapped around and he almost bit my father's hand off.

The entire bar fell silent.

"What's wrong with your eyes?" Dad's expression hardened. "Goddess, you're about to shift, aren't you?" His voice remained calm.

Logan staggered back, blinking hard. “I’m sorry! Ah, shit. I didn’t even realize—”

“Forget my hand.” Dad, unbothered at his almost lost limb, stepped closer to check Logan.

“Are you turning into Godzilla again?” Lachlan asked. Worry filled his eyes.

“I’m…not…sure.”

“Everyone! Out,” Dad commanded in his Alpha voice. “Yvaine, you too.”

Werewolves filed toward the exit. Gaius caught my arm. “Come on.”

“No way!” I yanked free. “I’m staying with my mate.”

Panting heavily, Logan glanced at me from under pitch-black locks. Those red eyes slammed back in an instant, his attention on Gaius.

He roared.

Dad intercepted him, both arms locking around his chest. Gaius jumped away from me like I was made of needles.

“Lucy…” I rested a hand against his burning shoulder. “I’m here. Everything’s fine.”

His eyes were an incredible show in that moment, a battlefield. The red fought against the silver while the wolf and the man tried to overpower each other.

Red eyes won. “Human not good enough for Mate!”

Silver eyes regained control. “You almost amputated her father’s hand, you stupid mutt!”

Red again. “Human let another male touch Mate! Human can’t protect Mate!”

The silver-eyed version of Logan snarled, headbutting the wall. The crack made me gasp and he glanced at me, blood streaming down his temple. He paled at my shocked face but then red took over again.

“You scared Mate!” Lucien’s voice broke my heart. “Lucien will kill male that touched.”

Logan clasped his head in his hands, panting.

“Get Sillas and Gaius as far away as possible,” I heard my father order Lachlan. The two were right behind me, watching in utter shock.

My hands cupped his face, thumbs stroking his burning skin. “Hey, hey.” His breath hitched. “Look at me. Both of you.”

Time stopped. It was just me and them, meeting each other's eyes. Blue, red, and silver.

We held gazes forever, forehead to forehead, until he shut his multi-colored eyes.

"Lucien always protects Mate." His voice was almost solemn. "Always here."

"I know. I can feel you, Lucy."

When I looked up, his irises had returned to their usual silver color, but his hair…

It remained as black as a moonless night. As if Lucien had decided to leave a piece of himself behind.

And I loved it.



"THAT WASN'T SO BAD, WAS IT?"

"Your dad sure asks unusual questions," Logan commented from his spot on my neck. "But he's cool." Lifting his head, he glanced at me, guiltily. "Hope he didn't mind about the hand."

"I'm sure he found your little show impressive."

Back home after dinner with my family, Logan and I were tangled together on the couch under a blanket, *Godzilla* playing in the background. Dad and Lachlan walked in, Zeus waddling after them, tail held high.

As soon as Dad noticed our position, he stared at our blanket and then at Logan's arm around my waist. I suppressed a laugh when Logan withdrew his arm, took my hand instead, and glanced at Dad, who gave him a small nod, like some mafia boss granting permission.

Then Logan paused. "Is that a…*raccoon*?"

I grinned, sitting up, and patted my leg. Zeus scampered over with a cry, then eyed Logan resentfully.

"Logan, meet Zeus!"

Logan blinked at me like I was crazy. "I assumed it was a dog." He looked Zeus up and down. "It's huge. How much food do you give it?"

Zeus bared every tooth he owned and Logan's eyes flashed red for a split second. "What species is he?"

"A Canadian raccoon." I scratched behind Zeus's ears. "I rescued him from an illegal circus and we've been inseparable ever since. Haven't we?" I cooed at him. Zeus chittered and licked my hand.

"We've had him since he was a baby," Dad said from the doorway. "He grew up around wolves. It's our pack mascot."

Lachlan smirked. "Lucien's not jealous of him…right?"

Logan snorted. "Course not! It's just a pet."

Zeus hissed and smacked Logan's nose with his fluffy tail. He sneezed.

"He hates you!" Lachlan laughed, collapsing into the armchair. "Good boy!"

Zeus trotted over and licked Lachlan's hand.

I glared at him with slight worry, but Logan only chuckled. "Because he senses the danger. Like you, Islander."

My brother scowled and Zeus somehow mirrored his expression. Logan ignored him. Though Lachlan never stopped professing his dislike for Logan, he showed no intention of leaving. He looked content here with us, too.



"I LIKE HIM," DAD ADMITTED AT LAST. "EVEN IF HIS FATHER IS CARRION. Always has been and always will be. Though the boy needs to learn how to live with his lycan."

"Thanks, Dad. We want to visit Archie and Uncle Mirko this summer. Chie thinks they can help Logan."

"Now *that's* a good idea." He nodded. "I'll call Alpha Mirko. Make sure they put you through proper training while you're there. You've lost muscle."

I scoffed, though he wasn't wrong.

Dad had asked me to meet him in his office, leaving Logan and Lachlan alone in the movie room. As I had walked away, I could hear them arguing

over what to watch next. Apparently they were annoyed they liked the same films.

My smile faded at the pain on my father's face. Used tissues littered his big desk. "Dad?"

"I just got off the phone with Doctor James."

My hand found my chest. *Please don't…* A sob clawed at my throat, but I swallowed it down. "What happened?"

Dad covered his face, his shoulders shaking.

Seeing the tubes on Ian's face was one thing. Seeing my father—the sturdy Alpha, the ferocious pack leader—crumbling like an old ruin was another.

He dragged a trembling hand down his face. "They need to operate. But his heart might—"

"Not survive it."

"There's an infection in the—"

"Appendix."

"They don't know which surgery to perform first."

I felt dizzy—my brain's latest reaction when acceptance was just too much.

We argued, pondering options, crying a little, until my father went to bed with bloodshot eyes and a hunched back.

Moments like this made me hate leaving home to study. I should've been here to hold Ian's hand and hug my parents whenever the doctor called with bad news. Because when it came to Ian…it was always bad news.

Closing Dad's office door, I spun on my heels and bolted outside.

Tree after tree, mile after mile, I still didn't feel that the space between the bad news and me was far enough.

My lungs burned, my legs screamed, but I ran. And ran some more. Sweat dripped down my face, mixing with dirt and creating muddy streaks.

A root stuck up out of the ground but I let it trip me on purpose and I hit the earth hard. The pain was good, something I wanted. A new pain. Face pressed into the damp soil, my fingers clawed at the ground until dirt jammed under my nails.

A sob tore through me, then another, and soon I couldn't breathe. I could still taste the nausea in my throat from my dad's words…

Two hands collected me and I didn't fight them. A warm chest pressed against my cheek, my nails digging into hard skin. He said nothing. Never

told me everything would be okay because he had stopped lying to me. I appreciated that—I would've resented him if he tried to comfort me with words that would change nothing. Because nothing would change. Ian was still dying.

When our eyes met and he just smiled at me, I couldn't hold it in anymore.

I let everything out, the sobs like harsh punches, tearing at my chest and throat, squeezing my lungs.

His thick arms closed around me, holding me close, lulling me in his impossible strength, as if he could shield me from my own pain.

"It's so unfair," I cried into his chest.

He just hugged me tighter, his warmth soaking into me, and for the first time in forever, I felt like I could breathe again. I inhaled the comforting scent of him, mixed with the fresh smell of the outdoors.

I had no idea how long we stayed like that, but eventually, the weeping slowed.

Mom found us, then Lachlan. They came. They left.

We remained under that old oak, his chest soaked with my tears, my snot, and my grief. But he never complained, never moved, just held me as pure desperation shook me to the core, possessing me.

"Do you know what I used to do as a kid?"

I sniffled and dragged a hand over my nose. Logan cleaned it with a corner of his T-shirt. "What?"

"I screamed."

"You screamed?"

His chin bumped my head with his nod. "I'd go into the woods, raging that I was in so much pain, and scream. Twice I'd even thought about… getting rid of myself."

"Logan!"

"It's fine now." It didn't look like it was. "This is the first time I told someone, though. It's…embarrassing."

I pressed my face into his neck. This beautiful, cheerful guy used to have depressive thoughts? "I'd never judge you. Thanks for telling me but…have you thought about it again?"

"Nah. I'm too self-centered and love myself too much to get rid of myself." My lips twitched. "And my family…I'd never do that to them."

"Why were you in pain? Your…mom?"

He nodded once. “And Daniel.”

“Did they—”

“I can’t talk about it.” His fingers brushed my cheek. “Not yet.”

We paused, his hand massaging my back.

“But I learned something.” His eyes reddened, from tears this time. “You can’t keep that much pain inside. I didn’t know what to do with it, so I went into the woods and fucking screamed. Sometimes my throat bled.” His lips thinned as he swallowed the emotion. “So I say…let’s scream.”

“Now?”

“Now. Tomorrow. Anytime.”

He pulled me to my feet and, together, we faced the forest, holding hands, the crescent moon above catching our matching necklaces resting against our sad hearts.

“On three,” he whispered. “We breathe in and let all the heavy shit out.”

One.

Two.

Three.

We inhaled…then screamed.

Not words. Not cries. Just raw animal grief. Just a roar against life, the universe, the unfairness of it all, the sound ripping out of us until our throats burned, until our lungs emptied, until there was nothing left.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

YVAINE

Today was a day I never expected in the 3,000-year history of werewolves.

Me, the Highlander's twin, sitting in the Dark Diamond arena and cheering for my mate, Comet's greatest rival. Whenever I'd heard his name over the past few years, an avalanche of insults had always followed.

And now? I was his number one fan.

Dark Diamond sat just two points behind Comet in the league, but if they won today against the Golden Furs, they'd reclaim first place. No doubt Logan and his team would smash them, though the Golden Furs… they were utterly terrifying. Rumor had it their new captain was a brutal giant who'd stolen the quarterback position from his predecessor in junior year. It reminded me a little too much of Logan.

Amaia, who attended not only every match but nearly every one of Callum's training sessions, had insisted we arrive early to avoid the crowds and the violent fans. Armed with our special passes, reading glasses, and textbooks, we stepped into the almost empty stadium. "Look at us," Amaia commented with a slight blush. "In the front row, like two fanatics."

"Yeah." I shaded my eyes against the blinding stadium lights. "What's better than two wereball players as mates to spice up our lives?"

"Callum is more like sugar. He sweetens my life."

"Logan is like paprika." I grinned. "Makes everything hotter, turns your face red, and definitely isn't for everyone."

She laughed. “I want to change mine! Callum’s my ginger honey tea.”

The stadium slowly filled around us. The DD Ultras, like a military legion of fans, unfurled a giant banner with *T-E-R-M-I-N-A-T-O-R* painted in enormous red letters. Hopefully it wasn’t blood.

I was about to start reading chapter ten when a specific blond head appeared on the field.

“Paprika’s here!” Zelda yipped.

In a jersey, tiny shorts, and no shoes, Logan still hadn’t spotted me, too busy shouting at his teammates as they warmed up.

Why is he the only one wearing a shirt?

A few feet away, Killian sat with legs stretched into a V while a girl painted a black skeleton across his tattooed chest. Every now and then, he leaned over to whisper something that made her blush so hard it was probably visible from the International Space Station.

Just then, Logan’s head snapped toward me.

I waved.

I expected him to wave back and return to warming up. But then again, when had my mate ever done something expected? He never acted like the typical guy, because he wasn’t typical.

He sprinted, and the more distance he closed, the more he reminded me of a lion. *I definitely have drool in the corner of my mouth.* Then he vaulted the railing, caught me by my hips, and lifted me into his arms.

“You’re here.”

“I’m here.”

He spun me once and kissed me like we’d been apart for months instead of a week. He crushed me to his chest, holding me there, my feet dangling above the ground, my cheeks burning against his warm pecs.

“Hi,” he whispered, eyes roaming my face.

I decided I wasn’t finished yet, so I stole another kiss. He groaned softly, pressing me into all his hardness.

“Hi,” I breathed out, stroking his cheekbones before my fingers found a deep scratch. “What happened here?”

He turned his head to kiss my palm. Amusement flashed in his eyes as he took in my worried state. “The new captain got mouthy with one of my teammates.” A shrug. “I fixed the problem.” Considering that smug look, he was pleased with the result.

“Logan…the game hasn’t even started. Why isn’t it healing?”

“It’s fresh.”

“But—”

He pecked me on the lips, silencing me in his usual way. “Will you cheer for me today?”

“I’m Switzerland, Rudy. Neutral territory,” I teased.

He groaned dramatically.

“But…be careful.” Something about today was making me feel anxious.

“I’ll try to take it easy with my bunny watching.” I let him sniff my hair and neck, giggling a little. “I don’t want to scare you,” he said.

I snorted, brushing his fringe away from his forehead. “I’m already used to violence.”

He chuckled, then bit my cheek, causing me to squeal. “Someday I’ll eat these pretty cheeks.”

Speechless again, I hid my face in his neck, his amber masculine scent messing with my head.

“I missed you too,” he said quietly, wiping his palm on his shorts before stroking my face. “Hmm.” His eyes traveled over me. “Something’s missing.”

Before I could ask, he yanked off his jersey, sculpted torso outshining the stadium lights, and slipped it on me without warning. “There.”

“Well, then.” I spread my arms, glancing down at myself swimming in the shirt, then looked up at him again.

The proud grin spreading on his face made me laugh. “Much better,” he rumbled.

Sure. Another excuse to stamp his name all over me.

And that’s why he was wearing a shirt—he wanted it to smell like him first.

“It looks good on you, Bunny Doc.”

“What exactly?” I rolled the sleeves up until my hands finally emerged. “Your pack colors, your name, or the fact I’m wearing a camping tent?”

“A little of everything,” he hummed, his languid gaze on me. “You look cute.”

My eyes slid to the thick layer of plastic wrapped around his left forearm. “What’s under there?” I probed it, and he winced.

“A surprise.”

“A new tattoo?”

“Maybe.”

“Is it my name?”

Instead of denying it, a slow, wolfish grin spread across his face before he reached over and poked my nose. “Aren’t you a curious bunny?”

Then something caught his attention, mirth-filled eyes looking past me.

“Oh, look! There’s Big Feet!”

“Who?”

“My dad!”

My eyes nearly popped out of my head.

Logan beamed, pulling me behind him and leading me straight to a tall, stoic man in the stands. “Bunny Doc, meet Big Feet.”

Jonathan Draven studied me in silence, his intense eyes narrowing ever so slightly. I blushed, tucking a loose strand of hair behind my ear.

“Sit with him,” Logan said, happy as a clam. Probably because he’d gotten to introduce us himself, unlike what happened with Bellatrix and Killian.

Before I could reply, he simply scooped me up like I was a small child and deposited me into the empty seat next to his father.

This was one of those moments I wished we could already mind-link. That only happened after completing the mating bond, or if you were from the same pack. Still, I did my best to convey my thoughts and stared at him with a glare that said, *When we are alone, you’ll hear about this!* Thank Stephen that Amaia slid into the seat to my left.

“Your game’s about to start,” was all his father said.

Logan nodded with a grin, planted another kiss on my mouth, then said in a hoarse voice, “See you when I score that touchdown for you, bunny cheeks.” He squeezed them one more time and jogged away, leaving me flustered and wanting to spank him.



THE DARK DIAMOND’S ALPHA WAS NOTHING LIKE HIS PUPS. QUIET, reserved. I assumed we wouldn’t speak at all, his eyes never leaving his son. Then Logan broke the other captain’s bone, the crack eerie.

“That’ll definitely need a doctor,” I muttered as Logan casually launched a perfect pass while the poor captain remained on the ground.

“Ribs?” Jonathan asked.

I squinted. “Intercostals.”

“Maybe a torn oblique?”

I glanced at him with a hint of surprise. “That’s possible.”

And just like that, the conversation flew.

There was something calming about him. He asked questions without prying and listened without interrupting—a breath of fresh air after my intrusive family.

“Do you like medicine, sir?”

“If I hadn’t become Alpha, I would have studied medicine,” he said, eyes following Logan as he flattened another defender. “I’ve always liked people’s hearts.”

“I think you would’ve made a great cardiologist.”

“You should come to our pack for dinner sometime.” His large watch gleamed under the stadium lights, his wrist the size of my ankle. I noticed that there wasn’t a single mark on his neck—Logan’s mom hadn’t marked him.

“I’d like that. Thank you, sir.”

“Jonathan,” he corrected. “Or Big Feet.”

He smiled at me for the very first time, and I returned it.

I couldn’t imagine why my father disliked this kind man so much. It was one of those mysteries that would remain.

“Does your father still have a weak right wrist?” he asked.

“I think so. Why?”

Jonathan only smiled, the tiniest lift at one corner of his mouth. *Mystery solved. Mr. Draven, you sneaky wolf.*

A roar from the field pulled my attention away. Dark Diamond scored another touchdown right before halftime. I rubbed at my sternum, hoping the ball of anxiety coiled there would unwind, but as I watched Killian and Logan clash in a hug and teammates pile on top of them, I knew it’d coil right back up as soon as Logan played again.

I couldn’t help worrying for him, though there was never a need. He was a sight to behold. Not every wereball player who stepped into the arena had that confidence, that control, that eagerness. Watching him, I wondered how different he really was from Lucien, how separate the man and the

beast were. Logan insisted they were total opposites, but from up here? It was plain as day for me to see they weren't.

And as worried as I was that he was the biggest target on the field, nobody managed to hurt him. The crowd tried—they threw rocks, bottles, and at some point an entire desk. But he dodged everything without breaking stride or missing the chance to send me those shameless smiles.

And judging by the way he grinned every time, he could definitely hear my heart racing.



LOGAN

The hairs on my neck stood to attention. Her eyes swept over my face, drifted down my chest, and stopped on my calves. My bloody calves. She loved those. No idea why, but I was okay with it.

Torture. Feeling my sweet mate's gaze trace my body was torture. And it was distracting. It had my cock swelling in my shorts. All I wanted was to ditch the match, march over there, and wrap myself around her.

Even when I wasn't looking at her, flashes of her invaded my head, like she was a human heliograph in my brain. I could hear every breath moving in and out of her lips, every heartbeat pumping precious blood through her precious veins.

Got me worked up without even trying.

Again, my eyes drifted to the bleachers. Yvaine sat between Amaia and my dad, face stuffed in one of her cinder-block-sized textbooks, her pretty nose wrinkled. She was showing Dad something in her book, speaking with complete focus while he listened, all interested. I did my best to hold back a laugh.

I remembered her face after I'd plopped her down next to Big Feet—she'd been ready to murder me. Worth it, because I'd been wanting them to meet. And I knew Dad already liked her—look at them! All intent on discussing who knew what.

I avoided a punch and drove my fist into my opponent's ribs, the sweet sound of smashed spleen and kidneys filling my ears. Yes, I'd learned a thing or two after eight hours of helping Bunny Doc study. I jumped over the body, winking at the player I'd just taken down.

My forearm throbbed; fresh werewolf ink always did. The protective wrap around it had wrinkled and gotten grimy from the game but I couldn't wait for her to see my new addition.

"You should ask Mate already…"

"No, mutt, I can't just ask her like that," I told my annoying lycan. I'd let Lucien out for a bit. In my head, anyway. Yvaine made me do it. He'd promised to behave, and he'd given me my blond hair back after his stupid prank at the Comet pack. My idiotic friends hadn't stopped calling me Goth Boy ever since.

"Why not?" Lucien whimpered, like a lost puppy. *"Need mark Mate."*

"She's not ready."

"Mate loves us. Mate's ready."

"She never said that." I threw the ball to Callum, a mile away. He jumped up and caught it.

"Mate told me," Lucien said smugly.

I pursed my lips. The animal always knew how to get under my skin. Which made sense, since he practically lived there.

"Just because I'm desperate enough to listen to your advice doesn't mean I fucking need it." I punched another poor bastard who happened to be in my way and flashed my fangs at another player, who halted and changed direction.

"Ask her already!" Lucien huffed. *"Human, you are male balls."*

"Huh?"

"Pussies are tough, bear children. Human is male balls. Those are weak."

Yvaine had given me a similar lecture months ago.

I shoved him away, ignoring his snickering, and locked him up. *Weeeell, my weekly dose of generosity is done.*

With another touchdown, we were dominating the game. Even though adrenaline was pumping me up and my knuckles were covered in blood, I halted, sighing.

The thought of mating with her made me all hot and bothered. I realized the damn fever and constant itching were because of that. Because of *her*.

Dad had a cabin in the forest, and I kept thinking about taking her there, just us and a romantic weekend. Mating wouldn't be on the table; I wouldn't even mention it. Except she'd practically offered to mark me in the bar…

My shorts tightened. Again. "Fuck."

"Dude, don't spill near me." Killian shouldered me.

Callum snorted, gaze flicking to where Bunny Doc and Amaia were sitting. His eyes softened. "Did you ask her yet?"

"No," I moaned, rubbing my face. I had told the guys about my plan. At the time I thought it was a good idea. Now? Not anymore.

"You'll finish in two seconds," Killian said. "Last time you had sex was…what? Months ago?"

Callum patted me on the back. "Poor girl won't even notice it happened."

"I don't give a fuck about sex," I grunted.

"Tell that to your buddy down there."

I covered my bulge with a groan and barked an order to Greg. He followed it—*touchdown*.

I huffed. "I just don't want to fuck this up. I want to do things right…"

"She loves you, man. It's all over her face," Killian said.

"But my beast—"

"Lucy won't hurt her, come on. They had their honeymoon in Scotland. Give it a break and stop finding excuses."

I lifted my gaze to Bunny Doc's. One of her delicate brows arched, likely wondering what had upset me. *Oh, if only she knew.*

I clenched my jaw, remembering how her perfect curves had felt around me, her heartbeat racing underneath my palm as she looked at me with those eyes of hers. *Moon Goddess, I want to see her staring up at me like that with my cock stuffed in her pretty little—*

I growled under my breath, cursing my horny self, and sprinted away to release some energy and win today.

The game got rougher, the crowd more aggressive, and I even sliced my foot on some broken glass. When Callum scored his second touchdown, all I saw was Yvaine standing in the bleachers. I wanted her cheering; instead, her arms were folded tightly over her chest and she was looking at me with worry.

Fuck.

I huffed, a hand dusting over the bite on my arm. One of the mad wolves that caused disruption during the game, a Jester, had gotten me.

Bunny Doc didn't care that the Jester was now limping while I got just a graze from it. No, she gasped like I'd been gutted, making me feel guilty for letting myself be bitten.

Funny thing was…I kind of liked being fussed over.

At halftime, when we were *supposed* to be going into the locker rooms, Killian ran over to the bleachers, calling out Yvaine's name. I smiled, watching her jog down and hang over the railing to chat with him. I threw the ball to the ref and sprinted to join them.



YVAINE

"Sweet Pea!" Killian waved at me, all bloody and sweaty, grime covering his tattoos.

"Hey there!" I beamed, hurrying down the steps. "Great game!"

"As if you even watched me once!" He wiggled his eyebrows. "Everyone knows you were too busy staring at your mate terminating players."

Heat climbed into my cheeks, because he was right. Even now, my eyes were still searching for him.

"Oh, by the way…" Killian snickered. "He wants to ask you to spend next weekend away with him."

My heart swelled. "He does?"

Killian glanced over his shoulder. Logan was currently signing autographs onto some kids' jerseys. All with the number 8, his number, matching my own jersey. "Don't say I told you! Just wanted to prepare you." Then he kissed my cheek and sprinted away.

I wiped off the smudge Killian left behind and waited.

Finally, Logan broke away from the crowd. A second later, I disappeared into a pair of massive arms. "Mmm, couldn't stop thinking

about you the whole game.”

I smiled as my fingers slipped through his damp hair. “You played really well.” While I didn’t want to add any more floors to his ego’s tower, there was no denying it. He was the best, nothing else to say about that. Pride blossomed quietly inside my chest.

“That’s because my lucky charm was here,” he said cheerfully before something shifted. His ears reddened.

Uh-oh.

“Hey, I was thinking—”

“I hope about me.” I poked him.

“Always.” He raked a hand through his ruffled bangs, his fissure tattoos shifting around his biceps. “You, um…”

An idea popped into my head. “Do you want to spend next weekend with me?”

It looked like he had just seen a witch riding a seahorse. “What? You want—what?”

“What *what*?” I pursed my lips. “Don’t you want to?”

“I—no! I mean yes!” He scrubbed both hands over his face. “I mean, I was going to…” He trailed off, growling. “The ass told you, didn’t he? Fuck.”

“Maybe.” I laughed, grabbing his arm before he could storm off.

He sighed, rubbing the back of his neck before looking at me again. Carefully. “So…what do you think?” He shifted his weight. “Just two days. You, me, your books. And a cabin. You can forget about everything for a bit.”

A small smile tugged at his lips. “I’ll cook.” He paused. “Well…the pack cook will, but I’ll tell him to make all your favorite foods.”

His ears were vermilion now.

I couldn’t stop smiling. “Yes.” I rose onto my tiptoes and kissed him. “I’d love to go.”



LOGAN LEFT TO GO INTO THE LOCKER ROOMS FOR THE HALFTIME SPEECH, SO I escaped to the bathroom with Amaia.

She washed her hands, a knowing smile tugging at her lips. “That was quite the invitation to a romantic weekend in the woods.”

My heart tumbled. “You think?”

“You’ve been back from Scotland for three weeks. Rip the Band-Aid off already!”

“We’ve both been busy, and with Ian…” My smile faded as I dried my hands. “Logan’s scared something will happen to me.”

“But you’re nervous too. I know you.”

“He’ll snap you in half.” A new voice made us both turn.

“Tizzy?” Amaia’s confused expression mirrored mine. Tiziano stood in the open doorway in a black hoodie with the drawstrings pulled tight, dark hair falling over one eye. “What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “Supporting you guys.” His tone remained as flat as ever. “They’re your mates, you two are my best friends… Figured I’d show up.”

“How nice.” Amaia slipped past us. “I’ll wait outside.”

He caught my forearm on my way out. “Be careful with your mate. I know you love him and everything but I don’t want you to be… disappointed.” The sincerity in his eyes warmed me and I squeezed his arm.

“Thanks, Tizzy.” I knew he meant well. He was just worried.

Together, we headed toward the exit. “You know”—I nudged him —“you’re technically not supposed to be inside the ladies’ bathroom.”

His smile didn’t reach his eyes. “I’ve broken bigger laws.”

A broad-shouldered man with salt-and-pepper hair also entered the bathroom, stepping into our path. Murky blue eyes settled on me.

“Well, hello there, *pumpkin*.”

My stomach tightened. I knew that voice, but before I could place it, something slammed into the back of my head. Everything went white; the floor lurched. A second blow smashed into the back of my legs.

The last thing I saw was Amaia lying motionless on the tiles, a puddle of blood all around her, legs bent at awkward angles. I thought about my little brother, then Logan, and whether I’d have the chance to tell him how much I loved him, before darkness took me under.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

LOGAN

As soon as the calming effects of my mate wore off, the urge to cave in Golden Fur skulls rushed back in.

"Yo!" Killian splashed water at me. "How'd the chat with Sweet Pea—*oof*! Damn it, T!"

My elbow buried into his exposed stomach as I drove the fucker into the mud.

"Not cool, man!" he groaned, glaring at me. "You ruined the painting!"

I glanced at the black skeleton head on his chest, now smeared. Good.

"You snitch." I helped him up. "Why'd you tell Bunny Doc? You made me look like a—"

"A shy boy?"

I pushed Killian back down.

"A nervous virgin?" Callum hooked an arm around my neck from behind. A second later, he joined his twin in the mud.

"You ruined the surprise, Killy!"

"You were never gonna ask!" He laughed. "Did she say yes?"

"She did."

"I wonder what the Highlander's twin is like in bed," a soon-to-be dead man said.

I turned right the fuck around. Golden Furs's captain stood on the opposite sideline and fucking grinned, one front tooth still missing.

“Going to kill that prick.” Two pairs of hands, one per arm, held me back.

“Don’t be stupid,” Callum warned. “He’s baiting you. You’ll get sent off and we’ll lose our captain for the second half.”

“No breaking people during halftime,” Killian reminded me.

I exhaled my rage. Slow. Controlled.

Slipping free, I looked straight at Captain Prick. “Remember what happened to the Crooked Fangs’s captain who messed with my sister last year?” I said in a sing-song voice, knowing he could hear me well, even from a distance.

His eyes widened, lips parted, but he shook his head.

“Exactly.” I let my fangs slide free. “Nobody found out.”

I watched him as he hurried off.

“Stop scaring them so much,” Killian sighed. “What’s the fun in playing if they all scurry away like hens?”

I wouldn’t make any promises over that one, not when my mate’s name was in the mouth of a scumbag.

After the locker room and my usual speech to pump up my boys, we spread out again. The stadium erupted, but my eyes searched the stands. It didn’t take long to spot Big Feet, listening to an elder from our pack. The seats beside him, though, were empty.

My brows furrowed.

Where is she? Bathroom. Or stretching her legs. She disliked sports but loved wandering around.

A violent shove rattled the inside of my skull. Freaking Lucien trying to sneak out. I pushed him back in and put extra locks around his mental cage.

“You all right?” Tank Man asked.

Heat boiled in my veins. My skin itched, though this time was different. *Not* the mate itch.

A weird restlessness buzzed through my body. *Something isn’t right.*

The thought had barely formed when Callum swayed and knocked into Killian, his hand flying to his temple. His twin grabbed him, alarmed.

I was beside them in a heartbeat. “C?”

“I’m cool…” He rubbed his left temple.

“You sure?”

“Probably the sandwich I ate.” Callum took a few deep draws through his mouth, clasping his chest. “I’m…I’m cool.” Except he looked sickly.

Hell, his skin was corpse-gray.

"Sit down and we'll get Doc Harris." Killian's voice was laced with concern.

"The hell you will! I told you I'm—" Callum paused, inhaling sharply, his eyes glazing over—

He suddenly dropped to his knees and cradled his head. "Amaia!"

"What about her?" Killian crouched beside him, hand on his back.

"She isn't answering my mind-link!" He moaned in pain.

A deathly cold chill went through me. *Amaia's with Bunny Doc.*

Lucien hit the walls of my mind so hard my vision blurred. "*Not now!*" I snarled at the dog.

Fear had me gasping for breath as I darted across the field. *You don't know that anything's wrong. Maybe she just went to buy that weird grass she likes. Oh Moon Goddess, please let her be okay.*

"Dad!" I shouted, pounding up the stairs. "Where's Yvaine?"

His head whipped toward me. "Calm down, son. What happened?"

He had no idea where she was.

"Yvaine and Amaia are missing," I heard Killian telling the guys.

Already past them, I raced into the long corridor, following the smell of honey and hazelnuts. Callum was right behind me, chasing Amaia's scent.

"The game has to continue!" someone yelled.

"Terminator!" someone else shouted.

"Captain! The second half!"

I ignored them all. *Fuck the game. Fuck wereball. Fuck Dark Diamond.*

Her scent led straight to the restrooms.

"Killian." My jaw ticked. "You're in charge. Get back in there."

His face tightened. "But I can only break bones! I can't lead the—"

"I don't give a fuck!" I slammed my shoulder into the locked door of the ladies' restroom. It burst inward.

Their scents end here.

My pupils dilated until every edge became sharp, a red wash tinting everything. Maybe *that* was how I'd missed the pool of blood at first.

"My brothers," Killian said from behind. "We'll find them—*oh shit*."

"Her blood." My voice went flat and my hands fell to my sides. My legs folded under me as I stared at something that belonged to my mate, something that should have remained inside her. My chest caved in with the force of my shocked inhalation.

Reality was dawning, closing in on me from all corners like an invisible trap. The blood, the locked door, the open window in the bathroom—

A roar filled my head, my eye twitching like a faulty cable. *“You no protect Mate. You failed! Weak!”*

Lucien was right. I hadn’t protected her.

A horrible tremor tore through me.

“C! No! Control yourself!” our Beta yelled.

Callum screamed, shaking from head to toe. “Amaia! She—” He sobbed, clutching his chest. *His bleeding chest.*

A werewolf’s reaction when your mate’s—

I scooped up some of the dense liquid. Still warm. Thick between my fingers. I slowly lifted my tainted hand to my nose and breathed in, smearing it over my face.

A growl rumbled somewhere, replacing all the other sounds in the room. In the *arena*.

It was from me. *Within* me.

The entire place fell into a graveyard-like silence.

Someone took my mate. Someone touched what’s mine.

“Mate is hurt.”

My chest heaved.

“Alpha, he’s shifting!”

“Get everyone out of here!” someone, maybe my father, yelled.

“Callum’s losing control!” another person warned.

“He’s just a werewolf, don’t mind him. Leave. Now.”

“It’s about to come out!”

I ignored them all. The voices became distant, every sound warped, muffled.

I embraced the invasion with a sigh, welcoming the incandescent heat and the explosion of my bones and muscles. Black claws burst from my fingertips; my vision fractured until all that was left was red and anger. My veins burned and thickened, crawling up my face. Fur tore through my skin, shredding my shorts and the last remnants of my human disguise.

My shadow on the floor expanded, two ears and a muzzle forming.

Hunt. Find. Kill.

I was possessed, stripped down to the raw primal thing the pack had always whispered about in fear. My chest was a jungle, my heart a drum, and it beat for vengeance.

For the first time in my life, I was grateful to disappear, to let the monster out. Because the monster knew exactly what to do: destroy anything standing between us and her.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

KILLIAN

I'd seen Lucien a grand total of five times in my life. Never a show I'd get used to. I told myself he cared about me somehow. He had to. He was Logan, wasn't he?

Except…he wasn't.

He was that part Logan had tried to sever before it rotted all of him.

But how do you amputate your own shadow?

The first time I saw Lucien pop out was when he slayed his own brother, Daniel. He also nearly took my leg off. Not on purpose, and I had forgiven him. The missing tips of my two fingers on my left hand had become quite the conversation starter with the ladies anyway.

The other recent time Lucien had visited us was when Yvaine slept with someone else, and half the pack had been demolished.

The lycan had crossed an entire ocean to find her.

And now? Now that his mate's blood had been spilled?

The moment Logan's skin split, I knew we all had to run. And fast.

Before bolting from the bathrooms I saw a black clawed hand slash the steel door, five perfect gouges shrieking through the metal.

For one suspended heartbeat, nothing happened.

And then an unearthly howl shattered the air.

We backed away from the epicenter just as a loud crash sounded.

Then silence again.

I stepped forward.

“Wait, Killian!”

“It’s dangerous!”

I ignored them and opened the door.

And there it was. Not the lycan, but a lycan-sized hole punched straight through the outer wall, bricks littering the floor, dust billowing. Lucien hadn’t bothered with the door. *Why would he?*

“Killian.” Alpha Jonathan’s voice stopped me. “The game continues.”

“What? Who cares?” I pointed toward the crater. “I have to go help them—”

“A rescue team is already following my son and Callum. It’s too dangerous, pup.” His eyes never left the hole, his tone grim.

I growled at him.

“I want you to take a deep breath and follow my order. Now.”

Exhaling, I nodded stiffly, my fists clenching. “Yes, Alpha.”

Even if we finished the game, none of us had won today.

Pulling my hair hard, I glanced at Lucien’s art on the wall. “Good hunting, my brothers.”



YVAINE

I dragged in a deep breath; damp earth and mold filled my lungs. Moon Goddess, my skull was throbbing, my legs were refusing to follow my orders, and a metallic taste coated my tongue. Something hard and cold pressed against my back—concrete.

My eyes fluttered open and a curtain of black hair welcomed me back. *Amaia.* Curled next to me, she was unnaturally still, dry blood matting one side of her face and staining the dusty floor. I could hear the faintest heartbeat…

“She’s fine.”

I jerked, bumping into the wall, but a hand shot out to help me. “Tiziano! You scared me.”

When I glanced up at him, he looked cadaveric. Big dark circles swallowed his face, like he hadn't slept for days. His dirty hair was matted, and he was only wearing a pair of Comet boxers. Scratches and bruises crisscrossed his body.

"What happened to you?" I asked.

He shrugged, then looked away.

"Wait, where are we?" I looked around.

The room was small, the walls unfinished, and nobody had bothered to add a window. One naked lightbulb swung from a loose wire overhead. The place smelled like cleaning products had never been introduced here.

"We were kidnapped," Tiziano croaked, the words scraping their way out of him. There was a sadness, a deep pain etched onto his usually cheerful features.

It all rushed back—the toilet break, Amaia on the floor, and that familiar-looking man.

"Who?" My fingers found dried blood tangled in my hair. *Ouch.*

"The Matenapper," he whispered.

Too disoriented to think, I gathered Amaia into my lap and cradled her, my cheek on her head. *Please wake up.*

More memories floated in. Logan. The game. Callum. The kidnappings.

"Oh Stephen! They took us so Dark Diamond would lose."

Zelda was silent inside me. Whatever they'd pumped into me had knocked my wolf unconscious so no mind-link, and no healing. Just pain, nausea, and the burning ache spreading through my neck.

Tiziano reached over and wrapped his arms around us. "Yvaine…I…" A sob tore out of him. "We…" Another. "He…"

The hairs on my arms prickled, and a whistle drifted toward us from somewhere. I hadn't even smelled him.

"Well, well…" a syrupy voice mocked. "Already awake."

My mouth gaped open.

There, in the border between shadows and light, stood the familiar man.

Where had I seen him before? *Think. Think. Ignore the pain and dizziness…*

Flashes of the college party crossed my clouded mind. Before Logan and I had kissed for the first time, someone unpleasant had bumped into me.

Recognition hit like another blow to the head.

"*Garlic Man!*"

His brows shot up before he laughed. “Yeah. Sorry about that. The garlic and alcohol were deliberate. Werewolves avoid anything that smells unpleasant, and they stop paying attention.” His smile widened, half a canine tooth missing. “Makes my work much easier.”

Unbelievable. Amaia…this…all for a stupid wereball match?

“You’re going to prison,” I spat, rage replacing my common sense.

His smile vanished, like someone had snuffed out a candle. The calculation in his eyes was as cold as the muscle in his chest.

He took two steps forward.

“Don’t,” Tiziano mumbled under his breath.

The man ignored him and his palm cracked across my face, sending me sprawling on top of Amaia. My hand covered my cheek. *That…really stings.*

“Don’t touch her!” Tiziano lurched to his feet, swaying a little.

“Why don’t you cool off?” the man drawled, glancing at Tiziano with disinterest. “Or get the fuck out and wait for me in bed.”

“You can’t hurt my friends. That’s the deal!”

Deal?

The man’s expression flattened. “She saw me.” He reached inside his jacket. Steel flashed, a long knife that I recognized. A skinning knife.

“She won’t remember. We’ll disappear,” Tiziano pleaded. “Please. For me.”

The unpleasant man barked out a laugh. “This is your fault.” He mocked him with fluttering fingers. “*Don’t use so much sedative! Don’t tie them up! Don’t throw them in trash bins*! Don’t, don’t, don’t! So many *rules*! You sentimental *mate*!” The knife glinted under the hanging bulb. “Because of you, she has to die.”

“No!” Tiziano yelled. His forehead smashed into the man’s nose.

The Matenapper staggered one step but calmly popped his broken nose back in with two fingers and snorted a fat blood clot out of his left nostril. “There. Better.”

Before Tiziano could do anything, the man hooked his forearm around his throat, wrenching his head until his vertebrae popped. His other hand stroked Tiziano’s snarling face, fingers digging into his flesh, which was now turning blue.

Tiziano thrashed, eyes glaring up at him and feet kicking. “I reject you!”

The man leaned close enough to whisper into his ear. “I told you”—his grip tightened—“not to disappoint me.”

Tiziano’s eyes rolled upward, foam gathering at the corner of his mouth.

And then there was a *crack*.

The Matenapper’s fist smashed into Tiziano’s face and his body went limp before he even hit the floor.

All I could do was fight the pull of sleep. Like Amaia…

Goddess, please save her. My tears carved clean tracks through the grime coating my face as I shook her shoulders.

“Ungrateful mate!” The roar made me flinch. “I did all this for you!” The Matenapper kicked his body. The bloody mess that was Tiziano didn’t reply. “Look what you made me do!”

“Stop!” I clawed my way up, supporting myself with a hand on the wall. Two of my fingernails broke in the process.

I had to reach Tiziano. Defend him—

A palm smacked my cheek, my skull shattering against the wall.

Warm blood gushed from my nose, spilling over my fingers and mixing with my hot tears. “Who are you?” I croaked, my voice muffled behind my bloodied hands.

He bent at the waist, leveling washed-out blue eyes with mine. “That’s not important.” One finger tapped my chest. “What matters is who *you* are.” Another tap. “And who you belonged to.”

I felt nothing. I guess their drug was good after all. Red dripped from a cut on my forehead and covered my vision. *My blood.*

He reached out and twirled a lock of my hair.

“Stop it!” I jerked away, but his grip tightened, yanking me closer.

“The convenience of mates,” he sighed dramatically. “He won’t die immediately. No, the Terminator will go feral without you.” His eyes glittered. “And eventually, his own family will have to put him down like you do with a damaged animal.” The words landed harder than the slap. “He deserves that. Do you know he beat me up that night at that lame party? And only because I talked to you.”

“Don’t do this.”

“You people, always the same. Always the same script. Boring as *fuck*.”

Disoriented, I wrenched out of his hold and crawled away. Every movement made the room tilt.

“Amaia?” I called. My fingers searched desperately for the pulse I’d felt moments ago.

No…

“No, no, no.”

Please—

“Say cheese!”

I met his eyes, only to see a fist connecting with my nose. My attempt to cover my face was futile.

At least the sound of the crack filled the void left by Amaia’s missing heartbeat.

Blackness took me away from a new painful reality.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

YVAINE

Dreaming had always felt real to me—the vivid images, the awareness, the ability to make decisions—until I woke up, and the pieces crumbled and scattered into nothing.

Most dreams die that way.

The brain is practical. It throws away what it doesn't need, and I was very good at forgetting nonessentials. We only remember what we most often think about or something that has emotional value.

Only the impossible survives. The beautiful. The horrific. The things that carve themselves so deeply into your mind that no amount of waking can erase them.

Tonight, I had one of those dreams, a permanent tattoo in my cerebral cortex.

I dreamed of my mate, in his most primal form, unfolding from the blackness of a cell. He seemed like another shadow, made of the same darkness that surrounded us, until he got close enough for everyone to realize he wasn't a figment of their imagination, but as substantial as their own flesh.

I dreamed of my mate acting like the monsters he was so often compared to.

I dreamed of my mate tearing apart the man who smelled of garlic and now only of the rottenest luck.

I dreamed of Logan's father and his inability to stop his son.

And then the dream shifted.

I dreamed of more fury, more blood, wet cracks. My mate looked furious, for some reason that escaped me, but I should have known.

However bizarre this dream was, those weren't the reasons why I remembered it.

What left a mark was when my lycan was enveloped by human skin, when black hair sprouted and brushed those sculpted cheekbones, when that mouth that had stolen so many kisses from me revealed two pairs of fangs. Logan emerged before me, except his eyes remained red, redder than red itself, and fixed on me.

He simply picked me up from wherever I was, and, without hesitation, plunged those fangs that frightened the world into my neck, piercing far deeper than flesh.

A white, blinding pain exploded through my soul—a soul that had been preparing for this, waiting for it.

The dream disappeared beneath the force of one growled word.

"*Mine!*"



THERE WAS A SOUND, STEADY AND RELENTLESS, KNOCKING ON MY consciousness.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

I'd heard this sound thousands of times, but this time, I happened to be on the bed—the patient, not the doctor. The monitor kept counting my heartbeat, and clear fluid dripped from the IV into my veins.

When my eyelids fluttered open, what greeted me was *white*. White everywhere. A color easier to clean and sanitize, creating a sense of sterility.

That endless white was just a ceiling. I glanced left, and saw Mom slumped in a chair, reading the *Herald Pàipear*. Not that I could make out the title from where I lay; I knew it by its smell. The *Herald* always emanated a peculiar scent—a blend of guaiac wood and cedar, with a velvet paper.

The olfactory bulb is part of the brain's limbic system, associated with memories and feelings. The *Herald* reminded me of bygone mornings with sheets of newspapers spread across the packhouse dining table, trading sections with Grandpa and Lachlan and sampling honey.

I tried to move. Nothing. My neck and my arms both refused.

For all I knew, I'd died and someone had preserved my consciousness inside a jar.

"Oh…" Mom looked up; the newspaper slid from her lap. "My puppy, you're awake." Her voice was different, quiet. *Bad sign.* She was never fragile. "What a relief. I missed you so much."

Mom approached in slow motion, worry dripping from her. She kissed where my cheek should have been, but I couldn't feel her touch.

Mom, I tried to say. Instead, I got lost once more in that land of dreams. It was too hard to stay awake.

When I woke up again, the white had become pitch black. Night.

This time, dark fiery hair and big elbows welcomed me back. My twin, arms folded under his head, was snoring next to me.

"Lachy…"

He jerked upright, a string of drool in the corner of his parted mouth. Relief and surprise clashed on his face.

"Oh, thank the Goddess." His large palm landed on my forehead. "And no more fever."

A glass of water materialized in front of me, his long fingers around it.

"What…" I tried to ask after sipping a little.

A stoic Lachlan slid an arm behind my shoulders and helped me sit up, tucking a pillow behind my back.

Finally, I managed to lift my hand, pushing a lock from my face. "Why am I here?" My dry throat burned. "For how long?"

"You've been out for over three weeks." His eyes bounced between mine and below my chin. "Do you remember anything?"

"Only the dreams."

Lucien. Blood. The bite…

Something within me stirred. A prickling sensation under my jaw.

My hand flew to my neck, and a gasp followed when I found something thick and raised.

My fingertips traced the alien bump. "He marked me."

My eyes found Lachlan's wary ones. His silence was answer enough.

“Mirror, please.”

“Sis, I don’t think—”

“Lachlan.”

When he handed the mirror over, my hands shook and I almost dropped it.

I saw it. Them.

Twin punctures, permanent and deep. The flesh around them was swollen and faintly red but didn’t hurt. When I touched it again, sparks burst across my fingers.

“Mate.” A whisper sailed in from somewhere.

Lucien must’ve marked me in his human form, otherwise my head would be rolling somewhere. And thanks to his present, I’d taken a three-week nap. Another memory slammed into me.

“Amaia.” I lurched up. “Tiziano! Where are they?” My feet hit the floor, ready to run.

He stepped into my path, his arm barring the way. “Don’t. The doctor’s on her way.”

“Lachlan!” The shout ripped from my throat as something hot flared underneath my skin. “What happened? Tell me.”

“Your mate…” Lachlan exhaled. “He killed the Matenapper. Or so we think. We found pieces…”

Pieces?

“One arm and a foot. But not the rest.”

My breath hitched.

“Mate.”

The whisper returned, louder this time.

“Tiziano’s alive. Lucien ignored him.” Lachlan cleared his throat. “Someone else didn’t make it.” His skin turned white, matching the surroundings, his eyes welling up with tears that I refused to acknowledge. “Yvaine, none of us could do anything about it and—”

“Who, Lachlan?” My fist closed around the bedsheet; my teeth stabbed my lip. I already knew. There were no other options.

Don’t, I contradicted myself. *Don’t say it*.

I wanted to prolong this moment of not knowing. As long as nobody spoke, hope still breathed, a faint flame trembling in the moonless darkness.

Right then, Lachlan was every doctor breaking tragic news to a bereaved family.

“She’s in a better place.” What place? In a coffin, in an urn, or in a refrigerator with a tag tied around a wrist?

“We did everything we could.” As if changing the wording could change death—it couldn’t. As if your heart wasn’t going to crumble at the news, as if your beloved wasn’t now a corpse, that there wouldn’t be an empty bedroom, shoes collecting dust along the wall, and a toothbrush no one would ever use again.

Amaia couldn’t have died. She was too busy with too much to give and too much to do.

I refused to believe it.

“Amaia’s alive.” It was a fact, not denial.

But then…?

Lachlan slowly shook his head. “*Zelda* is dead.” He grasped my hands. “I’m so sorry, sis. We didn’t know. Logan—he had no idea—”

His words dissolved.

Not because of shock. Not because Zelda, a part of me, was gone.

But because something was stirring inside me. Not grief, just… someone. I’d assumed it was Zelda—

“Human.” That same strange voice was clearer now.

“Yvaine! Oh Goddess, your eyes!” Lachlan stumbled backward. I ignored it, because my brain fully absorbed the realization: I had evolved into something else. Into a lycan.

“Ruby,” the voice, slightly pleased and feminine, answered. *“That’s my name, human Yvaine.”*

A memory surfaced in this overwhelming new me.

Grandma’s stories about the lycan prince. How I had always wished to be him, not the princess.

Ah, Logan had been right. *Be careful what you wish for…*

“Let’s find our mate.” Ruby’s voice deepened into a growl.

And somehow, I knew she was me. And me her. Two ends, two poles that joined in a single heart. A single mate.

My hand drifted unconsciously to the swollen mark on my neck. *“Mark mate.”*

And I knew exactly how to find him to do exactly that.



LACHLAN

As I watched my twin shift, her hospital gown ripping, amber fur threading with reddish sparks, I forgot I was supposed to breathe.

I was mesmerized. She was magical, and not in the fragile way humans used the word. Magical like wildfire and lightning. A creature from another realm. Fierce, but with a feminine touch. Way more than any she-wolf.

Long lashes framed impossibly blue eyes that shimmered like polished sapphires. Her amber coat glowed under the moonlight, each strand a star catcher. And her pearly claws and dark palms reminded me of those of an oversized wolf—her body was slim, nothing like Lucien's hulking form, but there was strength coiled beneath that graceful frame.

"Twin," she said, tilting her lupine head in a look full of curiosity. Her hand reached out to me and I pressed my own palm there. "Twin."

I smiled, a tear running down my cheek.

Just as she'd appeared, she vanished into the night with that effortless grace, almost dancing instead of running, leaving only swaying grass under the moon and stars that seemed just as amazed as I was.

A female lycan. Probably the first in a long time.

"Well, Masturbator," I mumbled, glancing at the stillness out there, the curtains billowing against my shoulder, "you are in for one hell of a surprise."

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CHAPTER THIRTY

YVAINE

Normally, my mind was orderly, all my thoughts arranged into small drawers with labels. I thought I was tidy, on the inside and out. There was a reason I'd chosen neurology over cardiology. A master of my own cerebrum matter, I could control my emotions, my heart.

Imagine my shock when my animal instinct took over; that primal part of me surged, erasing every rational thought. Now, I just had one thing on my mind: *Find him. Mark him. Claim my territory.*

And how dreamlike was the picture of Logan—the territory in question. And that was just what I remembered with my werewolf memories.

I needed to see him with lycan eyes to better gauge him. I needed to smell him with my lycan nose to better scent him. I needed to touch him with lycan hands to better feel him. And finally, I had to bite him with my lycan fangs to better *mark* him.

Logan seeing me, *us*, as a lycan made me want to laugh and run faster.

And I did.

My confidence in my new body only grew with my pace. My strides stretched longer and soon I was flowing through the woods. I feared that the dense trees would hit me, but they just brushed around me, almost parting like curtains to let me through.

It was a giddy, electrifying feeling to move like that, instead of running on all fours. I'd expected two legs and a larger body to feel awkward, but instead, it felt surprisingly easy.

A natural thing, really.

Ruby and I were in complete harmony, as though we had spent years learning each other's rhythm.

Was it because I knew myself on a deeper level? Or because I had accepted myself, making this evolution smoother?

I wasn't becoming someone else. I was becoming more of who I'd always been.

But the thing was nobody *truly* changed. Cinderella was always Cinderella, just in a better gown; the Ugly Duckling had always been a swan; the prince turned frog was still a royal underneath green skin even when he ate flies instead of ribs.

Evolution didn't replace you; it revealed more of you.

My vision carried a bluish tint, every sound closer, every scent richer. Everything was just *more* to me.

A spasm of loud laughter burst out of me, the echo lingering among the trees.

Now I was the Big Bad Wolf hunting for my human.

And somewhere above the canopy, I imagined the Moon Goddess smiling, because I had never felt more alive.



LOGAN

The image of my mate lying motionless in that hospital bed still burned behind my eyes, as vivid as when I'd first seen her. I wanted to wedge my head in the security room door and slam it shut for a whole day, then throw myself off a cliff a few times. It wouldn't kill me—most things wouldn't—but everything would hurt like hell.

I hated that she was in pain, I hated that someone had hurt her, but none of it compared to how much I hated myself. This was all my fault. My lycan's fault.

He—*we*—had done this to her.

And still, after everything, all I wanted was to go to her.

Three endless weeks had passed since Lucien had marked that perfect neck. Three weeks since she'd become a sleeping beauty. Two weeks since Zelda, the hyper little wolf who'd stolen my heart almost as thoroughly as her human, had died. Lachlan had updated me.

Early morning seeped through the single barred window, casting a cold blue haze over the sterile walls. Outside, life carried on, indifferent to the stillness and the man rotting inside this room, rage and guilt feeding on each other inside his chest. Garbage trucks groaned down the road, metal screeching, the dull crash of waste tumbling into compactors. I was under a dumping site. *Fitting.*

Every bruise covering Bunny Doc's face had branded itself into my memory. Every cut, every swollen patch of skin, whispered the same thing: *You failed to protect her.*

I'd sat beside her bed for days, watching doctors shine lights into her eyes that refused to open. Watching machines breathe certainty while my own hope suffocated. Watching her lie still, ready for her own funeral.

Yvaine will wake up, they'd told me, back at the Comet pack. *We just need to wait.*

So I waited, never leaving her side, staring at my beautiful mate for any sign of movement or change.

And hell had we gotten a change—the death of her wolf.

Zelda had been swallowed into Yvaine as though she'd never existed, as though Yvaine had been human all her life.

Her family kicked me out before I could process it, forbade me from ever stepping into Comet's territory again. My first reaction? Grab her, run, disappear into the mountains—follow my lycan's instincts for once.

Dad had stopped me, locking me down here, in this high-security bunker he'd built the day I was born covered in black fur and claws instead of pink skin. Protecting the pack was and always would be his responsibility, even if it meant locking his monster son up, but I understood him.

With my hair brushing the ceiling, I felt like I was living in the shoe box of a giant. They had injected me with all sorts of drugs, stuff that would kill a human or two, to shut down my fucking beast.

Part of me would always be grateful to him. Without Lucien, we'd never have found her. Lucien hadn't needed a scent or tracks; he simply

knew where his mate was. And thanks to him, Amaia had been saved.

The monstrous bite Lucien gave Yvaine, though, was hideous. Savage. But he hadn't been thinking, no reason left inside him.

Only instinct.

Only terror.

Only the unbearable certainty that his mate was dying.

Nothing on this earth would have stopped him from marking her. Not chains, not me, not even her refusal. Because in that moment, the only thing left inside my beast was the desperate need to make sure she could never disappear again.

I'd agreed with Lucien. Marking our mate was the only way to protect her, among my own selfish reasons…until she had passed out for good. Until Zelda had died. I kept telling myself it was Lucien's fault. But it was mine, and the Moon Goddess's, for pairing someone like her with this *thing*. Me. Us.

All I'd managed to do was kill her wolf, put her in a nice coma, rob more weeks of her life, and give her family enough heart attacks to last an eternity.

My eyes stung, tears spilling. *Ah, damn it.* I scrubbed at them with the heel of my palm, but the tears kept coming anyway.

Time had crawled inside this concrete hole. No one knew when she'd wake, or who she'd be when she did, but doctors had already started talking about physiotherapy—learning to walk, think, and live wolfless.

I'd crippled the love of my life.

A growl ripped from my throat as I buried both hands in my hair, yanking hard enough to tear the strands out.

I punched the wall, adding more decoration on it and on my knuckles. What could I say? I was an aesthetics kind of guy.

"Her body is in a comatose state from shock. Shock!" Another punch. "*Shock*!"

That was usually how every conversation started down here. Then came the endless parade of *what if*s.

"What if my mark poisoned her? What if she never forgives me? What if she never wakes up? What if—"

"Maybe she's already awake!" Killian cheered through the reinforced wall.

“And you’re mates,” Callum added, for once leaving his mate’s side since the incident to be here with me. “There’s no way you could hurt her like that.”

“Maybe it was a test.” Claudia’s nasal voice drifted through next. “Maybe she isn’t meant to be our Luna.”

“Shut up before I expel you from the team,” Bellatrix snarled.

“It was only a thought,” Claudia muttered.

“She’s right,” Sheila chimed in. “Dark Diamond needs a strong Luna.”

I stared at the ceiling, ignoring them. I regretted giving those two twenty orgasms when we had a couple of threesomes after the games in our first year.

“I’ve never met Yvaine,” Lydia said, “and maybe she’s wonderful. But keeping our options open isn’t exactly bad.”

Her gaze lingered on me and I suddenly wished bleach worked on eyeballs.

Half of Bellatrix’s wereball teammates had practically moved in here to support the Alpha family. *Support. Right.*

Five of them had asked me to choose them as Luna in the moments I was alone because Tank Man, Greg, Dylan, and Killian happened to be showering, eating, taking a shit, or all three at once. The girls had faced Lucien’s wrath. The beast had growled so loud through me that guards hurried down from above, but those were the only times I’d laughed in weeks. Two girls fainted, two burst into tears, and one pissed herself.

Outside my cell, they kept blabbing. Inside it, I eased back down, stretched my legs out, and shut my eyes.

Lucien was already there, clanging around inside my head. *“I need stronger drugs so you’ll shut the fuck up.”*

“Go to Mate!” He was a broken record.

The only benefit was that the internal shouting match drowned out all the boring chatting.

“Did you hear that?” Callum asked at some point.

Bellatrix clasped his shoulder. “You hear it too?”

I ignored them.

The conversations died one by one; every head turned toward the corridor.

Bored and worried, I couldn’t care less.

There was a dull thud that got closer, louder. A storm outside, probably.

“The fuck?” Killian shot to his feet. Callum followed, their bodies stiffening.

And then came an odd metallic clinking sound, rhythmic, like glass rattling together. My gaze slid across my shithole. The broken shards scattered across the floor—Lucien’s handiwork from one of my meltdowns—started to vibrate.

“Maybe one of the teen pups is pulling another prank,” Bellatrix said. “Can anyone smell anything?”

I took a deep breath just as she said that.

And the world stopped turning, because of the most intoxicating scent in the whole universe. I moaned and inhaled greedily, filling every inch of my lungs, breathing again after three weeks.

The reinforced steel doors fractured inward and a chill rushed over me.

And I almost choked on my own tongue. The color bled out of me like a candle snuffed, pure shock morphing my face.

She stood in the ruined doorway on hind legs.

The most beautiful thing I had ever fucking seen and would ever see. My shock turned into more shock, because her blue eyes, both now looking like pieces of a glowing sky, widened as they focused on me.

Shuddering, shivering, I staggered upright with my mouth open like a stupid fish out of water, but like a fish, nothing came out. I was speechless, which was something I never was. My friends might as well have ceased to exist.

I was too busy letting the thought sink in. *Yvaine is a lycan!*

Those mesmerizing eyes that had trapped some sky like they needed even more reasons to be my universe, bounced from mine to the people crowding the space.

A low, warning growl rolled from her chest, the concrete walls echoing it, and it traveled straight to my balls.

Murder was written on her face, probably because of the number of females. Little did she know I couldn’t care less; they could stand there naked and I wouldn’t notice. I’d turn the other way.

“Invader!” Claudia shrieked and charged, but I didn’t have time to warn her, too busy gawking at another lycan.

I watched, stupefied, as this elegant creature moved like a ballerina and rammed Claudia into the wall, knocking over a table in the process. Takeout

boxes flew through the air, barbecue sauce raining over Claudia. A chicken wing fell on her head like a crown.

Oh man. I was in love all over again.

“Yvaine?” I croaked, her aura beckoning me.

Her glowing eyes lit up even more, watching my every move. My chest tightened when I spotted the humongous mark on her neck. *That’s right. Mine.*

“Ruby,” she corrected me.

I shivered at how delicate her voice was. “Ruby…” I said in awe. “Hi.”

She smiled, and her eyes curved into crescent-moon slits above her cute cheeks. Ah, my heart forgot how to beat and I thought I’d die right there at her paws…until my face morphed murderously.

“Everyone. Leave.” I didn’t need a fucking audience and I hated that their attention was on this precious creature. “Killian, let me out.”

“But—” Killian tried.

“Now.” My Alpha voice bent him to my will, my fangs poking out. *Yeah, I was an asshole. Blah, blah.*

As everyone fled, quieter than ghosts, I shuffled toward her.

Her scent was Yvaine’s, but richer and all honey. I struggled to maintain my composure with Lucien headbutting at the cage in my mind. I ignored him. *“Go away. My turn.”*

I cleared my dry throat, trying to remember how to make words work again. “You can’t be real.”

She tilted her head. “Why not?”

“You just can’t be,” I said softly.

She laughed a little, making me moan. “But I am.”

I cleared my throat again and offered her a lopsided grin. “Mind if I ask you to prove it?”

“How?”

“Can I touch you?”

Ruby looked shy, averting her eyes, but nodded, peering up at me from under long lashes.

The instant my hand brushed that amber fur along her cheek, there was electricity, the look in her eyes like a shot of lightning straight down my spine.

I felt warmth, a feeling of home invading me, spreading from my fingertips on her face to my chest. “You are magical, aren’t you?”

She giggled and the sound alone finished me.

Suddenly, I was pinned to the wall and an involuntary *oof* escaped me. Her arms encircled my body, one clawed hand forcing my head into the crook of her neck.

We are the same height, I noticed with pride.

Her hot breath was on me as she sampled my scent, while I was out of breath—for several reasons.

“I can’t breathe, my love.” I laughed as I lazily dragged a palm down her side, dipping my fingers into her fur, savoring the soft texture and the sparks.

She lifted her eyes to mine. Hell, that didn’t help with my respiration issues at all. “Why?”

“Because you are perfection.” I smiled helplessly. My fingers played with her ears—even they were fluffy and dainty. Her eyes fluttered shut, a pleased rumble vibrating through her chest.

“Do you find me beautiful?”

“Of course. You’re cute.”

She frowned. “I don’t like cute.”

“You’re also beautiful,” I quickly added with a breathy laugh. Laughing was a way to release my shock, my amazement, at her simply being here. At being *mine*.

“Thank you. And you’re handsome. A movie star,” she admitted.

I grinned. “Well, thank you, Ruby!” Adoration bloated my chest every time my mate looked shy. “And you look like a warrior princess of all the enchanted lands.”

A sensual heat spread through me as I pressed my lips against my mark, skimming my nose on her furry throat. I gently scratched at her neck, her shoulders. *What would her tail feel like?* I touched it.

Ruby yelped a little, bringing the tip of it to her stomach.

“Oops.” I bit my lip to keep from laughing. “Not a good spot?”

She gave me a wide-eyed look and, very deliberately, placed her tail back in my hand. I burst out with that laugh now. “Oh, *now* you trust me with it?”

As I stroked it carefully, I almost moaned at how soft it was. Like touching fresh snow.

“Lucien’s turn, Human,” Lucien seethed like never before. The familiar pressure built under my skin until a blast of heat and immense pain split my

chest open and he crawled out.

With a smile, I let him.

I had lived with half a soul until I had met her—*them*. Always the outcast. Always alone. Because the only lycan I knew was, well, me.

That changed today.

For the first time in forever, I wasn't the only one. For the first time in my life, I felt at peace, and she was the reason.

She was my peace.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

YVAINE

Ruby had been sheepish with Logan, so much so that we'd forgotten the main reason we'd come: to mark him. It was no surprise—the first time I'd seen Logan at the wereball conference, I'd nearly needed a defibrillator and it'd taken several meetings to stop stuttering with him. Logan was just too much. Too tall, too handsome, too broad…too much of everything.

The moment Lucien sprang out? *Home* was the only word for it. I'd missed him more than I'd ever missed anything else, our time in Scotland a precious postcard my mind had wrapped in tissue paper, afraid to let time damage it.

Lucien looked startled, his mighty body stiffening, nostrils flaring madly as he *gulped* us in. Slowly, his lips pulled back in what I hoped was a smile—all sharp fangs glinting in the shadows.

Ruby's heartbeat shot up and I couldn't blame her; my own first encounter with Lucien hadn't exactly gone smoothly…

"Mate…" he mumbled, voice throaty, transfixed.

Then the panting began as he tried to take in as much as he could of Ruby's scent, of his lycan mate. Lucien's breathing grew rougher as he circled us, switching between two legs and all fours, like he was trying to decide something. Ruby remained still, expecting her mate to do what she wanted her mate to do.

“He’s going to eat us,” I whispered as he paced in tighter and tighter circles.

“It’s normal lycan behavior. Don’t worry, I’ll manage him for us,” Ruby assured me in flawless English.

An eternity later, Lucien halted in front of us and rose to his full height; he was enormous, much larger than us.

Ruby tipped her chin up, hands propped on her hips. “Do you love me?”

He looked utterly blindsided, ears flattening. When a tiny croak left his mouth, he covered it, horrified at his own sounds.

I giggled at the cute sight.

“Of c-course…” he stuttered. “L-Lucien love Mate a-and—”

Ruby remained stoic. “Why do you love me?”

His clawed hand scratched the back of his neck in such a human way my heart squeezed. “B-because…you are my m-mate?”

Ruby pursed her lips. “Only because of that?”

His red eyes filled with panic. “No! You, um…” He gulped loudly, reminding me of how he’d swallowed that half of a cow in Scotland. “Mate is beautiful.”

“Logan already told me that.”

“Ruby…” She had melted around Logan, but with Lucien? She was bossy and fearless. Our animal halves were entirely different beings.

“Mate’s fur is made of stars,” Lucien declared, with hope and determination.

Ruby pondered the compliment while I swooned. *“That was a cute compliment, Ruby.”*

“I’m a spheroid of plasma held together by its own gravity?”

I buried my face in my hands. Ruby had apparently inherited every lecture, textbook, and scientific obsession I’d ever accumulated. I could hear it in the way she spoke, too.

But Lucien hadn’t. My theory? Logan had spent his whole life suppressing that part of himself, never giving it room to develop.

“Sorry.” His shoulders slumped. “Lucien is very uninformed.”

His breath hitched when Ruby walked straight up to him, leaned in, and licked his muzzle.

“I’ll help you. I’m here now.”



LOGAN

Lucien tried to sniff beneath Ruby's tail…twice. She growled and batted his muzzle away.

His eyes widened, ears flattening instantly, a wounded whine ripping from his throat.

"Lucien, what the fuck are you doing?" I barked through our mind-link. Goddess, what if Yvaine thought that had been *my* idea?

He ignored me, one paw waving dismissively at me inside our shared mind, sulking like a loser.

"Mate sorry." He slowly kneeled before her and took both her clawed hands in his. "You. My life."

"Lucien." Ruby gazed down through her long lashes, and he lit up like ten Christmas trees. "Why did you sniff me down there?"

He looked away. "Lucien don't know."

"Tell me something nice."

I raised an eyebrow at the sudden fear embracing my body. It came from dear Lucy.

"Help me!" he called to me, sweating.

"Didn't you just dismiss me?"

"Please."

I huffed. *"Tell her she's the most beautiful female you've ever looked at in your life."*

"Won't Mate ask how many other females Lucien looked at?"

"Of course not!" I scoffed. *"I know how to melt a lady's heart."* Human or not.

Lucien repeated my words. To my shock, Ruby pouted, and *I* was the one that melted. *Goddess, she really is beautiful.* I could just stay here and admire her for hours, always noticing new details. My new favorite art piece.

"How many females have you looked at?"

Lucien recoiled.

Ruby stepped closer. “You enjoyed looking at them?”

His enormous hands flew to his furry chest. “Human told Lucien to say!”

It was a funny sight—a domineering creature, much bigger than the other, now shaking and stuttering.

Wait, did he just blame me?

“Oh.” Ruby frowned. “Yvaine says that compliment is low quality.”

“Shit,” I cursed.

“Human said *shit*,” Lucien reported diligently.

I nearly choked. *“No, no! Lucien! Don’t repeat that!”*

“Now Human said *no, no, Lucien, don’t repeat that*!”

I dragged both hands down my face. If I could’ve left my own head and moved to another skull, I would’ve.

“Yvaine says our humans need to talk,” Ruby announced.

Oh, fuck. *“Thanks, Lucien.”*

Lucien ignored me. “Mate...?”

Ruby tilted her head. “Yes?”

He opened his mouth but nothing came out. Fists clenching, he cleared his throat as though it helped his vocabulary and looked down, all ashamed. “Sorry. Lucien doesn’t speak good like Ruby.” He sighed. “Mate so clever.”

Ruby observed him for a long moment, her eyes the definition of inhuman, shining like colors from faraway worlds. She took his heavy arms and wrapped them around her smaller frame.

His heartbeat stopped. For one *hopeful* second, I thought my beast had died.

“You are clever. And strong. And I…” She hesitated.

“Mate?”

“I love you too.” Ruby rested her forehead against his chest after the confession.

Thank Goddess for all that fur; his cheeks were a fire-engine red.

“We’ll study English together. It’s not difficult when you practice with someone.”

Too soon, Ruby drew back, with Lucien just gawking after her. She wandered a few paces away and glanced over her shoulder, her magnificent tail swaying, seducing the air itself. One flick. Another.

A third flick…and she ran off.

It took Lucien a moment to snap out of his lovestruck trance and understand our mate wanted us to chase her.

“Well?!” I barked. *“Go! Go, you giant wuss!”* A raging fire slashed through my veins as I watched the tip of her shimmering tail vanish between the pines, daring us. *“What if she runs into another male?”*

The fur around Lucien’s neck bristled, his gums retracting, and a growl meant only for her rumbled through our chest and rolled out.

“Mate mine!”

We launched after her through the wilderness, her laughter a wind chime, playful and impossible not to follow.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

LOGAN

More than a chase, it was Lucien following Ruby wherever she decided to go.

If Ruby was grace and intelligence, Lucien was the opposite. *"Human, you very mean,"* he told me and I snickered.

"If you don't pay attention…" With my hands clasped behind my head, I watched through his eyes. *"We are going to smash against a—"*

Thunk!

Lucien collided against the trunk of a massive fir. The whole forest shook.

You'd think he'd feel pain or embarrassment. Instead, he just peered at our mate who had stopped several paces ahead. Concern shifted to confusion, until she giggled in a lycan way—cute, small growls.

Lucien beamed like he'd been crowned Forest King instead of today's traveling circus.

"She's laughing at you, not with you," I groaned. *"I tackle people for a living, not freaking conifers."*

"Don't care. Mate laughed." He shrugged. *"In your face, Human."*

I was taken aback. Usually he let *me* roast *him*, never the opposite. Had he unlocked sarcasm after finding his mate? Or…was he starting to inherit my personality now that he was popping out more often?

Ruby turned. Her flawless muzzle was as pale as the moonlight, fur as luminous as a precious pearl, and her limbs were smooth and strong.

All very distracting, but still. *“Do you want our mate to think we’re dumb?”*

That did it.

Planting both feet into the ground, Lucien wrenched himself up in one quick move. The tree we’d hit tipped over and rolled onto the forest floor, with birds crying for their lost nests.

Then he shot off like a bullet of fur.



YVAINE

I could sense my mate behind us.

He wasn’t trying to overtake us, content with Ruby choosing the path, trusting her instincts. We wound through spruce trees, up and down the eastern hills.

Stephen, I loved being a lycan!

It felt more like I’d finally become what I was always meant to be. I loved Zelda—I always would—and I missed her the way I missed my teenage years, something precious that had shaped me but couldn’t be reclaimed.

White mushrooms climbed tree trunks; scarlet poppies peeked through blades of grass that brushed my legs as I ran; and a horned owl, busy preening beneath one raised wing, paused to tilt its head, our eyes meeting for the briefest instant.

I’d always noticed details. Medical school had trained us to observe what others overlooked. But now the forest recognized one of its own, every twisting root, every trembling leaf, every living thing pulsing in time with me. With him.

And speaking of…

An annoyed snarl ripped from my throat, my teeth vibrating with it, as a black blur landed ahead of me.

“Follow Lucien…if you can,” he teased with his throaty voice, and barreled through the forest. Young pines snapped like matchsticks, branches burst into showers of needles, and shrubs vanished beneath pounding paws. Like a runaway freight train that had derailed.

Shaking my head, I threw myself after him.



OUR LYCANS RAN STRAIGHT INTO A SOUNDER OF BOARS JUST AS THE BLOOD moon crowned the mountain, staining the peaks the color of our next meal —red.

Ruby wrinkled her muzzle at the mud caking their coarse hides. I smiled as she edged closer to Lucien. *“Don’t worry, Lucien will get them for us,”* I told her.

Wrong thing to say.

“I will do it,” Ruby huffed, squaring her shoulders, receiving a curious glance from Lucien.

She only managed a step.

“Mate,” his deep voice rumbled. “No hunt. Mate stay here.” He bumped a fist against his broad chest. Once. Twice. “Lucien hunt.” Another tap. “Lucien feed.”

The protectiveness mixed with dominance in his voice stole every argument Ruby had prepared. She merely nodded.

Satisfied, Lucien grinned, licked her muzzle, then scooped her up and deposited her onto a thick bed of moss. He even swept the moss with his tail.

“Stay. Please?” The apex predator had vanished; Puppy Lucien had returned.

Ruby did listen, excited at his new attitude. And I had to admit… watching Lucien hunt was magnificent.

His lunge was the strike of a tiger, his claws a cage of knives, his fangs unforgiving. He was at the top of the food chain, the rightful lord.

I felt a sudden jolt of pride.

“He is ours,” Ruby snarled.

Lucien took down the largest male, the Alpha boar, even before the startled mammal fully understood its death. He flexed his muscles beneath black fur, making sure Ruby saw every action. The rest scattered.

"Show-off," I reprimanded while Ruby giggled like a pup with a lollipop.

Ruby padded over to him and rubbed her muzzle onto his. "Thank you, Lucy."

All the fur around his neck puffed up. "Lucien provide."

He split open the boar belly with one sweep of his claws, selecting the richest cuts for Ruby. As he worked, we just watched him.

"Mate?" He tilted his head, the blood drip, drip, dripping down his front. "Food?"

With a massive grin, Ruby let her mate feed her straight from his mouth. After he'd chewed it! I respected the lycan way of feeding each other but I ran off then.

"Where Mate going?" Lucien inquired.

"Wait here."

"But—"

"Stay!" Ruby ordered.

Lucien bobbed his head and sat down, tail wagging. "Lucien stay."

She vanished into the forest.

This was our first hunt together—Ruby's and mine. We did end up with a small wound on our foreleg but it had almost healed by the time we returned, though Ruby hooked a claw into it and reopened it.

"I've hunted a bigger animal," she announced, flashing Lucien a grin full of fangs and blood. "For you."

We enjoyed Lucien's mouth dropping at the gigantic elk we dragged in by one antler.

Our favorite part though? Lucien and Logan both fussing over that wound on my leg no bigger than a pinecone as they bickered with each other for letting us go alone.



LOGAN

My cheeks hurt from all the smiling.

I really wanted to see Yvaine; I had no idea how she'd react to me. I could only hope watching our lycans together had softened her opinion of… *us*.

After feasting, Lucien cleaned Ruby's muzzle, licked her paws, and insisted she drink from a nearby pond.

"What Mate want now?" His tail thumped against a tree. He was hanging on to her every move.

"Not sure." A cute yawn escaped her.

"Take time. No rush." Lucien yanked her to him, and she collided into his chest. Her eyes narrowed. "Mate went too far from Lucien," he explained, whining.

I sighed, rolling my eyes. My beast had basically glued himself onto her.

"Goddess, Lucien, stop." I dragged a hand down my face.

They continued their cuddling session, not bothered by time, space, or the forest's inhabitants.

Though something changed when a female rogue popped out, foam around her mouth, heat rolling off her scent. She was in season.

Lucien glanced at her, winced, and proceeded to hide his muzzle in Ruby's neck. Her reaction couldn't have been more different—a low, possessive growl vibrated through her chest, scaring off the rogue.

Then a pensive look befell her. Those impossibly blue eyes settled on us and I could discern Yvaine looking back at me through them. I heard her heartbeat rise, while mine stopped completely.

Lucien tried to straighten up, but she planted one paw on his chest and he immediately surrendered.

"Enough females ogling what's ours." The words were calm, certain, possessive.

Lucien and I breathed out in a needy daze. "Yeah. Enough."

Ruby licked our artery, and I wasn't sure who moaned—Lucien or me. Or both.

"We're marking you."

Oh Moon Goddess, thank you. I'll build you a temple on every mountain peak for pairing her with me.

“Mm-hmm, yeah. Mark us, please,” we begged.

There had never been another who could dominate me, and fuck if I enjoyed it.

Panting, Lucien looked at her…happy. Shivers of anticipation ran down our spine and to the tip of our cumbersome tail that was sweeping the ground so hard it flattened the grass.

Ruby leaned over Lucien, holding him beneath her despite the size difference, and yanked his muzzle toward her with sudden fierceness. She snarled, the sound sending a shock wave through my system, and I almost spilled there and then.

When the flesh of my neck tore under her long fangs, a white explosion detonated through my throat and euphoric heat flooded every corner of me. Fuck, I was in heaven, where clouds were made of sparks and melodies of her sweet growls played.

“Ours.”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

LOGAN

My eyes snapped open to a starry sky.

Flashes of recent events bombarded my head. *Goddess, if it was all a dream, I will make it a reality. Our reality.*

My body still burned, shivering with nasty heat flashes as I rubbed a hand over my sweaty forehead, then dragged it down my face until it stopped *there*. On the mark on my neck. A proud grin tugged at my lips and I blew out a sigh. *Fucking finally.*

I felt amazing. Complete. Proud to show I was hers.

Having those cute tiny fangs puncture my neck was the best experience of my life.

Speaking of cute tiny things…where was she?

I rolled onto my elbows and scanned the area.

Tall trees of the valley surrounded the rocky field I was in. I heard the wind bothering the leaves, the hum of insects, and nocturnal bird calls.

Looking down, I saw blue shorts on me that were very tight and not mine. *Bunny Doc must've put them on me.* I hoped she looked. A grin threatened to emerge at the idea of my doctor mate trying to be professional.

Something crunched underneath my palms. Leaves and moss. A mattress? There was also a chunky roll of moss and grass supporting my head that seemed to be serving as a pillow. Twigs surrounded me in a circle.

I plucked pine needles from my hair and blinked around.

Did Ruby make me a nest? Or a ritual altar? Either worked for me. Especially if I was the offering and she the collector.

A rustle in the underbrush drew my attention.

I smelled her before I saw her.

She was my splash of color in a dark forest. Her petite form strode to me in a loose pale yellow shirt that fell to her knees—something she must have found in some rogue hideout. I frowned at the thought that it might belong to a male, but the irritation vanished when I noticed her damp hair piled on top of her head, a fat bumblebee investigating her messy bun.

Drool filled my mouth; my temperature rose. *Easy, boy.*

My nose detected wild mint, the resin in the evergreens, and a pond behind the birch trees where she must've gone swimming. Water gurgled down a river somewhere. No trace of humans or werewolves. Just us.

She offered a small zsmile, and mine instantly mirrored hers. Until I remembered…

"Yvaine, look, I'm sorry about Zelda…" Each syllable was equal parts pathetic and desperate. My eyes stayed on her as she drew closer. "If I'd known, maybe we could have—whoa, what are you doing?"

She straddled my hips, her shirt bunching up.

I sucked in a breath. *Fuck,* I could smell her.

"Just hugging you."

"You a-are?" *Did I just stutter?*

"I am." Her chuckle was music to my ears, her arms wrapping around my neck a comfort after weeks of separation. I sighed, closed my eyes, and dropped my forehead onto her shoulder.

Until she shifted and pressed her front to mine, not an inch of space left between us.

"Yvaine!" I stumbled back on all fours, palms sinking into the arranged twigs around us, my ass crushing the mossy pillow.

"Are you *nervous*?" She winked.

That alone sent my heart thundering, making me forget how sad I was about my mossy pillow.

"Yeah," I rasped out. "I am."

She ignored me. "You smell nice. I never noticed it before with my werewolf nose." She crawled over me, giving me a flash of a cleavage, making V my new favorite letter. "Too nice."

Yeah, definitely too fucking nice. I shivered, a new heat wave racking my body. I was as hard as the rock underneath us.

I shut my eyes and my nose, worried if I took another sniff I'd lose my shit for real, because she obviously wasn't wearing any underwear.

"Logan…"

I was almost lying completely horizontal now, the little temptress pushing down on me. I gulped hard, trying to contain a growl, shoving it back into my stomach.

Space.

Yeah. I needed to put some fucking space between those gorgeous tits and me. I needed to breathe and think. Couldn't do either now.

"Logan?"

I ground my molars. *Don't. Smell. Her.* "Hmm?"

"I'm tired of waiting."



YVAINE

Logan went so still beneath me that I wasn't entirely convinced he was breathing.

The top predator looked like a deer that had wandered onto a highway, and I was the giant truck about to run him over. The shock on his face was almost laughable. Werewolves usually mated within days of finding each other. This should be normal but…

Gently but firmly, he peeled my fingers away from his shoulders, one at a time. His large hands banded around my waist, and with one effortless lift, he relocated me a full foot away with my butt on the ground.

By the time I looked up, he was already retreating through the rocks like a wild turkey on the run, one hand clamped over his groin.

I leaned into a crouch and sprang forward. "Logan? Come back here!"

"Let's talk about this for a minute, Bunny Doc—"

"Don't *Bunny Doc* me!"

“But look.” His free hand gestured around us, the other still cupping himself. As if I couldn’t see his bulge anyway. “Look where we are.”

I did. The stars stretched overhead. The lake gleamed silver. Pine trees swayed softly in the breeze. “It’s romantic.”

“It’s dirty! We have no blankets—”

“Grass is comfy enough. Studies show outdoor sleeping improves concentration.”

“Oh, I’m very concentrated.” A bead of sweat dripped down his temple.

I arched my brow. His ears turned red and a curse slipped from under his breath. I took advantage of that distraction and hopped onto some rocks, gaining another few feet.

Logan backed away, one palm up. “Wait! You aren’t thinking clearly here.”

“I’ve never been more clear.”

“You’re obviously not yourself after the change—”

“I feel fantastic!” I cut him off.

“You should be studying!” he boomed, jogging backward while facing me. “Reading a textbook, taking notes! Not rolling around in the bushes with me!” He waved both hands.

I stalked after him. “Stop running!”

“I’m not running!” He ran. “I’m just repositioning myself.”

I halted and rubbed my forehead. At this rate, we’d hike across half of Montana. “Can you just listen for a second?”

He glared at me from over his shoulder but stopped, wary, and crossed his imposing arms.

I exhaled. “Why don’t you want to mate?”

He sighed. “You know why.”

“I don’t! You’re being ridiculous.”

“*Am I?*” The words cracked out of him. “Did you forget about the past three weeks? What if I come up with more lycan shit? What if you get hurt again? I’m tired of damaging your life!”

“You forget I’m a lycan now too.”

“Yeah, another precious thing for me to worry about!”

I ignored that, mostly because a small part of me liked being precious to him.

“Stop apologizing for what you are!” I took another step closer, my hands raised. “You are a lycan, Logan. My lycan.”

His jaw tensed so much that I thought I heard a crack. It was his extended talons digging into the rock.

“Zelda. Died,” he growled, panting hard.

“Nobody died! I changed! Ruby’s an evolution of Zelda.”

“You aren’t a Pokémon!” He scoffed. “You should be mad at me! Not trying to chain yourself to me even more.”

My chin dropped, and for a moment, I studied the moss between us. “Don’t you want me?”

The distance immediately vanished. One large arm slid around my waist, long fingers tilting my chin up.

His eyes held mine. Bright. Earnest. A little broken.

“That’s not the problem *at all*. I wanted to take you away for the weekend…I had it all planned.” He swallowed thickly, disappointed. “Not here in the bushes.” His thumb stroked my cheek, and the tenderness in the gesture nearly undid me. “You deserve better.”

My heart swelled. “Your invitation to your father’s cabin was because you wanted to mate?”

“I thought it could be kind of romantic!”

I giggled. “I don’t care about that.”

“Warmer?” he tried, with a tiny smile.

“A werewolf’s body temperature is already 108 degrees Fahrenheit. Ours even more, though I haven’t checked yet.”

He frowned, opened his mouth, then closed it again.

I pinched his cheek. “Looks like Mr. Rudy ran out of words! This is historic. Somebody document this moment!”

His groan echoed through the trees. “Yvaine…”

Fireworks erupted when my lips crashed onto his. We had talked long enough.

A masculine moan slipped out of his mouth, along with an underlying growl. My head tilted; the kiss deepened. He palmed my thigh tucked high onto his hip, long fingers digging into my flesh.

Still…he wasn’t taking things further, keeping his hands, and mine, in safe areas.

When we caught our breaths, I took a step back.

His eyebrows shot up. “Bunny Doc? What are—”

“Taking the lycan by the tail.”

With a big inhale, I lifted my baggy shirt, letting him see all of me for the first time.



LOGAN

I choked on my spit as Bunny Doc pulled the shirt up and over her head.

Oh my dear Goddess, even with you making me a lycan, my strength's not enough for this.

I expected my nose to start bleeding as my eyes raked over her bare breast, the other hidden by her forearm. My gaze trailed down her flat stomach and paused on the juncture below her navel.

My nostrils flared as I stared. My erection punched at these sorry excuse for pants, pushing, wanting to get free.

She might've said something but I didn't catch it. How could I?

When she crossed her arms, covering more of her perky swells, I raised my eyes to meet hers.

"You're stunning," I croaked.

"For a second I thought you were going to collapse." She came closer with all her goddess-like features. *Damn, she has all I need in life. She is a goddess. My goddess.*

"Yeah, for a moment I thought so too," I managed to laugh out, sweating like a pig and panting like a mutt. "You make it so hard to control…" I trailed off, my voice raspy and low.

"Let's make it easy then." She smiled at me with those tempting eyes, a finger running over my pec. "Kiss me again."

I snatched her hand and kissed the palm. "I'll never forgive myself if I hurt you during the mating, Yvaine."

"I trust you won't." Just as she whispered that, her mouth touched my chest, right above my heart, which had always been hers. Always hers.

Those delicate lips and that strong yet petite body ignited a passion in me, but the tightening in my balls told me my control was being tested

beyond belief.

I didn't know what to do; I was at a loss for words and actions here. If I moved, I'd just snap.

"Yvaine, I'm so obsessed with you. If I could I'd absorb you, keep you inside me all day and all night. Away from eyes. Away from danger," I continued calmly, like this was a normal thing to admit. "I'm clinically, certifiably, completely insane about you." I paused. "But I consider myself part of the danger, too."

"I'll manage the mating," she said like she could already read my thoughts, and maybe she could, since she was my magic bunny.

And since I knew I had already lost the argument, I relented.



YVAINE

His eyes were hooded, filled with hunger, when he nodded with a husky, "All right."

The intensity of his gaze made me feel clumsy in my stillness. "Really?" I fidgeted, watching his Adam's apple bob.

"Really." He let out a breathy, short chuckle. "We can do whatever you want. Just…" He paused. "Tell me when—*if* I hurt you."

My nerves kicked in, so of course I had to blurt out the first thing that popped into my mind. "How about you remove your shorts?"

Logan did just that, and any remaining confidence I had evaporated the moment I saw the thing suspended between his thick thighs.

Capers.

Werewolf males were known to be well-endowed, but like any species, there were some who exceeded the standards. Logan was that example. Maybe because he wasn't one. It made sense that he'd be big. But *that* big?

He cleared his throat, making me realize I had been gawking for the last…*who was keeping count?* I was too busy calculating the probability of

that pipe fitting inside me without causing the equivalency of birth contractions.

“Yvaine?”

“Huh?” It seemed that my brain was no longer functioning. I mean, it *was* processing, calculating… *Oh shut up! You are a doctor. You’ve seen plenty of penises in books and on plastic bodies and real people alike. No reason to start hyperventilating over one of them now. And, biologically speaking, vaginas are much prettier to look at.*

But Stephen, how could he be that blessed? *Or cursed.*

At his throaty chuckle, I glanced up. He scratched the side of his head and ran his hand through his golden locks. Then I stared down again.

“I never thought that—” My eyes swiveled between my wrist and Logan’s penis, comparing the two widths.

“Want to measure it? You can do all your doctor experiments on Rudy Junior if you want to.” His voice turned raspier, intimate. “We wouldn’t complain.”

“That’s not what I…” I trailed off, my voice silly. “What do you do with it when it’s not erect? Use it as a belt?”

He howled out a laugh.

“Stop!” I whined. “I preferred you when you were scared of me.”

He patted my head. “It’s okay, babe. You can look at my dick for as long as you want. Should I make it dance? I can.”

I gave him the stink eye, trying to push him away.

“What are you gonna do with these cute arms?” His expression was glowing with sardonic glee.

I was about to inform him that my biceps had enough strength to euthanize him when I realized we had a problem. *I can’t believe I didn’t think about this before.*

“Um, Rudy, actually—”

“Changed your mind?” His lips parted slightly. “I’m sorry, I’m such an idiot.” He cursed, my eyes widening. “I shouldn’t joke about my dick, I was just trying to lighten the mood! Your eyes on me almost made me come—”

My raised palm silenced him. “It’s not that. I was just wondering what to do since we don’t have condoms.”

“Ah.” He blushed. “Don’t worry, you aren’t ovulating.” He sniffed the air, now making *me* blush. “As much as you…smell amazing…”

“Oh.” I wondered if turning into a lycan had changed my menstrual cycle. I couldn’t wait to track my changes.

I suddenly found myself caged in by his strong arms and peering up at him. He gazed down at me with the look of an untamed beast. He grinned, causing my heart to do a backflip.

“What?” I giggled, a little shy.

“Nothing…you’re just so gorgeous.” He peppered kisses on my chin and down my collarbone as I breathed out a small moan. “Let’s find a better spot. I’m not in the mood for killing anyone who might happen to see what’s *mine*.”

“Yeah, your belt is a bit hard to hide.”

A predatory glint flashed in those silver depths. “Well, thanks, but I meant *you*, Bunny Doc.”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

YVAINE

The stars wheeled above me and the treetops blurred past us in dark-green streaks until Logan, who looked just like Lucien when he ran, slowed down and set me on my feet.

Hand in hand, clothes back on, we followed a beaten path, thorny shrubs at each side ready to draw blood. “Sea buckthorns.” I pointed. “The berries are packed with vitamin C.”

Logan grinned, plucked one, and popped it into my mouth. I returned the favor and laughed when he winced. “I feel the C already.”

The shift of energy in the air swept through me. “Logan…?”

“Oops.” He peered down at me, grinning shamelessly. “Don’t worry, I told my people to disappear.”

I shook my head with a small smile; my mate had carried me into Dark Diamond at the eastern border. We reached a giant pine tree and my mouth formed a perfect *O*.

Nestled high among the branches sat a treehouse, and not the typical rustic-looking type. Wooden panels curved around the trunk, blending so perfectly with the forest that it looked as though the tree had grown the house itself. Thick branches supported the base, and one enormous limb passed straight through the middle of it, the walls carefully built around it instead of cutting it away.

“It might be a bit dusty…”

“It’s perfect!”

A fond smile tugged at his lips. “Haven’t been up here in years. Trix still sneaks in sometimes.”

The ladder was rolled up beneath a small round door.

“What are you doing?” I asked as he bent, hooking me into his arms again.

“Going up? Unless you’d rather stay down here. We can do squirrel watching.”

“Put me down.”

He tightened his hold on me. “Cute doctors aren’t meant to climb.”

“But—”

“Nope.”

I huffed. “Sometimes you treat me like I’m human!”

“Just let me be an old-fashioned gentleman and carry my woman to my cave for once.”

I scoffed, arms looping around his neck. “That’s an oxymoron.”

He flashed a toothy grin as I let him haul me up. I peeked at a wooden sign bolted to a branch—NO ENTRY. LOGAN, BELLATRIX, AND DANIEL ONLY—and my heart swelled.

“Welcome to Trigaland!” He pushed the door open.

Magic.

Tiny moon-shaped fairy lights glowed overhead. The wooden walls were painted with rolling hills and running wolves, two of them standing upright—one with red eyes, the other yellow.

The ceiling was midnight blue, interspersed with paintings of silver stars and tiny Saturns. Shelves lined one wall, packed with children’s books and battered board games. Fluffy rugs, cushions, and blankets covered almost every inch of the floor, leaving barely any visible wood. A mushroom-shaped lamp glowed beside a doodle of a girl and two boys holding hands.

There were no windows, only skylights cut into the low ceiling. The whole place smelled like Christmas mornings.

“This is every child’s secret dream.” I wandered through the space, touching everything, getting another piece of my mate. A glimpse into the boy he’d once been.

“You know, you’re the only one who’s ever been up here, apart from us siblings…and the cleaners.”

“What an honor.” My gaze fell on a small basket tucked beneath one of the shelves. “What’s this?” I crouched. “Sedatives?” Some were long expired; others had recent labels.

He shrugged. “Back when I got too intense. I was a wild child…and Lucien was a wilder pup.”

My fingers froze around one of the blister packs. Sedating your child because you couldn’t handle him sounded like lazy parenting to me. It told the story of a boy people hadn’t understood.

The annoyance dissolved when I rotated on my heels and saw Logan leaning against the wall, arms crossed, blond locks falling over his forehead, a quiet smile on his lips.

Something passed between us as I stood. No room left for doubts or fear; Logan and I belonged together. We stared at each other and smiled like fools.

Logan scratched the back of his neck. “Want a drink?”

“You have drinks?”

“No, but I can run to the packhouse. You can come too and—”

His rambling ended when I caught his shoulders and pulled him to me.

“The only thing I want”—my fingertips brushed his moon necklace, my voice small—“is to be with my mate.”

Logan released a shaky breath. “I’ve wanted you since the night I first heard you on the phone.” His eyes searched mine as his knuckles grazed my cheek. “Your grumpy, half-asleep voice was the best thing I’ve ever listened to…even if it was busy scolding me.” We laughed softly under the little hanging Saturns. “I’ve never wanted anything this much.”

He took my hand and gently pressed it against his forehead. “I’ve had this damn fever, or whatever it is, since Scotland.”

I drew in a shocked gasp. He was burning up.

His smile turned crooked. “I want you so much it hurts.”

“Good,” was all I said before rising onto my tiptoes. “I feel the same.”

Logan kissed me with quiet devotion, slowly at first. Certain.

I answered with everything I had until we toppled sideways onto a mountain of pillows and fluffiness. “Oops,” I said. His laughter vibrated against my chest.

“This is convenient,” he purred, voice intimate, big hands stroking my back up and down until his fingers brushed the sides of my face. “Are you

really sure?” He stopped blinking—such a lycan thing. “Because I can wait as long as you need.”

My heart rate tripled. “I don’t need you to wait. I want you.”

His fingers spread across my cheek, angling me to receive a kiss. One that was sweet then hard, tender then heated, so much so I thought my lips might catch fire.

He pulled back, our eyes inches apart, and I saw something new in him. Vulnerability. “You’ll never get rid of me after this.”

“Neither will you. I’m a lycan, you can’t escape me even if you tried. I’d sniff you out.”

Effortlessly, Logan flipped us. His muscles did some sort of terribly hot rippling motion as he flexed above me and reached for the hem of my T-shirt. “I can take it off—” I started.

Rrrrip. The fabric surrendered straight down the middle.

“That works too.”

“Just delivering on the caveman.”

His hands settled on my hips, drawing me flush against him. I cupped his face and pulled him down for another kiss, our tongues meeting.

His lips dusted across my jaw, down my neck, lingering over the mark until his canines grazed it, eliciting a moan from me. His answering groan did something to my pelvic region.

Golden hair tickled my neck as Logan trailed lower. I recognized his destination and a familiar insecurity tightened inside me at his closeness.

“Logan.”

He looked up from my collarbone with those glowing silver eyes. “Hmm?”

“Can you…not kiss me there?”

His brows knitted together. “Where?”

I hesitated, my arm instinctively shifting over to the area. “My left boob.”

“Why?”

“It’s a little ugly.”

He stared at me. “You’re joking.”

I bit my lip. I was born with an inverted nipple—instead of pointing outward, it remained tucked inward unless heavily stimulated.

He peered down, one hand gently squeezing my forearm. “Let me see.”

“No!” I squeaked, shielding my face with a pillow.

His laugh came out soft and breathless. “Come on, Bunny Doc. You don’t have to be shy with me.”

I shook my head stubbornly.

He pressed a kiss to my cheek. “Please show me your perfect tit so I can get to know her.”

I failed to hide my smile. “Her?”

He scattered little kisses over my jaw and neck before pausing once more over his mark. “Come on. I’ll see it eventually anyway.”

He wasn’t wrong. I sighed, lowering my arm.

A strange look crossed his face and he huffed out a small growl. I blushed at him seeing me that close, that uncovered, all my flaws exposed to his scrutiny. “There she is.”

Logan looked back up at me, eyes softening. “Oh, Yvaine…” The tenderness in his voice nearly undid me. “You’re perfect. All of you, *perfect*.” He leaned on *her*. “Your nipple’s just a little shy. It needs more attention, that’s all.” He delicately sucked my *shy* nipple until she popped out. “See?”

I smacked his shoulder, the last knot of embarrassment unraveling, but my giggle morphed into a startled choke when Logan basically made out with my boobs. His palm cupped one and his mouth, hot and moist, took care of the other.

“Logan…” I sighed, eyes shutting. The mate-bond sparks magnified my pleasure.

“I want to kiss you everywhere…” His voice was deep, thrilling. “Will you let me, little mate?”

I nodded…once.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

YVAINE

Logan groaned, the sound of it rippling through me as he smashed his lips to mine. Our tongues tangled; sparks exploded.

My nipples hardened again, against his warm chest, and the walls of my sex clenched over and over, demanding something to grab hold of.

The metal of his silver necklace dropped to my stomach, making me shiver, and then his exploration started.

His long tongue mapped my breast and circled my shy nipple before he took it all into his mouth; he was clearly obsessed with it. As he sucked, his long fingers slid down to my inner thigh. The darker hairs on his forearm and the back of his hand looked thicker, as if his lycan side was surfacing, too.

"I knew you'd taste like honey…"

He pressed open-mouthed, wet kisses over my navel.

"Hmm, look what I found here." His tongue delved into my belly button.

My voice caught between giggles. "Rudy! What are you doing!"

His mouth teased the contracting muscles of my stomach, occasionally nipping at the shivering flesh. "Eating up my mate."

Oh, if he keeps his word!

He edged back, hands gently pressing against the inside of my thighs, prying my legs apart, and crouched on all fours like an animal about to pounce. His silver moon necklace hung in the air. Once more, his eyes

flicked to mine, a promise of dark ecstasy there, and then his lips descended.

My thoughts scattered like autumn leaves, impossible to hold, while Logan licked.

I cried out at the sparks spreading through my body. My hands dove into his soft hair, making sure he remained there.

Logan slurped and lapped like a starved, greedy man.

His hand slipped under me to cup my bottom. One finger delved into me, then another; he crooked them, brushing something inside me that I thought was a myth. Logan had the capacity to do that, though, turning fables into reality—first by showing me lycans exist, then by introducing me to this new level of pleasure.

“Goddess,” he growled out. “So tight around my fingers.”

That did it.

I came undone in his mouth with his name rolling off my tongue and sparks blinding my vision.

As I settled back into my body, his whole face pressed against my throbbing flesh, letting me feel the indentation of his features.

“Fuck. I love your taste.” He licked me again, making me squirm. “Did I tell you that my favorite thing in the whole world to eat is elk?”

I could only shake my head, still floating.

He lifted his hooded eyes to me. “After today, elk is going to second place.”

“Logan…” Lightheaded, I blew out an exhale. “Reindeer is my favorite.”

With a growl that startled me, one of his hands clasped my butt, the other clasped his cock, and he dove his tongue into me again.

My back arched, my head flying back as the air left my lungs in another surprised gasp.

He hummed deep in his chest. “Mmm, much better than fucking elk.” He readjusted, the flat of his tongue pushing and grinding against my clit.

My breath came in short bursts and my toes scrunched against the blankets as he reduced me into a puddle of moans.

Inhuman eyes, a swirl of red and silver, watched me as Logan lapped, stroked, and sucked. Until he closed his lips around my clit and did something with his teeth only a wolf could do.

Another orgasm exploded. The hairs on my arms stood up as he purred into me, only extending my pleasure.

“No more,” I breathed out, feeling like a feather fluttering down from the heights he’d catapulted me to. One of my hands covered my sensitive core.

“No more?” His voice dipped deeper.

I giggled, snapping my knees together. “I’ll die.”

He grinned.

He crawled up my body and my palm drifted lazily down the planes of his chest, savoring the warmth. There was so much hard skin to touch, to explore, to memorize. *Wait, what’s that?*

“New tattoo?”

How had I missed it?

Stars. Eight of them, scattered between the tattooed cracks that marked the inside of his forearm, each a different size. “When…?”

Logan lifted my hand and kissed my knuckles. “Remember the flight home from Scotland?”

I nodded, in a daze.

“You were sad the little stars you traced on my arm would disappear forever.” His thumb stroked mine. “I made sure they wouldn’t.”

My heart stumbled. “You did that…because of me?”

A crooked smile tugged at his lips. “I wasn’t joking when I told you you’re under my skin, Bunny Doc.”

“Logan…you didn’t have to. This is permanent!”

“So are you.” He brushed a strand of hair behind my ear. “You told me your name means *the first star of the evening*.” His voice softened as my fingertips traced the stars on his forearm. “For me…you were the first light that found its way through the cracks of my life.”

“Logan…” I whispered.

“Lost for words, honey?” His voice was low and intimate. Nothing arrogant there.

“I think so.” My hand cupped his cheek and he leaned in as I smiled weakly. “You overwhelmed me again.”

He kissed my palm and nuzzled into it.

My fingers drifted down, tracing the hard line of his abs, walking lightly over his clenching muscles, and playing with the darker blond hair that trailed toward his groin.

Logan growled low in his throat and dropped his head to my shoulder.

My hand traveled farther south. “Your turn now.”

“Nah, you don’t need to—*ah, fuck*.”

He arched against me when my hand found his inhuman length, pulsing with desire for me and only me.

When did he get rid of his shorts? Not that I minded.

I brushed my thumb over the head, smooth as silk and yet hard as granite, smearing the bead of pre-cum there. Logan hissed as my hand got acquainted with him, but I only managed a few strokes before he snatched it away.

“Come here,” he grunted, rolling us so that I was on top of his stomach, my core dripping all over him.

He propped himself up onto his elbows, stroked my cheek, and kissed me with such devotion that it filled me with peace and passion at the same time.

“You do it.” His breath ghosted over my lips, voice rough with restraint. “You…take me the way you need. Take as much of me as you want. Just…” His eyes searched mine. “Please…take something.”

The husky plea instigated something deep in me. Primal.

Shaking with anticipation, I shifted above him, knees at either side of his hips, and reached between his thighs.

Logan moaned deeply, his eyes hooded but watching my every move.

I slid the underside of his cock through my still-pulsating folds before I pressed his tip against me.

Our gazes stayed locked when we slowly became one. Or tried to.

I barely had the wide tip in and Logan was already losing it.

His head snapped backward, the cords in his neck straining. “Yeah. Just like that.”

With just a quarter in, I raised my hips. Logan looked at himself, then at my entrance, then at himself once more and frowned. “My love…there’s no rush. I, ah—” His nostrils flared. “Can prepare you better. We can take our time…” He blew out an exhale; it sounded like it was pulled from the depths of his soul.

“As tempting as that sounds…” My hips dropped down again, taking a few more inches, though I wasn’t even close to having all of him. “I’m managing this mating, remember?”

His laugh was warm yet airy, his fingers slowly circling my clit, making the stretch more tolerable. He was good. Too good.

I took more and more of him, surprising us both, until the stretch was too much, until I was so full of Logan, my vision went blurry.

He was panting when I finally sat on him, though an inch or two was still out. My thighs strained as my channel struggled to adjust to his size.

“So thick,” I moaned out, closing my eyes.

His breathy chuckle turned into a choke when I sank down again. “And you are so…tight.” His lips peeled back from his teeth. “Yeah. So fucking tight. Oh Goddess, give me strength!”

His abdomen clenched hard and his hands squeezed my hips. His face darkened as he pinned me with his gaze.

Waiting.

Giving me control.

I trembled and moved in a steady rhythm, wrapping myself around him and retreating. Each descent stretched me, each rise coating him with more of my arousal.

It was such a rush, feeling him, taking him, riding him. He was like no one else, from that blinding beauty and his masculinity to his concealed, precious heart.

I whined at the sting and quick bite of pleasure, and Logan answered with a pleased hum. “You feel so good. So much better than in my fantasies.”

A new, warm, almost overwhelming sensation started to build deep in my stomach, and those bursts of pleasure helped me take more of him. And Logan? Well, I wished I could take a picture of him right now. He was watching me through languid eyelids, messy hair falling all over his forehead, lips slightly parted. He looked completely bewitched.

I rode him faster, clamping down harder, demanding my pleasure and taking all he had to offer. My hips rocked with the help of his strong hands, and I felt him under me, solid and ready.

I pulsed around him, the mind-blowing ecstasy rushing through every part of me. He made an odd yet sexy sound in response, a mix between a growl, a male moan, and a whimper.

“Yvaine,” he gritted out, jaw tense, a predatory glint in his silver depths. “Don’t…do…that…”

I did it again and again until I came all over him, coils unwinding in my belly, and he growled, again and again.

Then he snapped. He grasped my hips, flipped us, and pinned me under him, thrusting my knees up and apart.

“Wrap your legs around me.” His voice dropped to a husky, thrilling promise. “And don’t let go.”

I might have stopped breathing at that commanding tone but I did exactly as he asked. My trembling legs locked around his waist.

“Good girl,” he whispered.

And from then on, Logan reigned.

He drew his hips back before sinking into me in one hard stroke, the sparks there making me cross-eyed.

I cried out as he buried himself deeper, every thrust more urgent and demanding than the last. The growls rumbling through his chest were animalistic, almost a warning, his hips swaying at an impossible rhythm.

“Is this okay, Bunny Doc?”

“It feels like I’m being magnificently split in half.”

He breathed out a laugh. “As long as I’m doing it magnificently.”

Outside, the wind started to pick up. It howled at the forest and our little home, announcing a storm.

We didn’t care.

The real storm raged right here, between us, as our mating reached its final bond, as two lives became one the way fate had always intended.

My inarticulate cry was muffled by his lips as he plunged his silky tongue into my mouth in time with his thrusts.

A bolt of lightning sizzled beyond the skylights, brightening the room for a heartbeat. Its light reflected in my mate’s silver eyes.

Moon Goddess, he’s gorgeous.

“Logan…”

My eyes brimmed with tears.

Maybe because he filled every empty corner of me.

Maybe because of the way he looked at me.

Maybe because I could no longer tell where I ended and he began.

Probably all of it.

Wave after wave of pleasure pumped through me until my body trembled against his. My fingers clutched the blankets and pillows as my fifth—or was it sixth?—orgasm stole every rational thought.

Logan didn’t slow down. Didn’t seem to ever want to stop. The storm outside only grew louder as he took me, over and over.

Claws gouged into the floorboards when he drew his hand back and slammed it down. “Mine,” his most primal side snarled. “All. Fucking. Mine.”

Something inside me shifted, shattered, broke wide open all at once. A low, breathless mewl slipped from me as a crack of heat ripped through my entire body, reaching out to him, tying everything that I was to Logan. Everything that he was to me.

It was deeper than physical—like our mating had set off some tectonic disturbance, another Big Bang that rearranged all the parts of myself and himself. My whole world had shifted, and it didn’t just settle back into place. It readjusted *within* him.

I wasn’t just me anymore.

We were *one*.

Logan felt it too. His head dropped into the curve of my neck as a broken, reverent whisper escaped his lips.

“Mate.”

Then he surrendered, allowing himself a well-deserved release.

And it was…a sight that left me shocked.

Cursing under his breath, his eyes squeezed shut, head tipping back.

“Yvaine, I…*ah*!” He moaned, his thrusts sloppy and unmatched.

I felt him spasm as he came a second time, pumping into me. I held him as he shuddered. His orgasm had no end; it simply kept *coming*.

I was amazed. I had never seen anything like it. Never read about it either.

He let out a guttural sound. “Goddess damn it…”

Still panting, Logan connected our foreheads, his hot torrent pouring into me. Sure, he had accumulated over the past months…*but this much?*

I let out a broken laugh, covering my mouth at his weak glare. “Stop…laughing…at…me,” he huffed huskily. “It’s…embarrassing…enough…already.”

How could I still be surprised by him? Everything about him was legendary. *Even his cum.*

“I’m…shit, I’m s-sorry…” Another involuntary shudder. “This…never…” A groan came from deep within his chest. “First…time…this has happened…to me.”

His thick muscles contracted as he filled me up again. He grabbed his cock, this time around the base. It was…bigger, swollen. *What is that?*

Logan collapsed and rolled to the side, bringing me along with him, his thick arms a muscular cage around me. When I tried to shift, his grip tightened, his voice a plea. “No…not yet.”

My heart exploded into several tiny pieces that scattered all around us.

A lazy chuckle rumbled through his chest. “Good thing I can smell when you’re fertile.” He lazily dragged his fingertips up and down my hips. “Though a pup or two in you looks very good right now in my head.”

I laughed and smacked his shoulder lightly, then just let him hold me.

Sparks pulsed wherever our skin brushed. The earth moved around us. The thunderstorm poured its rage onto the forest and its inhabitants.

Inside our little treehouse, none of it mattered.

I listened instead to the steady thunder beneath my ear. His heart.

And, wrapped safely in his arms, I wished that moment could last forever.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

LOGAN

My sweet mate fell asleep right away, while I felt wired enough to stay awake for months.

Her face smooshed on my left pec like I'd been promoted to her favorite pillow, eyelids closed, a little bead of drool in the corner of her mouth. Her lips brushed my skin with every tiny breath.

My own twitched. Goddess, how can she always look this perfect?

Even after my shoulder stiffened and my arm went numb, I refused to move even an inch to avoid disturbing her.

I'd never felt anything like *this* for anyone. Hell, I hadn't even known these feelings could exist.

Guilt crept up my neck as flashes of earlier invaded my mind. Had I been a little too much? I recalled and analyzed every one of her gasps, every little moan, every time she'd pulled me closer to her. She had a smile on her face. That was a good sign, right?

I'd made my woman come eight times. Yeah, I counted. Figures, as eight was also my wereball number.

I grinned proudly and tightened my arm around her waist.

Be cool, Logan. Let her be.

I scrubbed a hand over my face and hair, releasing a slow exhale. The way I came yesterday had never happened before…not even my first time. And I couldn't explain it.

Well, maybe I did know why.

I love her…

I focused on the gentle rise and fall of her chest while the rain fell and the wind howled through the wooden walls. This was contentment. This was peace.

I'd really exhausted her. I should let her sleep more.

Unfortunately, *should* and I had never liked each other. Plus, I wanted to chat with her. Kiss her for the rest of the day. Laugh with her. Maybe other activities…if she was interested.

My fingers drummed lightly against her waist before transforming into gentle little pokes, until a tiny frown appeared between her delicate brows. I grinned like a crazy mutt. She answered with the sleepiest little grumble and burrowed into my chest even more, dragging a streak of drool across my pec. I bit my lip to stop myself from laughing, wiped it away with the corner of a pillowcase…and poked her again.

Her eyelashes fluttered.

Finally, Yvaine stirred, stretching gingerly.

"Logan?" Her voice broke on a whimper when I kissed the hand she'd left above my heart. With her other hand, she pushed a few locks aside and peered up at me through a cascade of luscious hair.

I kept kissing her fingers, then her wrist…only to pause. Embarrassment swept through my body and I blinked, puzzled.

What was that?

Ah! A slow grin spread across my face. *My mate* was embarrassed, not me.

I could feel her emotions because we'd completed the bond! They flowed into me as naturally as my own, unless she blocked them. Incredible, and *useful*, since I'd never have guessed from her face alone. Because, come on, how could she feel shy at this point?

I huffed out a chuckle. "You're shy after we mated, Bunny Doc?"

"Yes," she admitted, hiding her face against my chest.

"You're so cute."

"Why does he have to stare at me with those intense eyes? Oh Stephen, and we're still naked."

My grin expanded, teeth showing. "Well, I'm staring with *my intense eyes* because you're my little mate."

She sucked in a breath. "You're spying on my thoughts?!"

"Yup."

“Shameless! Like always!”

I burst out laughing.

Cupping her cheeks, I planted my lips on hers, once. Then again, because when was one kiss with this woman ever enough? I lingered there, thumbs stroking her cheeks while I looked at her with adoration.

“You’re still staring,” she huffed, hiding her face in a pillow.

“I know.”

“Would you mind looking somewhere else?”

“Why? I’ve already seen everything, and I happen to like everything very much—*ouch*!” I rubbed my shoulder where her small fist had bounced off it. *At least she kept her thumb tucked in.*

She tried to get up, no doubt to search for clothes, but I wasn’t ready to see that firm, rounded butt get covered yet. I brought my open palm down and enjoyed the slap more than expected.

Yvaine squealed but managed to slap my ass back—I enjoyed that less—before I snatched her and squeezed her to my chest again.

Goddess, I can’t seem to stop mauling this woman.

“Logan!” Even irritated, her voice sounded sweet.

With a silly smile, I littered kisses all over her face, then moved to her neck.

“Capers! Lycans still sweat like werewolves. What if I smell awful?” she thought, uncomfortable.

To me, her scent had never been better. She smelled like *me*.

I could have told her I was still hearing her thoughts, that she’d need to shield them from now on, but for right now at least, they were helpful.

“Mmm, you know, my love, you smell so good,” I said with a small smirk, and her shoulders relaxed. *See? Useful.*

When I buried my face against her chest, she dissolved into giggles. “Logan! You need to shave!”

“Shave?” I rubbed a hand over my jaw, feeling a little stubble. “It didn’t seem to bother your sweet puss—”

“Shh!” Both of her hands clamped over my mouth.

I grinned against her palms.

We’d entered a whole new stage of our relationship. And I fully intended to make the most of it, embarrassment included, because it looked too fucking cute on her.

I wanted to memorize everything about her, down to every freckle and eyelash, every expression she made when she was happy, flustered, or pretending not to be.

I licked my lips. I had work to do. *Better start now.*



YVAINE

"Logan! Do you hear me?" I wagged a finger in front of his face.

He caught it and pressed a kiss to the tip. "Hear what?" he asked, his voice huskier.

"Why are you looking at me like that? You look creepy!"

"Creepy, you say?" he murmured, his hand sliding up to squeeze my waist.

His silver eyes roamed over me with unsettling intensity, his tongue licking his lips. A low growl rolled through his chest, possessive enough to make every tiny hair on my body stand at attention.

He looked starved.

"Logan…" I laughed, a little nervous about this side of my mate.

He blinked twice, as though surfacing from somewhere else, then sighed with a sheepish smile. "Sorry." He rubbed the back of his neck. "You take away all my good judgment."

I rolled onto my stomach, propping myself on my elbows, while he mirrored me on his side. "Do I?"

He hummed and leaned forward, brushing his lips against mine.

"I never noticed you had much good judgment to begin with."

"I've always had good judgment," he said, with no trace of irony.

A breath later, I found myself flat on my back. Logan's teeth sank into the soft flesh below my right breast and trailed up. I yelped and sighed when he rained tiny kisses all over it.

"Judging from our position, Bunny Doc…" He lifted his face with that predatory smile. "I'd say my judgment looks better than yours."

I laughed, tunneling my fingers through his hair. “Fine. You win this round.”

He gave another warm chuckle. “I always win.”

I rolled my eyes and pecked his cheek.

“Anyway, I was about to ask, before you distracted me—” His fingertips stroked down my skin, *distracting* me. “If you want a shower.”

“That’d be lovely.”

He rose in one fluid move, pulling me up with him. My legs wobbled. I was sore—*Logan-sore*.

His white teeth gleamed. “You look a little tousled. I guess eight orgasms will do that to a person.”

“I only counted seven! And stop being so full of yourself!”

“It was eight, trust me.” Something mischievous crossed his eyes. “And *you* were full of me. But I don’t think you minded it, did you, Bunny Doc?”

I scoffed, though I didn’t move from my spot. He smiled at me. “What are you so cheerful about?” His grin grew as I spoke. “That I can’t walk straight? Or that you caused it?”

“Yes…and yes.”

I tried to move, my body sluggish. Thank Stephen Logan lifted me and cradled me against his chest. My knees were dangling, my arms wrapped around his neck. “I can walk,” I protested halfheartedly.

“I disagree.” His hold tightened around me. “Though I can’t say I’m sorry about it. Because I’m not,” he whispered. Images of our mating crossed my mind and I hid my head in his neck…until I noticed something big.

He’s already hard. Or maybe he never softened.

He looked unconcerned by my ogling.

“Yeah. I’m hard. How couldn’t I be, with your beautiful eyes staring at my dick all the time?”

“I wasn’t! And stop listening to my thoughts!”

Logan padded across the creaking floorboards to a small triangular door, nudging it open with his shoulder, ducking beneath the frame. It led outside to a tiny wooden platform built onto the trunk, bordered by a silver railing overlooking the endless treetops. Mist coated everything in dew, the sky heavy with rain. Goosebumps popped up over my bare skin, the cool breeze reminding me of my complete lack of clothing.

Before I could ask where the shower was, a valve squeaked and I found myself under an icy downpour from the bucket-like showerhead above. Naturally, I let out an undignified shriek, loud enough to send every bird in the forest fleeing.

“I can’t believe you did that! You’re so rude!” I cried, laughing despite the cold.

“Well, I *do* have poor judgment,” he mocked. “Didn’t you just tell me that?”

I clung to him and his warmth. “I take it back!”

Like the gentleman he *wasn’t*, Logan stepped fully beneath the freezing water.

My glare met his amused eyes. “Aww, look at my furious wet bunny! Aren’t you an ice bath master?”

“When I prepare for it!”

“What’s the fun in that?”

Grinning down at me, he brushed soaked strands of hair away from my face. I blinked my water-glossed eyes at him and forgot all about the temperature, which wasn’t cold anymore. Then his mouth found mine.

The kiss was slow and sweet, almost lazy. A hungry look appeared on his face, silver eyes wandering, lingering on my nipples, long and erect thanks to his little trick.

I shifted in his thick arms, pressing to his front, legs and arms wrapping securely around my mate. He let out a low noise of appreciation.

We kissed again, tongues meeting in a slow rhythm. Each brush seemed to make my blood heavier, sweeter, until it flowed through me like that warm honey he loved.

Without breaking our contact, his hand slid lower, settled on my butt, and squeezed.

A rough groan vibrated through his chest. His fingers explored my small crack, then reached underneath me. He ran through my slick heat and worked one finger in and out, pausing to squeeze a second finger in. His long thumb moved upward to rub my clit expertly as his mouth ate all my cries.

My hand roamed, gliding over his clenching abs, and grabbed his length. *It was his* turn to moan now. “Yvaine…”

I stroked him once, loving how heavy yet smooth it felt, as we kept making out in the open.

“Goddess!” His voice was ragged, almost disbelieving, between kisses. “I want you so fucking bad.”

“I know,” I whimpered. “I want you more.”

What happened next was pure animalistic instinct. There, on the balcony of his childhood treehouse, Logan, still standing, started to make love to me by holding my smaller frame up with his hands. He lifted me higher, making my fingers lose the grip on his length. Then, kissing hungrily, breathing harshly, he lowered me directly onto his large tip. I was already so wet that I took several inches without any problem.

I gasped into his mouth, thrills shooting up my spine, as he continued until the rest of him was sheathed inside me.

No way would I ever get used to that mini monster.

Pulling back halfway, Logan thrusted up into me again, the kiss broken. His breath fanned my throat and his lips mapped the water droplets there as he slid in and out of me, watching me with eyes that were simmering with possessiveness and wonder.

“Say you’re mine.”

I didn’t. I just clenched around him. On purpose.

His eyes narrowed. “Yvaine…”

A soft laugh escaped me.

He nipped at my ear, delving in and out with disconcerting slowness.

“Logan…” I protested with a whine.

“Say it,” he ordered, mouth curving into a sensual smirk, sharp canines peeking out.

“Jerk.”

His thrusts stopped and I felt the loss immediately.

“I’m yours!” I hurried to say, triggering a satisfied growl from him.

“There she is.”

The words had barely left my lips before his pace quickened again, his fingers digging into the soft flesh of my butt.

“Say it again.”

The shameless lycan flipped me around, pressing my front against the wooden panels of the treehouse, my hands on the wall.

“I’m yours, Logan!”

With one deep thrust, he filled me up. “That’s right, Bunny Doc. No one else gets to fuck this delicious pussy but me.”

He buried his head in my neck while his body slapped against mine, the familiar sweet burn of his penetration reaching my cervix and making my toes curl. Not even the wind in our ears could hide the sounds of our mating. Wetness trickled down his legs and only stopped when I was full of lycan cock. Logan sealed me airtight every time.

I reached for his hair and grabbed on to keep him right where he was. Logan had the same idea, because he leaned in to bite my neck and pushed me down on him. There was that delicious pain again. I didn't think Logan could avoid it if he wanted to. He was just too long, too thick, designed for fucking and breeding. I didn't mind—I was being fucked by my beast out in the open, above the treetops of his forest.

His low grunts vibrated through my skin. His fingers brushed the back of my hand on the wall, and he laced them with mine.

I was losing myself more and more, pressure rising, until my inner walls convulsed around him and another orgasm took over.

"Damn, I love when you come around me…"

He grunted louder, thrusts shallow and erratic. He slammed his length to the hilt and held it there, shoulders stiffening, as a drawn-out moan unleashed from him.

Then I felt it.

Instead of softening, something at his base swelled inside me, holding us together.

We both went perfectly still. "What…?"

"I…" He swallowed, eyes flashing with shock. "I can't pull out."

I looked to the side to meet his eyes. "Another lycan thing?"

His breathless laugh was almost embarrassed. "Apparently."

He gave the smallest experimental tug. My eyes rolled into the back of my head at the sparks.

"Well…" His ears reddened. "That's definitely new."

I couldn't help laughing. Trust my supernatural mate to discover yet another surprise.

He hid his face in my shoulder with a groan. "Don't make fun of me."

"I'd never."

The surroundings had quieted, save for our labored breathing, frantic heartbeats, and the sound of our fucking still echoing within the wooden walls.

His thumb rotated my face, and his searching lips found mine for a quick kiss. He was still inside me, the larger base of his cock pulsing, his long fingers idly stroking my side.

No words were exchanged, since we could perfectly feel each other through the bond. Touches and gazes were all we needed.

Until I found myself wrapped in a warm towel as Logan dried me off.

Neither one of us knew how much time had passed before I broke the silence. “We should probably head back…”

“Do you want to?”

“Not really. You?”

Logan let out a sleepy laugh. “Not even a little.”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

LOGAN

After our magical afternoon in the treehouse, we had to get back to our boring reality. I had to share her with the rest of her world, something I was struggling with. *At least I'm aware of it. That's good, right?*

I'd saved her schedule on my phone, but she was completely MIA for four days in a row—*four*!

Like some abandoned shelter dog, I counted the hours until I could see her again. Sure, wereball kept me busy, but we had practically won the league already.

The Comets had been disqualified from the championship. After Tiziano's stunt and the discovery that he, the Comet Ultras's leader, had been involved with the Matenapper, the committee punished the whole team. This development was my new mood booster. If I ever got bored, I thought of this, and *poof!* Happy again.

Both Yvaine and I were relieved, for different reasons. Me, because I didn't want to dismember her pack friends; Yvaine, because she wouldn't have to watch the bloody game—because yeah, it would've been one. And she would've sat on *my* side of the stadium. Not that she'd agreed to it, but I'd have persuaded her.

Thank Goddess today was Saturday! I'd already started to make the most of it, getting me and my mate naked. I'd brought her back to the treehouse to have more privacy—her moans were mine only.

Currently, I was cleaning her thighs, making a heroic effort not to look at her pink pussy and get horny again…which was futile because I always was with her. Basically, I was this weird hybrid between a mutt in heat and a hormonal teenager.

But I couldn't help myself from pecking her breasts again, wanting to fit them both in my mouth. I'd always liked breasts, but had never experienced this borderline feral urge to devour them.

"Wanna shower?" I flung the used towel into a corner of the room. "I made a bit of a mess of you…" I'd been a little…*enthusiastic*? I had missed her the past four days, and I couldn't contain myself now that she was finally here and all mine.

She didn't seem to mind, though.

"Not yet. I just want to lie here with you." She stretched both her arms toward me, unconcerned about her nudity. "Cuddles?"

I let out a breathy laugh. "Give me a sec." I rummaged through a drawer. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

She let out a cute yawn. "No."

"No dislocated hip?"

She giggled. "Negative."

"No pain?"

"No. I feel stretched…but that's normal."

I didn't like that answer.

Why is it normal *for her? Have all her ex-losers made her feel this way? Fuck.* I grunted to myself, taking out a clean sheet and a woolen blanket big enough for both of us.

"What are you muttering about over there, you grumpy old man?" she inquired, eyebrow lifting.

"Nothing…"

Yvaine sobered, probably because of my frown. "Logan, you know…" She bit her lip. "I never had, *um*, multiple orgasms in a row before you."

And just like that, the grin returned to my lips.

"And you…?" she asked, playing with the hem of a pillow.

"I…*what*?"

"Was it better for you with me? Since we are mates? Statistically, the—"

"Of course not," I said honestly.

She looked like a kicked puppy, so I hurried to explain. “I don’t have anything to compare it to.” Her eyes widened. “It was the first time I made love with someone.”

It was the truth. Up until her, I’d never loved anyone. Hooking up with girls had been a mix of consensual entertainment and natural urges. I’d never even fucked anyone missionary style before her. Not that I’d actively bring that up.

“You sure you don’t need anything?” I asked as I padded back to her. “Water? A snack? Medical attention?”

“Just cuddles. Come here and give them to me.”

I chuckled, lifting her into the low armchair. “Yes, ma’am. Sometimes your orders are easy to follow.”

I yanked off the dirty sheets, threw them onto the floor, and made the bed. Then I deposited her back underneath the covers, slipped in beside her, and pulled the blanket over us. Finally, I gathered my needy mate against my chest.

Yvaine shifted so half of her body was on top of me. I heaved out a sigh. She was so beautiful, her flawless skin like cream, her long hair spilling over me like my new favorite blanket.

She was wearing a knowing grin. “You’re really cute sometimes.”

“*Cute*?” I screwed up my nose, eliciting a giggle from her.

“Lucy made that exact face when I called him cute!”

Fantastic. I’d just been compared to that ugly beast.

“*Whoop, whoop*,” I deadpanned. “And why exactly am I cute?”

Yvaine twirled a strand of my hair around her finger. “That’s a secret. If I tell you, you might stop, and I can’t allow that.”

I found her reasoning amusing. “If you say so, but can’t you call me something else?”

“Cuddle provider?”

“Um, let me think about it…” I tapped a finger on my chin. “Nope.”

“Professional pillow?”

“Nah.”

“Well, guess what, *Rudolph*?” I raised my brows at her tone. “You don’t get to decide what I call you!”

I was about to tell her exactly what I thought of that, my comeback already loaded, when my little bunny yawned again. The way she curled herself around me told me everything—she needed a nap.

A grin tugged at my lips as I stroked her shoulder. Maybe I should stop calling her Bunny Doc.

Bear Doc suited her better. Or Teddy Doc.

I glanced down.

The little bear was already fast asleep.

"Dad, we're going to be late for dinner," I said through our mind-link. Absent-mindedly, I dropped a kiss on Yvaine's forehead.

His response was immediate. *"Why? Got lost in our woods?"*

I snorted. *"Sure."*

"Lolo!" Bellatrix cut in. *"I came home early to spend time with Yvaine!"*

"We can be at the packhouse in half an hour."

"No! If you say thirty minutes it means two hours!"

Fair.

"That's too bad, big sis."

"Argh! You are so—"

"Bellatrix, leave them alone."

I smirked…until Dad's next words. *"Yvaine will have to come with me to the library first."*

"What?!" both Bella and I blurted.

"Why, Dad?" I continued.

"It's something between her and me. Nothing that concerns you pups."

I didn't like being left out; I needed to know. I glanced down at my sleeping mate, all adorable draped over me.

"Why the library? So you can show her your big feet?" I teased.

He ignored the nickname like he always did. *"If you really must know—"*

"Yes, I do."

"I want to show Yvaine an ancient volume on neurosurgery."

I heard the subtle excitement in his voice. *Oh God…* I already knew how my night was going to go: Yvaine and Big Feet blubbering about medicine for hours; me sitting there, not understanding a single thing; and Bellatrix chatting up Yvaine.

Before I had met my mate, Saturday nights meant friends, barbecues, parties, and girls. Now? Ancient textbooks and chitchats.

I looked down at the warm little bundle sleeping on my chest.

Yeah. Not even a contest.

I’d choose this every single time.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

YVAINE

Smoke rose above the treetops ahead, from the packhouse where we'd be meeting Jonathan and Bellatrix. Daylight was dwindling to a thinning veil of gray, dusk coming sooner than expected—or maybe because time always flew by with Logan.

Although, right now, I was more annoyed with him than anything.

"Baby!" Logan exclaimed between a fit of laughter. "You're supposed to growl from here." He patted my belly. "Use your diaphragm."

"Don't call me *baby*!" I snapped, batting his hand away while he almost choked on another laugh.

"But seriously, shouldn't you know how to growl in your human form too?"

"Oh, forgive me for never needing to growl as a human!" I folded my arms and lengthened my stride. "Some of us had peaceful lives. Until you," I added under my breath.

"What was that, Bunny Doc?"

"I can growl!"

His blond brow climbed expectantly.

"Oh, you want proof?" Ruby bristled. *"Let me show him."*

I drew in a deep breath.

The growl erupted from somewhere low in my abdomen, climbing through my chest before rolling through the forest like thunder.

My heart soared. And I had the pleasure of erasing Logan's smug smile.

Victory.

Until heat flooded his irises, turning them dark and hungry.

“Oh no…” I sighed.

A heartbeat later, I was pinned against his chest.

“Mmm.” His voice carried a growl of its own. “You’re not allowed to growl in front of anyone else.”

Here we are again.

Ever since we had completed the mating bond, Logan’s possessiveness had evolved into a full-time hobby. Not that he’d exactly been subtle about it before, but I used to be stronger.

Now he had weapons.

Since sex was on the table, couch, and basically anywhere with available space, it was a little harder for me to put him back in his place. All he had to do was kiss my neck and I melted into his griddle-sized hands.

Very unfair.

“You’re hard,” I hissed as Logan stopped to nuzzle my neck. I darted a horrified glance around.

“And that’s a problem because…?”

“You can’t be thinking about *that* here!”

“*That?*”

“You know.”

“You mean fucking you?”

My palm clamped over his foul mouth. Some pack members strolled past, waving and smiling at us.

“We’re about to go see your family!”

And Logan’s grandmother.

He read my unguarded thoughts. “Grandma canceled at the last minute.”

“Why?”

“She hates you,” he said nonchalantly.

“How’s that possible?”

I adored grandmothers and they adored me back! Makena’s grandma still mailed me *mabuyu* from Kenya every single year.

“She’s obsessed with this other chick. Smart, beautiful, perfect for me, blah, blah, blah.”

My eye twitched, a lycan feature I had inherited.

“I think her name was…Teresa?”

I was about to calmly explain that his grandmother would inevitably love me once she met me, but then Logan halted. I took two more steps before realizing he wasn't beside me anymore.

Something, or someone, had struck a spell, turning Logan to stone. His muscles were locked, his breath suspended.

His eyes though?

They could ignite a forest.

I followed his gaze to a human woman standing between two pines.

My instincts recoiled before my mind understood why. I couldn't sense her wolf, yet nothing about her felt human.

She didn't merely stand still. She was *motionless*, like an oil painting someone had forgotten to breathe life into. Even the wind seemed to split around her.

Ageless and tall, she had ash-blond hair that drifted to her thin hips and gray eyes that reflected the fading light. She was beautiful, terribly so. Beautiful the way winter lakes are, cold enough to drown you beneath perfect, unbroken ice.

"Hi, baby." She smiled at Logan, revealing white teeth. "Look at you. You've grown." A pause. "Still so handsome."

Her eyes fell on me, her gaze so penetrating I felt like it was slicing me open to have a look inside.

Her right eyelid started to tick…

Lycan.

I still couldn't sense others—not yet. Lycans concealed themselves well.

"Is this your mate?" Her nostrils flared almost imperceptibly. "Ah. You've completed the bond." Her eye twitched again. "A newborn lycan."

Her words stirred Logan.

"How dare you come here, Francisca!" he seethed like never before. I'd not seen him like this in wereball or even with my twin. This was a new world of rage.

My stomach dropped. *Don't Call Her.*

She sighed softly, like he was being unreasonable. "I tried calling again, but your phone was…well…"

"Have you thought about the fact that *I* don't want to talk to you? Wasn't blocking your numbers enough of a clue? How many new SIM cards are you willing to buy with Dad's money?"

"Please, can we talk?" she asked, tone pleading.

Logan let out a humorless laugh. “How mentally disturbed can you be?”

“Just a few minutes!” She still hadn’t moved an inch.

I rubbed my arm; something about her unsettled me.

“Stay. Away. From. Us.” Logan’s voice sharpened as he stepped in front of me. “Don’t even look at my mate.”

“He will come for you, Logan. For her.” Her voice was clinical, quiet, cold-blooded—everything that Logan wasn’t. “You killed his son and he hasn’t forgotten. A lycan debt is a life sentence.”

Logan’s hand clamped around mine and pulled me away.

I glanced back once.

There was nothing between the pine trees anymore; Francisca had vanished, the forest swallowing her whole.

My skin prickled.

Logan cut through the woods without direction.

“Our mate is suffering,” Ruby whimpered.

“We can explore this area, sure.” I didn’t know what else to say, my heart aching with his. “The woods are…mystical at dusk!”

Nothing. Only the harsh rhythm of his breathing.

I almost had to jog to keep up, hopping over sprawling brambles, while Logan simply walked straight through them, letting the briars rake bloody lines across his skin. A particularly nasty thorn lodged itself into his knee. He didn’t even flinch.

The sparks where our hands were touching flickered weakly. Nothing was reaching him. Were we even inside Dark Diamond territory anymore?

“Logan?”

Silence.

“Rudolph?”

He continued on.

“Please, can we stop?”

I swallowed, using the only resource left.

“Lucien.”

He stopped so suddenly I almost collided with his back. A low growl rolled through him, his shoulders trembling.

I calmly circled him and gazed up…only to gasp. His lips had peeled back over elongated canines that had cut into his own flesh, blood trickling from both corners of his mouth. Black veins fanned out like spiderwebs

beneath his skin, and his irises glowed red. The embodiment of a creature that haunted lonely forests and gave birth to legends.

I'd called and Lucien had come.

"Lucien, look at me."

He glanced down and I knew it. Ruby knew it too. For one terrifying heartbeat, he didn't recognize who I was.

But something shifted and I saw it—the pain, so much of it that I almost missed the underlying fury.

"Who was she?"

"Nobody," Logan said.

I stroked his cheek with my thumb. "I can't help if you don't let me in."

His lips pursed, causing his canines to dig in further, blood running faster.

My eyes welled up. "You don't have to carry it alone anymore."

The forest darkened around us. One star popped in, then another, while the wind gathered in the branches overhead, carrying the scent of rain.

My arm ached from holding his face but I didn't lower it.

Only when a faraway howl rose, announcing the beginning of another night, did Logan fold.

His head dropped to my shoulder, his body still trembling as though Francisca had left frost under his skin.

I didn't need to know who she was. I knew it already.

Lucien told me regardless.

"She let Lucien stay inside her womb for six months," he said, speaking through Logan. "And spent the next six years locking Lucien up in the attic."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

YVAINE

One thing I'd always taken for granted was my family. My enormous, loud, occasionally infuriating but wonderfully overinvolved family.

A family is like a tree. The people, like branches, grow in different directions, reaching for different skies. Yet they're all fed by the same roots. Cut those roots, and every branch withers, swallowed by the undergrowth.

My family, however, wasn't just a tree. They were an entire forest of towering pines and stubborn oaks and tangled brambles. They gave me roots and the safety to become who I was.

Dad had surrounded us with so much love that Lachlan and I could have lived off it for years. Mom protected us with all she had, taking us to Scotland at every chance, teaching me archery, and bringing me to medical conferences on weekends. Lachlan was that best friend who never had to earn my trust because he'd been born with it. And little Ian taught me that life was frighteningly fragile, and that time was the only thing no one was ever promised.

Beyond them was Scotland, with grandparents who loved us with the strength of a thousand suns, mischievous aunts and uncles, and more cousins than I could count.

In my family, there was always a seat waiting for me, always another plate on the table, always someone who'd come looking if I didn't come home.

But Logan…

He’d never had a forest, just a tree that had tried very hard to survive the fire.

“There was a rogue in the pack.”

Those were the first words out of Logan’s mouth when we stepped inside the packhouse.

Alpha Jonathan sat in a huge charcoal armchair in the massive living room. Floor-to-ceiling, black-framed windows overlooked the dark forest, while oversized sand-colored sectionals and cognac leather armchairs gathered around coffee tables. A sleek black dining table, long enough to seat twenty, lay at the far end under soft pendant lights. One entire wall served as Dark Diamond’s shrine to wereball. The glass cabinets displayed polished silver trophies, medals, framed championship photographs, and signed jerseys.

The large room hummed with ordinary, peaceful life. A pair of elderly wolves argued over a chessboard; teenagers laughed over a card game sprawled across an olive-green rug. Two women and a man knitted beside one another, while another read aloud from a book. Children darted between the furniture before being shooed away with affectionate grumbles.

An enormous stone fireplace dominated the room, though only a few lazy logs smoldered inside—werewolves rarely needed fire for warmth.

And tonight, the cold wasn’t from the absence of flames.

Alpha Jonathan lowered the newspaper resting across his knees. His eyes lit up when he spotted me behind his son.

“Good evening, Yvaine. How are your studies going?”

A familiar force crashed into me from behind. Strong arms wrapped around me, squeezing some of my insides out.

“Bella!” I twisted around and hugged her back.

She beamed at me. “Finally! What took you two so long?”

“We got…distracted.”

Bella’s knowing smirk widened immediately. “I’m happy for you but I don’t ever want to know.”

On a normal day, I’d laugh. Not today.

Logan and his dad were busy in a glaring contest. Probably mind-linking since their eyes had glazed over…

“Not here, son,” Jonathan spoke aloud.

“But she was—”

“Logan. I said *not here*.” The Alpha’s voice wasn’t loud; it didn’t need to be with its quiet authority. Several heads turned instinctively toward him, conversations faltering, chess pieces pausing halfway across the board.

Logan’s jaw creaked. *No*, his claws had pierced the timber wall beside him.

“Where then?” he hissed, splinters curling beneath his fingertips.

Jonathan held his gaze, inclining his head toward a dark-green door tucked near the fireplace. Logan marched over, looking ready to step into a fighting ring, as we followed. Bella glanced at me, bewildered.

The Alpha closed the door behind us with a quiet click, but the sound felt louder than a slam.

Logan immediately spun, arms folded so tightly across his chest the muscles in his forearms stood out. “Why did you let that *rogue* in, Dad?”

“What are you talking about? We have around-the-clock security!” Bella looked between them. “A rogue couldn’t possibly get in.”

“No.” Logan didn’t turn from his father. “Not unless someone let one in.”

The room seemed to shrink around us, all eyes on Jonathan. The air itself felt like it was holding its breath, and even the grandfather clock in the corner sounded intrusive.

Jonathan slowly removed his reading glasses, pinching the bridge of his nose before meeting his son’s blazing stare. “Francisca requested sanctuary, acceptance into the pack.” He took a long, slow inhale, as if to prepare us and himself. “And I granted it.”

“What?” Logan’s voice came out almost inaudible. “You did what?!” The office shook with his fury.

“Mom’s back?” Bella whispered, looking small and insecure for the first time since I’d met her. “Why…why didn’t you tell us?”

I reached for her hand. She gripped mine so hard her long blue nails dug into my skin.

I shuffled under the intensity in the room and took a moment to decipher the emotions racing through the mate bond: confusion, frustration, and a terrible anger. Logan’s right eye twitched—not a surprise, considering how much Lucien hated seeing his sister in distress. I moved to go to him, but Bella’s hand didn’t let me.

Jonathan rubbed his face. “If we could all just sit down and discuss this as a family…”

“What family?” Logan snapped. “You let that hideous woman in without asking for our—”

The office door slammed against the wall as Bella fled.

“*Damn it*!” Logan drove his fist into the wall, leaving behind a jagged hole similar to the one forming inside my chest. “You see, Dad? Bella and I always end up paying for your weakness for that woman!”

His fingers curled into long, black hooks. I hurried to him and reached for his wrist.

Logan glanced at me, eyes softening, until his dad spoke again.

“Francisca lost everything and—”

“Spare me the philanthropic bullshit!”

“She also wants to meet Yvaine. She thinks you two need guidance after the changes.”

“That woman is in no fucking position to meddle with our life!” He pulled free from my hand and went for him. “How dare you let her into our pack after all she did?”

“I did what I thought was best for you.”

“In the same way she did the best for Bella and me? Hmm?”

“She’s still your mother.” Jonathan’s tone was placid.

“Really? Is that what she was while she sedated us?”

Jonathan winced; my hand flew to my mouth. *That explains why Bella is claustrophobic.*

“Is that what she was when she cheated on you with half the countryside?”

Pain flashed across the Alpha’s face.

“I still remember hearing them, Dad.” Logan’s voice had become strangely calm. “That house, the one you broke your back to build for us, and she filled it with strangers. She fucked strangers upstairs while you were bleeding to death downstairs, Dad!”

“How many times do we have to discuss this? She was a newly turned lycan who didn’t know what she was! She was out of control, confused. She had no guidance!” Jonathan was breathing hard now, frowning—a rare show of anger on the perpetually composed and stoic Alpha.

“Ah.” Logan smiled like a demon. “You feel that rage? That consuming parasite? That’s what I felt when I finally understood what that woman did to you, what that bleeding meant.” He struck his own chest. “That’s what I felt when I was six, patching you up and holding you until the pack doctor

arrived for the usual transfusion! That's what I felt when Lucien killed my brother, and…that's what I feel *now*." His voice cracked as he swallowed hard. "And I hate her more than I hate that rage, Dad! I hate that she looks like me. I hate that she bleeds like me. I hate that we have a bond I can't ever fucking sever! She wants what's best for me? Then she can crawl into a hole and rot there!"

Jonathan didn't answer. I could only stand there and feel Logan's emotions pour through the mate bond, a bridge that carried every shard of his pain straight into me.

Eyes flashing red, Logan looked feral. "And you know what? You can fucking go with her!"

Then he stormed out, leaving behind a broken chair and a silent dad with bloodshot eyes.

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CHAPTER FORTY

YVAINE

Logan and I returned to my apartment on campus. It was quiet—no roommates, no Zeus. Only my keys jingling against the ceramic holder next to Spiky, our pet cactus, and the tiny shrine for Gertrude B. Elion.

Logan remained by the door—like he was waiting for my permission to come in. His eyes were closed, his chest unmoving—as though he was waiting for my permission to live.

I went to him before he could retreat further into himself.

Rising onto my tiptoes, I cupped his face. “Rudy, look at me.”

He did. Desolation was all I saw.

“I’m here. I’m your family. Bella and Big Feet are your family. Killian and Callum, too.” I brushed my thumbs over his cheeks. “And you have your granny, even if she insists on matchmaking you with another girl.”

His lip curled up an inch. *Small victory.* “But…” I paused, considering carefully. “That woman…is not necessary.”

I studied the harsh lines carved into his handsome face.

“You didn’t choose her to be your mother.” My fingers traced his jaw. “But every choice she made to not be one was hers alone.”

There was a bitter story written behind the contours of Logan’s clenched hands and tense shoulders. Could his sometimes oversized ego be a shield? Could his emotional distance from women be the result of his mother’s distance? And his violence…

“I can’t believe Dad let her into the pack.” His voice came out flat as he finally stepped inside. “He always, *always*, falls for her tricks.”

I closed the door behind him. “Maybe…you could have just one conversation? Hear what she wants?”

Logan looked physically repulsed. “Never.”

I nudged him onto a stool—not as good as a ladder, but it almost put us at eye level. “I just want you safe.”

One blond eyebrow arched.

“She mentioned a…man coming after you.” *Us.*

“Magnus.” His answer was immediate. “He was there when Lucien killed Daniel. And did nothing.”

“But she sounded—”

“Manipulative, crazy. Trust me, I know.”

Something told me Francisca had been telling the truth; the fear I’d glimpsed in her icy eyes had looked real.

“Still…” I took both of his hands. “That doesn’t justify how you treated your dad tonight.”

He tilted his head, narrowing his silver eyes. They glinted ferally in the kitchen light.

“No matter how you feel about Francisca, your father raised you the best he could. She hurt him too.”

“So? He *let* her hurt him. He’s weak when it comes to her!”

“Maybe.” I squeezed his hands. “The wrong love is still love to some people. She was his mate, after all.”

That shut him up and I used my chance.

“Here.” I slipped my phone from my pocket and held it out. “Call him.”

He opened his mouth.

“He needs you, Logan. After you left, he looked destroyed.” I still couldn’t forget Alpha Jonathan standing alone in that room seeming older. Smaller. Like a parent who had tried his best, wondering where he’d failed. “You and Bella are his world and now both of you are disappointed with him.” My throat tightened. “Family is precious. You hold on to them while you can, because one day there’ll be a last hug, a last laugh together, a last goodnight, and none of us get to choose when.”

Logan pulled me into his chest when tears started blurring my vision. “Little Ian’s doing better,” he murmured into my hair.

I nodded against him. “He is.” The surgery had gone better than anyone had dared hope. Grandma insisted it was because she’d prayed hard at every sunset and sunrise—*when the Moon Goddess has a keener ear*, according to her.

“Let’s go back to your pack now, Bunny Doc.” I blinked up at him. “To hug Ian.”

My heart swelled. This strong, sarcastic lycan was going to overload my system one day. Warning: *mate sweetness exceeding recommended dosage.*

“Not before you call Big Feet.”

“I can mind-link him,” he grumbled.

“No.” I climbed onto the kitchen stool next to him and folded my arms. “I want to hear you apologize.”

He stared at me for several long seconds before sighing. “Fine…but only because you’re asking me to do it.”

Good enough.

The call went better than I’d expected. Jonathan apologized for accepting Francisca into the pack without consulting Bella and Logan first, and Logan apologized in the most Logan way possible—without an actual *I’m sorry*. But somehow, they both knew they meant the same thing.

They agreed to discuss Francisca without anyone punching walls and Jonathan promised she’d stay in an isolated cabin under guard, far from the packhouse.

Alpha Jonathan reminded me of a captain of a ship weathering life’s storms. Steady. Patient. Quietly carrying everyone else before himself.

He’d been both father and mother to Bella and Logan. The one who comforted Bella through her first period, taught Logan how to shave, organized birthdays, kindly chastised Logan when he broke furniture, and somehow held an entire pack together while his own heart kept breaking.

Yet the more I thought about it, the less everything added up.

Why was Logan a lycan while Bella wasn’t?

Why didn’t anybody ever speak about Daniel?

And Magnus…who exactly was he? Another lycan?

The answers were there, buried somewhere in the past that Logan had spent his entire life trying to outrun.

At some point, their phone conversation turned lighter and moved to a topic I didn’t expect: *me*.

“You got lucky,” Jonathan said when Logan admitted he’d called because I’d asked him to. “Your mate’s lovely. Shame she has that old grump of a father.”

Logan snatched me up, my cheek pressing into his chest as I giggled. “She’s the best bunny.”

“No wonder half your team has a crush on her.”

“They do not, Dad!”

“That’s not what I heard. If I must say my opinion—”

“You must not.”

“—you better keep her close. Some of them might try to steal her, son.”

“Nobody would dare.” His eyes connected with mine. “She’s mine.”

“If you say so.”

“Logan has nothing to worry about,” I said to Jonathan over the phone.

“I’m going to make their training a living hell!” Logan bolted up, the stool falling to the floor. “Bye, Big Feet. Try not to step on any more cats with them big feet of yours.”

He jabbed the red button and ended the call. I was snatched up again by one arm while his other hand picked up the stool. “Sorry, he got under my skin.”

I patted his head. “It’s okay. I won’t let anyone kidnap me but you. And I’m a lycan now too. I’m stronger.”

“Yes, you are.” He let out a slow breath, grimacing. “But please don’t mention kidnapping. I still haven’t recovered from last time.”

“I’m okay. We’re all okay.” I smiled. “Thanks to you—”

He smiled.

“—and Lucy.”

The smile faltered.

Something flickered across his face. “You know, Bunny…I just remembered a little conversation we had some months ago.”

Instinct made me take a step back. I didn’t like that look, like he was about to pounce.

“What?” I asked warily as he started toward me with lazy confidence.

“Nothing.”

I backed around the kitchen table.

He laughed. “Why are you running?”

“I’m not staying close to you when you look at me with *those* eyes!”

Another laugh, deeper this time. “I always look at you with these eyes, Bunny Doc. You just don’t notice.”

“What conversation were you talking about?”

He stopped on the opposite side of the table, planting both palms on the wood. His fingers spread out as he leaned forward. “You once told me you had a secret kink.”

I paled. “I don’t remember that.”

His silver eyes became half-lidded. “So who’s the liar now?”

“Still you.” My hand flew to my mouth, trying—and failing—to hide my ridiculous snorting laugh.

“If you tell me yours…” He straightened and casually clasped his hands behind his head, smiling in a way that suggested it was perfectly safe to leave my wooden fortress. “I’ll tell you mine.”

My eyebrows shot up. “You have one too?”

“Oh, yeah.” His gaze never left mine. “You’re my kink, Bunny Doc. I’m into whatever you’re into.”

The mate bond fluttered. I sensed honesty there but also…a tiny omission. “You *do* have one you like already, Logan. You can tell me.”

“So can you.”

Primal play pulsed to the tip of my tongue. But what if Logan hated it? What if he thought it was strange?

“Hey…” Concern washed through the bond so suddenly it almost startled me. “You don’t have to tell me.” His voice softened. “Tell me when you’re ready…or never. I’m sorry. I’d never pressure you. I was just—”

“A curious reindeer,” I finished.

His smile returned as I crossed the distance between us.

The warmth of his breath mingled with mine. I knew what he wanted, because I wanted it too.

But…

When he leaned in, I rested a hand against his chest. “Wait.”

He immediately stopped, though his eyes dropped to my hand before his fingers gently threaded through mine.

“We should talk about Francisca first,” I said. “I need to understand.”

“Okay.”

Maybe I had misheard him. “What?”

“I said okay.”

He really had.

“But first, let’s get comfortable.” He took my hand and led me to my room.

We stripped off our clothes, and I pulled on an oversized T-shirt while Logan settled for nothing but his boxers. I glared a little when he casually dropped his clothes onto the floor. He caught my look immediately, smiling sheepishly, and scooped everything up into a messy bundle, depositing it on the chair.

That works, I guess.

I slipped under the duvet, welcoming the blanket hug. Logan followed, adjusting me until I was stretched across his chest, his heartbeat steady under my cheek.

I looked up at him. “So?”

“So…what?” His voice had already lowered.

“You know what.”

“Fine, I’ll tell you.” He opened his mouth…but then only kissed me, specifically my neck.

“Logan…” Maybe this had been his plan all along.

“Hmm?”

“Are you going to tell me?”

“Mm-hmm.”

His mouth wandered lower, lingering on my chin.

Definitely his plan.

I couldn’t argue since, when I went to do so, his lips descended on me. One large hand traveled up to cradle my face, while the other caught the hem of my shirt.

Riiiiiip.

“My shirt!”

“It was Lachlan’s.”

I glared at him, but when his bare chest pressed against mine, so warm and so right, I put aside my lecture for later.

“Yvaine…” He uttered my name like a prayer. His lips found mine again, hungry but soft, lingering as though he couldn’t bear to pull away. I tasted his need, his pain.

Logan wasn’t the cheerful reindeer tonight. He was a man hurting.

There was agony in his expression, and as his mate, I *needed* to fill up that decade-sized hole his mother had left behind. I wanted to give him all the affection he’d been denied.

Maybe that was why he clung to me so desperately. He found reassurance in every kiss, every touch, every spark that passed between us.

"I'm here. I'm not leaving," I whispered through our mind-link.

His musk wrapped around me, making me dizzy in a new way, clarity and fog blending together. I could see more of him—the wounds behind the arrogance, the loneliness behind the jokes, the boy hidden behind the man—but the intensity between us blurred everything again.

I didn't know how long we'd been kissing.

"We still need to talk," I reminded him.

He shook his blond head, mouth clamping onto my mark. "Nah."

"Bully." I tugged his hair until he looked at me. What a shock to see his signature smirk—*not*.

"Talk later. I need you now." A husky sound rumbled from his throat. "*Please*, Bunny?"

His mouth on my mark, his body on mine, and the sparks wouldn't be enough to convince me to postpone this important conversation he was avoiding. But that vulnerability, clear and raw in those silver eyes? Unacceptable.

Tonight, Logan wanted somewhere safe. Someone safe. To feel safe. And a part of that involved joking and smiling for him.

So I gave him just that.

"It was all a trick then?" I tried for a stern expression.

It didn't survive his smirk.

"Oh, Bunny, I don't need to trick someone who *wants to* be tricked."

My body hummed in anticipation as my fingers clawed at his boxers, his cock poking out. "I'm not *that* trickable."

He breathed out a laugh on my shoulder. "No?"

"But if I were to be distracted…" I hid my smile. "How would that work?"

"First…" He shifted and sat on his parted knees, his genuine grin a relief. "I'd kiss you, all the way up your legs," he semi-growled, reaching down to do exactly that. "And lick my way up to your thighs."

My toes curled and my glutes clenched as his lips ghosted over my thighs.

"Have you been tricked yet?"

"Nope. What's next?"

He chuckled. “Next, because I’m always fucking starved for you”—Logan licked his lips, his silver eyes boring into mine—“I’d eat this sweet pussy all up. Make it come until *I’m* satisfied that *you’re* satisfied.”

My surprised gasp shifted to messy moans as he did exactly what he said he’d do—eat.

He buried his face in me, tongue wide and ready. His strokes sent shocks rippling through me as his hands held me firmly in place.

My fists gripped the sheets and Logan’s hair as he shifted his face, burrowing deeper into me.

“You’re like a bear!” I mewled, hands cupping my breasts.

He chuckled, tongue fully in. “And you taste just like honey.”

I squeezed my eyes shut when his searching nose ground against my clit. My hips convulsed, legs jerking…until I squirted right into his mouth and he made sure to eat it all, like the glutton he was.

“And finally…” I opened my eyes to find Logan crawling up to me with that satisfied grin. “I’d fuck you with those long legs around me and those pretty eyes on me.”

Breathing hard, a languid sensation was enveloping me.

His voice dropped. “You won’t take your eyes off me, little mate. Not even once.”

My legs wrapped around his hips, my arms wound around his neck, and a small whimper warmed his throat.

“What? Nothing to say? No arguments?” He chuckled breathlessly. “I love it when I take those little lectures right out of you.”

I watched his *DOOM*-tattooed fingers clutch his cock, giving it a single, rough pull.

“Do you want it, Bunny?”

I licked my lips, grinning. “Keep it for yourself.”

“But I want you to keep it.” He placed a kiss on my chin. “To keep *me*.” Our chests touched. “It’s all yours.” Our noses brushed. “*I’m* all yours.”

I sighed. “Okay. Now I’m fully tricked.”

He slipped into me easily. Logan looked at me tenderly, thrusting back and forth with languid strokes.

We gazed into each other’s eyes the whole time. It was a whole new level of intimacy between us.

My body thrummed with pleasure as the mate bond electrified me. My thoughts fogged as our hearts and groans synchronized. There were no

troubles anymore, just me and my mate feeling, kicking the world with its pains out.

Logan pulled out, breathing ragged, and choked the base of his cock, grimacing at its engorged base, thick and swollen. Male canids had an erectile tissue structure at the base of the penis, the *bulbus glandis*, and, during mating, this tissue expanded with blood, mechanically locking the male inside the female. A…*knot*? Could that be a real knot?

I forgot all about it when he shifted and flipped me on my hands and knees to face the mirror.

His big hands palmed my calves, my thighs, my breasts.

“Fuck, Bunny,” he breathed out. “Look at you. So damn flawless. I couldn’t have dreamed of you even if I tried.” My cheeks burned as he caught my gaze in the mirror. “Spread your legs wide. Let me see that perfect pussy.”

My legs fell open and he exhaled, a long sound that blew over my clit.

“Logan…” I gasped.

Glancing down between my legs, I saw his throat working as he licked and drank from me, his Adam’s apple bobbing.

The sight of his desperation was enough. My orgasm crashed into me, my knees swaying, but he held me, working me through it.

Once he was done, Logan bent over me and lifted us.

“Look at you.” He gripped my chin, shifting my gaze to my reflection. Grasping my hips, he shifted and the ridges of his cock rubbed against my clit. “All drenched for me.”

I moaned. “More, Logan!”

“More what?”

My answer was to throw my hips back and burrow him into me in one slippery move. His shocked groan filled my ear, his body trembling as he resisted the urge to finish right then and there. That knot swelled inside me again.

I pressed closer, pulsing around him, never breaking eye contact in the mirror.

Our lips connected in a hungry kiss as he rocked into me harder, the bed creaking faster.

“I was…made…to be…inside…you,” Logan moaned, his words matching the deep thrusts.

Locked together, my body plastered to his, his arms holding me, and his every muscle rock hard, he was desperate for me, like he had never touched me. His need was something beyond craving, beyond anything I'd ever experienced; he needed me to remain sane and I was here for him.

"Little mate," he groaned, husky and deep. "Come again for me…and then fall asleep in my arms."

"Yes!" I cried out. That dominant side was almost too much, but perfect regardless.

When the thick base of his cock locked him to me, white heat and blue lightning crashed through my body, and just as he'd asked, I climaxed and fell asleep in his arms.

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

LOGAN

The moon ruled the sky with an army of stars. The night was alive with crickets singing, the calls of owls, foxes, and something larger.

This was my favorite hour, as was theirs.

Maybe because I was a predator too, lonely in the darkness from which I had been spawned, destined to wander alone.

My knuckles whitened where they were curled around the edge of the bed.

You aren't destined to be alone if you have a mate. A voice. The voice of hope.

Wereball had always been a whim, a rebellion against what I really was—a beast made to roam, never satisfied by the company of lesser beings like the werewolves.

Lycans were meant to be alone.

Sure, I had Yvaine, but I could never take her with me. And usually I didn't want to leave either.

Though, there was a sick part of me that did.

I'd spent years burying that instinct, and when I finally thought I was fine, my long-lost mother showed up out of nowhere and stained my life all over again. She was a reminder that my lycan nature would eventually demand the same loneliness, the same wandering, the same cold distance that had consumed her.

I hated that woman for coming to my home, to the place she had always tried to flee. I hated how her presence dragged memories from graves I'd spent years digging. I hated her for being a lycan…and giving me this curse. And I hated her for coming near Yvaine, the most important part of me.

A small sound stirred behind me. I glanced over my shoulder.

There she was. My little mate, sleeping peacefully, arms wrapped around the pillow I'd tucked against her.

She was wearing *my* shirt; Lachlan's lay torn on the floor.

A satisfied smirk tugged on my lips. *I'll send him a picture.*

That bittersweet feeling returned. *She has brothers. You don't. Not anymore.*

Daniel. My hero. The boy who had climbed trees when I got stuck, pulled me from rivers when I fell into them, and made me believe he could save me from anything—even myself.

Francisca had been human before Magnus found her. He marked and mated her the same day they met, without being fated mates. She had turned into a lycan, just like what happened to Yvaine with my mark.

Except for one tiny difference: Francisca spent six months in a coma, nearly dying while fully pregnant with Daniel. When she woke up, she was different. She had a baby she hadn't known she was expecting, and Magnus was gone. There were months where she looked for him until she fled to America. Then she met Dad, her real mate, and Bella and I happened.

Only Dad and I knew the truth—Francisca was a lycan. Everyone else believed she was simply a spoiled human who couldn't stand pack life.

Only *I* inherited the lycan curse. Lucky Bellatrix.

"Rudy?"

Calmness poured over me. My mood, dark as the night, became as bright as the moon. She was my *moon*, chasing away the monsters in my head. The urge to roam, to leave and disappear, dimmed. For now.

"Where are you?" The blankets shuffled; the mattress shifted.

A small smile climbed my lips. "I'm here, Bunny."

I bent and stuffed my face into her neck, inhaling that soothing smell. My hands glided over her tiny waist to her back under the large T-shirt.

God, these curves fit so perfectly in my hands, against my chest, and… with the rest. When something stirred, I exhaled, trying to calm myself.

“What time is it?” Her voice was hoarse as she turned to look out the window. “Why did you let me sleep?” Bunny sounded annoyed now. “You said we were going to talk.”

Fair accusation.

The issue was, I didn’t want to waste my present talking about my stupid past.

The past was just that—past. Gone. And, apart from my fucked-up mother and the murderous beast within me, I’d had a great childhood.

Mostly.

There were a thousand better ways to spend my time, and fucking my mate was one of them. Plus, I preferred when *she* was the one telling me stories, all her memories happy, full of warmth and laughter.

I dove back into bed and gathered her into my arms. “*Weeeell*, I couldn’t let my bunny doc miss her beauty sleep.” I patted her head, grinning when she glared up at me. “Your brain is too important.”

Huffing, she tried to wiggle free.

Not a chance. My arms tightened around her. *Ah.* The sweetness of her flooded the mate bond, warming something inside me that had been cold all night.

“Logan, listen. Do you want to talk about your mo—”

“Not really.”

“Oh…” Disappointment rippled through the mate bond. “Fine. I’m sorry.”

I sighed and rolled us over until I was staring at the ceiling.

“I can feel what you’re feeling now.” I swallowed. “And you’re disappointed.”

“I am disappointed, Logan.”

Ouch. She could’ve thrown a vase at my head and it would’ve hurt less.

“But not in you.” She sat up, crossing her legs beneath the sheets.

“Then?” I pushed myself up against the headboard.

“I’m disappointed that someone let you down to the point that you don’t even want to talk about it with *me*. Your mate. The person you’re supposed to be able to tell anything to.”

Rubbing my face, I exhaled.

“You’re right. And you are that person. I’ll tell you…” Her expression softened. “But it isn’t a pretty story, Bunny. It’s boring…and sad. I’ve been

sad for long enough already and I sure don't want you sad because of it, too. Are you sure you want to know?"

When she nodded, eager, I smiled and leaned in to kiss her…but her palm flew over my mouth. I raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, come on! Stop using sex to distract me!" She stared at me with disapproval, her arms crossing over her chest. "You can tuck that beastly appendage back into your pants!"

I blinked. "Um, what?"

"Because there will be no more sex until we finish this conversation, Logan."

I stared at her, mouth hanging open…then burst out laughing. "You are so cute! Oh, Goddess. I already knew you were, but I didn't think you could be even cuter."

She opened her mouth to argue, but I kissed her, her tiny moan slipping between us.

Yvaine slapped my hand when I squeezed her butt. "Logan! Stop."

I had no intention of stopping. Life was too short and I needed most of it to love and tease this woman as much as I could.

"I don't think I like your compliments." She snorted, brushing her hair from her face. "First, you tell me I'm too tall so you need a ladder. Then you call my dick a beastly appendage." Shaking my head, I hid my smirk. "You know what?"

"What?" She pursed her lips.

"The appendage is offended."

Her eyes widened.

"And it won't be giving you any more attention until you apologize."

"Logan!" She was bright red now.

I laughed softly, then brushed my knuckles over her cheek. "Hey. I'm kidding." *Mostly*—the mental image of her apologizing directly to my *appendage* was going to be a problem. I took a deep breath. "Let's talk and get it over with."

Then I can kiss all of you afterward.

She let out a long, relieved exhale and nodded. I started with Francisca and her background.

"Bella and I used to come home from school to our parents yelling. Or, more accurately, Francisca was. Every day was a different reason. The

house felt too small. The pack hated her. Dad was never around enough for her liking, too busy being a father and an Alpha."

I shook my head, sickened by the woman that created me. "When I wasn't at our Gamma's with Killian and Callum, Dad took Bella and me to Grandma's or to the playwood, our werewolf playground. He drove us to school and picked us up. Made sure we ate proper food, told us to brush our teeth. We at least had one great parent, because Francisca never cared. All her attention always belonged to Daniel…or to whatever man she was fucking that week."

I glanced down to see Yvaine's hand had slipped over mine. She didn't say anything, just held it and waited.

"For months, I watched a procession of men leave my parents' room. She didn't even bother hiding them. It was always the same story—Dad bleeding on the floor, me patching him up, doctors coming and going, and ending with him making peace with her. All she had to do was cry and apologize. It was pathetic. I tried to stop her from making Dad bleed and fought her lovers away."

Yvaine's face drained of color. "What happened?"

"Francisca got furious. Said I was a problematic child that wanted her attention. After that, when she had her lovers at home, I ended up locked up in the attic so I wouldn't *hurt her friends*," I snarled, airquoting. "She'd sedate me to keep me up there for days on end. Once she left me there for a full week because she had someone home every day. I was six."

"That's terrible! Where was your dad? And your grandma?" Her tears soaked the sheet as I held her to me.

"Hospital. His heart almost collapsed from her cheating. Grandma was with Grandpa, who was sick at the time. When he passed, she was…gone for a while."

"But how could you be without food for—"

"Oh, Killian and Callum snuck in and brought food. Mostly waffles. All they could steal from the packhouse."

She was sobbing now, watching me with those beautiful blue eyes. "That's why you love waffles so much?"

I nodded, unable to speak.

She cried, holding onto me as I held her.

"We can finish another time—" I started.

“No.” She lifted her head, swiping her shirt over her eyes, sniffling. “Tell me about Daniel. Lucien told me that he was hurting Bella—”

“That’s a lie.” I shook my head, growling. And it was *my* growl, not Lucien’s. “Daniel was always there for me. He was a lycan, like me. He showed me things. We shared. We were the same.”

My breathing grew heavier, my heartbeat as crazy as my beast.

“The day Daniel died…I also lost my father.”

“Jonathan?”

I stared at the ceiling. “Francisca left for good after everything with Daniel. Bella was devastated, but Dad…” I swallowed. “Dad had to be put in a coma. His heart almost gave out when she rejected him as his mate. Grandma, still mourning Grandpa, took care of us from then on.”

“I was nine when Dad finally woke up. That was when we started living normally. No more Francisca.”

Something wet landed on my hand. A tear. My mate’s. I reached over and stroked her cheek. “No more crying.”

“Why not?”

“Because it changes nothing.” I lay down, turning onto my side and pulling her against me. “I cried when I felt Lucien hurting my brother. And he still died. If only I’d been able to control him…” I closed my eyes. “I still dream about that day.”

Her hand found mine. “Lucien acts on instinct. And he was a pup, just like you were. He lost control because someone was hurting his little sister.” More tears slipped down her cheeks. “Maybe Daniel tried to hurt Lucien too and Lucien just didn’t…tell you?”

“He did not!”

She flinched in my arms and I mouthed an apology, cursing myself.

“Okay. Fine. But maybe Daniel was hurting Bella when you weren’t there and *she* never told you. Maybe, deep down, you knew something was wrong.”

“Daniel wouldn’t have. She was his fucking sister.” My voice broke into something harsher. “And even if he did…bully her, which he didn’t, that wasn’t a reason to kill him! He was a lonely kid. He didn’t have his real father. He had a crazy mother that only doted on him because he reminded her of Magnus.”

Her next words shook my reality. “But, Logan, don’t forget that Lucien is part of you. Just like you’re part of him.”

I went still while inside, beliefs and truths collided.

“You two aren’t completely separate beings. If Lucien was driven to kill his half-brother, something terrible must have triggered that reaction. Something beyond simple bullying.”

I stopped breathing; my heart stopped with it.

Could it be?

Had I blamed my animal side all these years for something *I* had done?

Had I hidden the trauma of killing my brother behind the convenient explanation of losing control?

If Lucien and I were one, it meant that…I’d killed my half-brother too.

I shut my eyes and the darkness answered with memories.

My palms stained with blood, my heart crumbling.

Francisca’s screams as she pulled out her hair.

Bella crying.

My brother’s lifeless body as I held him to me, his throat sliced open for the whole world to see.

“Logan, you don’t have to process all of this now.”

Our eyes met. Only then did I realize tears were running down my face. And hers.

We stayed like that for a long time, long enough for the night to fade toward morning.

We rode through my trauma together, talking until there was nothing left inside me.

“Daniel wasn’t supposed to die,” I whispered. “He was only a child. Surrounded by people who didn’t accept him.”

“I know.”

“He was misunderstood. He didn’t mean to hurt Bella, I’m sure of it.”

“I know.”

“He had his own trauma. His own things to carry.”

“I’m sure he did.”

I kept talking. Pulling out skeleton after skeleton I’d convinced myself I had buried. Yvaine stayed and met every single one.

“Why don’t we ask Lucien what really happened that day?”

I shook my head.

I wasn’t ready, not after all the years I’d spent blaming him.

“You may have lost your brother under horrible circumstances. You may have had a hard start. But you still have time to reconnect with yourself.”

She squeezed my hand. “With Lucien.”

I scoffed. “I don’t think so. We are different. We’ve always been separate.”

But then I thought about all the times I’d let him out because Yvaine had asked me to. About the people he’d saved. Yvaine. Amaia. Maybe Bella. People who would be dead without him.

“There’s always time.” She kissed my hand. “And Lucien adores you.”

My heart stumbled.

“What exactly are you proposing? A picnic between me and the beast?”

“No, but—”

“A shopping trip? A nice stroll downtown while he kills everyone?”

“Of course not. Everyone would stare at what’s mine.” She winked and I laughed despite myself.

I reached for her, but she was already climbing out of bed. “I have a better solution.”

My eyes zeroed in on her bare legs. “Which is?”

Yvaine looked at me, twirling a lock of her gorgeous hair. “You have to say yes to this one. And I know they could really help you. Besides…I’ve kind of already organized it…”

I already knew where this was going, but I pretended I didn’t. “*They?*”

Her hands landed on her hips. “Archie and Uncle Mirko! My uncle knows how to connect wolf and man. There’s no one better than him and his Beta, trust me! And Archie already said he’d help us!”

My heart skipped a beat at the word *us*; my problems were her problems now.

I sighed, watching her practically glow with excitement. This woman who had already changed my life had somehow become my world. If I wouldn’t do it for myself, I’d do it for her. “Fine. We can go and see—”

She squealed and threw her arms around me.

“But they’re not lycans,” I pointed out, stroking her back. “How would they know anything about this?”

“I don’t want to speak too soon,” she added, eyes sparkling, “but I suspect they have a lycan in their territory.”

That snagged my attention.

But me and Lucien reconnecting?

Pfft.

Good luck with that.

I had no choice, though. Saying no to Yvaine was biologically impossible for me.

And, if I was being honest, part of me was curious about the infamous Black Devil pack—rumored to have mateless cursed wolves, their ancestors having destroyed pack after pack. They used to say where Black Devil passed over the land, no grass would grow again. I also wanted to learn more about Yvaine's childhood friends, Aurora and Archie…and this lycan hiding there.

Who could they be?

All this talking had made me thirsty. I reached for the bottle of water on the nightstand…only to choke.

A tiny hand had landed on a certain part of me that had developed a remarkable lack of discipline around my mate. And squeezed.

"Yvaine!" I coughed, my balled hand in my mouth.

She smiled like the Cheshire Cat. "I really think my favorite offended appendage deserves some special attention."

I watched her lick her lips, her intentions as clear as the water I'd just sputtered. "And I want to test if my nasal-respiration technique works under…*so much pressure*. Strictly clinical."

I exhaled shakily. "No, Bunny, you don't have to." *Please, Bunny, do it.*

"Take off your pants, Rudolph."

I adjusted my cock. "My pants?"

"They're definitely in the way."

Her fingers walked lightly over my thighs. *Oh Goddess.*

I sat there, throbbing, as she sank to her knees in front of me in my boxers.

The sight of my bunny doc on her knees for me…

Damn.

I was so hard my pre-cum leaked down the side of my dick.

With anyone else, the old me would have treated this as nothing more than another way to forget myself for a while, but this was Yvaine.

My love.

My bunny.

Her fingers pinched my waistband. "Logan…?"

"Hm?" I blinked. "Right. Pants." Fucking hard to think, considering all my blood had fled south. "Sometimes your orders are easy to follow."

Her eyes flicked up. “Too bad you ignore them most of the time.” *That sultry little voice.*

Like a good boy, I made quick work of getting rid of my sweats and kicked them aside.

Her hand drifted lower, exactly where I wanted it. *Fuck*, I almost blew inside my boxers that she tugged down in one swift motion until they pooled around my ankles.

My cock sprang free, twitching under the attention of her beautiful eyes.

“Mmm,” she hummed appreciatively.

I moaned. “It’s all for you. You’ve…got me all…worked up.”

She wrapped her hand around me and rubbed the head of my shaft against her parted lips.

I groaned, never wanting this moment to end.

One of my hands gripped the edge of the bed while the other cupped the back of her head as her tongue tickled the sensitive underside of my cock. Yvaine gazed up at me with mock sternness.

“Hands off, *baby*,” she admonished me.

Goddess, the way she talks to me! I wanted to just pin her to the bed and fuck her into submission. Instead, I held onto the bed as her mouth continued to languidly stroke my cock.

When her lips parted and she took a large portion into her mouth, my eyes rolled back and I fell on to my elbows. “Oh…my…fucking…Goddess.”

The suction and the warmth of her mouth and, most of all, the knowledge that this was *her*, my soulmate, reduced me to a pleading, pathetic mess. She owned me completely.

Her breathtaking, slightly teary eyes stared up at me, watching me as I moaned in pleasure. With one hand on my balls, the other wrapped around my cock—twitching and throbbing like never before—she sucked me deeper, twisting and gliding.

“Fuck,” I groaned, sinking into the mattress. I arched into her mouth as she found a rhythm.

The thousands of blowjobs I had received in my life were erased from my head (and my cock). Completely. The sparks around my shaft were as magical as this woman.

“Fuck, *baby*, holy fucking shit.” The wood of the bed frame cracked underneath my grip as her pace drove me fucking wild.

She bit me, teeth grazing my shaft, and I let out a choked growl. *She fucking bit my cock, and I fucking loved it*!

I looked down at her through hooded eyes as she stared up at me with an evil smirk. “Don’t call me *baby*,” she said against the tip of my cock.

“Sorry,” was all I could choke out, needing more of her.

“You’re adorable, all worked up,” she teased, breathing on my tip.

I opened my mouth for a smart comeback, but my response was cut short when she plunged me down her mouth, burying *a lot* of me. The feeling of her throat around me…

A sound I had never made in my life escaped my parted lips as my head fell back onto the mattress.

“Don’t…stop…” I whimpered.

She didn’t. She took more and more like a goddess until she let me pop out of her mouth with a laugh. “Ready to see what else I learned from medical school?” She drew in a big breath and cracked her jaw.

I blinked. “What…?”

My girl shifted, lining herself up precisely, and then she did it. Eyes watering, drool everywhere, and gagging beautifully, she descended and took *all* of me. Her throat seized around me, delivering the final blow of my destruction. As soon as she popped off, I clutched the base of my cock and I came right then, all over my stomach, standing no chance against her. A low growl started deep in my throat, rising in volume, and that weird thing grew again at the base of my cock.

I’d long since accepted that nobody would manage to fit me.

But apparently, I was mated to the deep-throating queen.

The queen pulled back with a smug little grin. “I seem to have found a good way to efficiently shut you up.”

Yeah. She fucking had.

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CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

YVAINE

Ever since we completed the mating, Logan embraced his new mission in life…relentlessly.

It didn't matter what time it was or what I was doing. I could be in the middle of a presentation on infectious brain diseases or having dinner with my parents, and somehow, my mate would find a way to remind me that he had a dirty mind.

It wasn't that he was pushy about sex, though he'd never refuse if I initiated. No. It was all the *commentary*. He started through our mind-link and, whenever I shut that down, went through text.

> Bunny Doc, I found your underwear. I hope you weren't fond of it, because from now on, it's mine.

> Bunny Doc, I'm never changing the sheets again. Never. Not until you come back. Wink, wink.

> Bunny Doc, dinner tonight after your shift? This time, I'll actually feed you with food. Wink.

> Bunny Doc, this bun I'm eating reminds me of your cute, soft butt.

> Bunny Doc, my ears are sad today. They miss your screams.

And on. And on.

We were also unable to stay apart for more than a day. It was too painful, but also magical and a little frightening. Logan now had his own space in my closet, and I had the keys to his apartment.

His sister had become friends with Amaia and Makena, though I couldn't say I was fond of Bella's friends. Most had crushed on Logan at some point; some still did. Zeus continued to dislike Logan, the feeling mutual. And as for Lachlan and Logan…well, they had reached something resembling tolerance. Lachlan had stopped calling him Masturbator, though Logan still called him Freckles.

Logan had also started joining us for Sunday dinners at my pack. Afterward, he and Lachlan would watch a game with Dad, who had become so accustomed to Logan's presence that he'd asked where Logan was if he didn't show up.

Progress.

The same couldn't be said about my twin and Bella. Whenever those two happened to be in the same place, they'd act as if someone had started a fire and flee in opposite directions.

And Archie? He told me he'd started dreaming about his mate, though he couldn't see her face. Every time he got close, she'd run away from him.



THAT AFTERNOON, I WENT TO VISIT MRS. TINA AT HER PLACE.

Since Scotland, I'd only seen the sweet lady once at the pediatric center where she also volunteered. She had just returned from a cruise with a group of women, all over seventy and single.

Mrs. Tina lived in the middle of the woods, in a little maple-brown wooden house with green shutters and the veranda of my dreams. Wildflowers spilled from every planter and climbed the railings in pinks and yellows. A silver-painted swing like the one in *Gone with the Wind* hung from the porch ceiling, swaying gently.

After her mate had passed away, Mrs. Tina left the pack to live on neutral lands, away from pack politics and mind-links. She claimed the

woods were quieter, but I suspected she just enjoyed having nobody around, visiting her family when she wanted to.

“Oh, my star! I have bad news! Terrible news! It’s a catastrophe!” That was how Mrs. Tina welcomed me. Her hair was dyed black that day, since she was mourning. “My grandson found a mate.” *Ah, mourning that.* “Some short, good-for-nothing girl! She doesn’t even play wereball, can you believe that? What was Moon Goddess thinking?”

“I don’t play wereball, Mrs. Tina. It’s not a requirement.” I chuckled, curling my hands around my mug of jasmine tea that she’d given me. We sat in her kitchen, surrounded by cream-colored cabinets, brass handles, pale-blue tiles behind the stove, and little ceramic wolves lined up along the windowsill. Copper pots hung above the island, and jars of flour, sugar, cinnamon, and tea crowded a shelf in mismatched glass containers. Sunlight spilled across the wooden counters, making the whole place feel like a warm hug.

“Oh, please. You’re an exception.” She winked. “With volunteering and all of your studies, I wonder how you find time to sleep!”

She bent over and pulled one of her famous apple pies from the oven. I jumped up to help her with the tray.

“Why don’t you like this girl? Have you met her?”

“No.” She licked her finger before grabbing a pie cutter.

“Did she say something rude?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Did she do something bad to your grandson?”

“Oh, no.” The scent of cinnamon flooded my nose. My watering mouth almost made me miss what Mrs. Tina mumbled next. “But she isn’t you.”

Here we go again. “Mrs. Tina, I’ve also found a mate. You know him for sure! He’s the son of—”

She waved me off. “You’d be perfect for each other. Perfect! Trust me, girl, in my past life, I was the Moon Goddess. I know a match when I see one!”

I didn’t bother pointing out that Moon Goddess was immortal or that, according to everything Mrs. Tina told me, her grandson possessed a personality that could never match mine: arrogant, spoiled, narcissistic, womanizer.

“Maybe you should meet the girl. She might surprise you.”

Mrs. Tina scoffed. “My dear grandson will walk all over the poor thing, crushing her with his exuberant personality as he does with everyone else.”

“That’s not a good quality. To walk over people.” Carpets made of real people flashed through my head and I blamed Killian and Logan for the horror movie we watched the other day. Next time it was my turn, and I had my four-hour brain surgery to watch. See if they have nightmares after. All bragging about nothing scaring them.

She handed me a humungous slice of heaven. “He needs a smart woman who can keep up with him, not some little mouse who lets him do whatever he wants! You know my boy still receives gifts from his fans? A mate shouldn’t allow that!” She added whipped cream to my plate.

“And don’t get mad but…” Guilt crossed her face as she glanced toward the window. “I invited him over, so you two could finally meet. But what kind of woman allows her mate to see someone else?”

Well, certainly not me.

“He didn’t even tell his mate because she never asked him about it!” Mrs. Tina scoffed, peeling off her apron as I shoved a generous spoon into my happy mouth. “My boy said she’s jealous.” A condescending laugh slipped from her.

I could understand the jealousy part. Sometimes Logan’s fans made me want to fetch my Scottish arrows and go hunting.

“Of course she didn’t ask if he was meeting someone else! Who would ask that, Mrs. Tina?” A tiny part of me suggested that this sounded like something Logan might do—omit. “I think he should tell his mate and explain why he felt the need to see her.”

“Maybe.” She folded her apron and placed it on the counter. “But my Lolo is so handsome! It’s not implausible to think you two might get along!”

“Who?” I blinked. Did she say *Lolo*? Even if she had, it could mean nothing.

Couldn’t it?

“Lolo. My grandson.”

“Mate,” Ruby hissed as my skin tingled.

No.

“Mrs. Tina…” My voice came out carefully. “You aren’t related to Alpha Jonathan, are you?”

“What do you mean?”

Relief washed over me.

“He’s my son.” My spoon froze halfway to my mouth. “I don’t advertise it, since you know how it is with Comet. They don’t particularly like Dark Diamond and—”

I stopped listening.

Ruby clawed toward the surface, desperate to find that mate of ours. And maybe lock him in a cage for…*years*, until he was old and less pretty.

I should have been ecstatic—Mrs. Tina was Logan’s grandmother and fate had handed me another piece of him before I even knew him—but I wasn’t.

One thought drowned out everything else: He was coming here to see another girl.

“*Star*? Are you okay?” Her palm caressed my forehead. Oh, I must have been *boiling*.

My gaze found her worried one. “Mrs. Tina, Logan, the captain of your wereball team—”

“My grandson!” She brightened like a Christmas shop in December.

“He’s my mate.”

Then I smelled it, the scent designed to make me lightheaded.

“Gran,” Logan called, “I don’t have much time. If my mate—” His voice trailed into a strangled squeak when our eyes met through the window.

There he was.

That mate of mine. More dashing than ever in black pants and a wereball tank top. Golden brows framed eyes that were usually naughty but were now wide.

Good.

He sauntered into the little home, opening the door with his shoulder. “Yvaine!” He huffed a nervous laugh.

“Moon Goddess!” The old lady practically died and resurrected right in front of us with her shock. “You’ve made me the happiest wolf alive!”

She squeezed me, droning on and on about how beautiful and smart our pups would be, how she’d known all along we would be perfect together, yadda, yadda, yadda. I was fuming; I could almost hear my hair sizzling. Logan? He dabbed a tissue over his sweaty temple and paled further and further.

“You were coming here to meet a girl? Without telling me?” I said icily the moment Mrs. Tina went to get meatballs, Logan’s favorite childhood food.

Unbelievable. Intolerable.

“Technically…” Logan raised both hands defensively. “But it’s not what it looks like. I was just trying to placate Gran. And how amazing this chick turned out to be you!”

He was lucky that the mate bond carried the truth beneath his frantic explanation. *Still.*

“Lucien didn’t want to go,” Lucien whined through our mind-link. *“Lucien tried to stop Human. Lucien only loves Mate! Lucien promise!”*

“Shut up, Lucien,” Logan blurted aloud.

“Don’t talk badly to Lucy!” I hissed. “Actually, I’ll only talk to him from now on.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to upset you—”

“I am upset.” I walked back and forth in the tiny room. “Why do you always have to hide things, Logan? I thought we were past that!”

“I didn’t mean to make you angry.”

“I’m not angry, I’m disappointed!”

Mrs. Tina waltzed back in carrying several frozen bags. “Here you go! I made a lot for when you visit, just the way you like them, Lolo!”

Logan shut his eyes and cursed under his breath. “I can’t believe you’re Teresa.”

“No, Lolo!” Mrs. Tina laughed. “She’s my star! Teresa is the other sweetheart I work with. Our human friend.” She turned to me, saying more softly, “I’m sorry for not wanting to meet you, Star. Had I known it was you…”

“Star?” He blinked, and understanding dawned. “Gran has been calling you Star this whole time but I always thought the girl she wanted me to meet was Teresa! How was I supposed to know it was you? Comet has thousands of people, and the hospital where you two volunteer at is huge!”

True, but that doesn’t justify him coming here to meet who he thought was a random woman!

I slapped him, hard, and received a grunt. My new lycan strength had its advantages.

He rubbed his cheek. “Come on, Bunny—”

“Lolo, we eat rabbits! I made a stew just last night. Would you like to take some home, my dear Star?” Mrs. Tina beamed at me and I nodded at her with the best smile I could muster.

“Grandma, can you give us a minute alone? You’ve done enough damage already.”

“Of course!” Her eyes widened. “I need to light candles and thank the Moon Goddess!”

And just like that, she was gone. I loved the old woman, who was strangely similar to my own grandmother. The only problem I had with her right now was her grandson.

“Have I told you how radiant you look today?” Logan approached me with caution, like I was a dangerous animal. Maybe I was.

“No.”

“Well, today you’re just so radia—”

“Oh, save it!”

He tried to hug me.

I stepped away.

“Stop using the sparks to calm me down!”

“But I missed you today.”

“Not that much since you were planning to see some other girl!”

“That girl is you!”

Scooping me up, he settled me on the counter, pulling my legs around him and burying his face into my neck. I huffed, my palms landing on his broad shoulders and pushing him back.

“You know how much I don’t give a damn about other girls…” He looked up, hitting me with a dazzling smile. “Why would I, when I already have the best one?”

Not good enough.

Ruby’s growl came straight from my lips. My lycan wasn’t happy that our mate had done this. He should have told me. Told us.

“You know what? I’ll take the medical volunteering position with the werewolf league! Yes. I’ll *professionally* touch injured males!”

“Professionally touch…” he repeated incredulously. “To hell with that!”

“*You* go to hell!”

“Careful, Bunny Doc…” His hand spanned my throat, stroking it with the pad of his thumb. “You might be a lycan now, but I’m still the Terminator.”

That did it.

In a flash, Ruby burst forward.

My frame grew. My face lengthened into a muzzle. Hazelnut-brown fur sprouted. Cute ceramic plates scattered on Mrs. Tina's immaculate floor.

Ruby seized Logan by the shoulders and, without giving him time to react, plunged her fangs into his pretty neck, on the opposite side from his first mark.

"Since you have so many females around you, I'm marking you twice," she hissed, fangs still buried in his flesh.

"Oh, yeah," Logan moaned. "Mark me as many times as you want, little mate."

I could feel his bulge. *Maybe we should mark him there too.*

Another helpless sound left his parted lips, his head lolling onto Ruby's shoulder.

"Now the mark can be seen from every angle." Ruby withdrew her fangs and licked her lips, satisfied and proud, supporting the weight of Logan who was passed out in our arms.

Who's the real Terminator *now, Rudolph?*

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

YVAINE

"I can't believe you volunteer with my gran!" Logan complained later that night. We'd made peace after he regained consciousness. "She's been blabbering about you all this time."

He leaned over to kiss the side of my head. I grinned, peering at his fresh new mark. This one was red, making it quite vivid against his thick skin. Marking him twice had felt fantastic, but being a lycan felt even better.

As a werewolf, I'd never been particularly into wolf life. I was decent at tracking, but I'd never possessed an extraordinary sense of smell. My fighting skills were purely defensive. I'd always been more interested in knowledge, in healing, than embracing my wolf side. Letting Zelda out had been mostly a chore, like remembering to water your favorite plant—easy to forget when life got busy.

This felt different. This felt right.

It was like I was born to be a lycan.

"And all this time, Mrs. Tina has been telling me what a player you are," I teased, though it was true.

"Traitor," Logan scoffed, depositing his heavy arm around my shoulders as we walked toward his apartment. "You're so hot when you're angry. I should annoy you more often."

"And I should mark you more often."

The look he threw my way was downright *feral*. "Deal."

With a huff, I pinched his side.

Part of me still demanded more justice. After all, he had visited Mrs. Tina to meet a *girl*; little did it matter that I'd ended up *being* that girl. Still, the mate bond displayed everything I needed to know. His thoughts, his feelings—honest, genuine, and completely devoted to me.

A thought crossed my mind, and I winced.

"What's wrong?" Logan could also read my heart, just as I could read his. He grasped both my hands in his, bending to look at me. "Come on. Tell me. I know I can fix it."

My heart ached. "Logan…if we'd listened to Mrs. Tina…" I trailed off, gazing up into his concerned eyes. "We could have met months ago. We could have had more *time*."

My mate blinked, clearly not expecting that.

His hands cupped my cheeks. "Well, Bunny Doc, I love that fate slowly revealed you to me. Little by little." He winked, and his smile swept away my sadness.

"You're right. I needed a couple of months to prepare myself before having *you* as a mate."

He snorted but pecked my lips.

"Really, don't be sad." His forehead rested against mine. "I can't stand your sadness. That's how we met, and when I think about it…" His mouth curved. "It's totally original. Just like us."

I chuckled at that naughty expression, kissing him a little more.



LOGAN SCOOPED ME UP INTO HIS ARMS, SETTLING ME ON HIS LAP, BURYING his face in my neck. "*Ahhh*, paradise!"

"Friend in the room!" Killian shouted without looking away from the screen as he played *Call of Duty*, fingers tapping maniacally across the controller as he massacred virtual enemies, a bowl of popcorn mixed with M&Ms on his lap. Skeleton Man seemed to have everything he needed in life.

“No, Logan.” I wiggled free. It was rude to sit on his lap when Killian was here. “I want to spend quality time with Killian.”

“Fuck that.”

“Oh, come on, babe. Don’t be jealous,” Killian drawled.

With a long sigh, Logan let me go, leaned over to kiss my neck, then belly flopped onto the other couch. He fished out a mini waffle packet from his pocket.

“Sweet Pea, did I tell you Spiky Junior just bloomed?”

“No, you didn’t tell me.” I giggled. “What color are the flowers?”

“Yellow.” Killian scrunched his eyebrows. “You sure I don’t need to clean it up? It looks dusty.”

“I’ll bring you a cactus cozy next time. It helps with the dust.”

“Really? Do you have a cozy for pears too?”

“Only apples but it can work for pears!” I drummed my fingers. “I can’t wait for you to find your other half and show her your new cactus plantation, Killy.”

“You mean your martyr half?” Logan commented, lips curled into a smirk as he threw a waffle into his mouth. He was on his second pack.

“Logan, don’t be mean.” Killian had told me in secret that he missed his plants back at the pack, so I had given him a part of Spiky, my cactus. Seemed like a safe choice since all his previous plants had died after he forgot to water them.

My eyes shifted from the game to the second controller.

“You know how to play?” Killian asked, a massive grin on his face.

“I’ve tried once or twice,” I said vaguely. Little did he know I’d been playing with Lachlan my whole life.

I snatched the controller he dangled in front of me. “I’ll go easy on you, Sweet Pea.”

Same, Gentle Eyes.

At some point, Callum, Tank Man, Greg, and more hulks sauntered into the apartment. Noisy, chatty, and enormous—typical wereball players.

“Luna!”

“Comet girl!”

“Yo!”

They greeted me with a variety of nicknames before spreading throughout the living room. Some fetched beers, while others carried Korean takeout.

Logan shifted onto his back, hands behind his head. “Where have you douchebags been?”

I loved watching Logan with his friends. He always wore that small smile, a tiny curve of his lips that made him look at ease. Happy. Himself.

“Jeez, your ears are so big, I can’t see the screen,” Killian told Callum as he dropped onto the couch next to him.

“Big ears mean big intelligence,” Callum replied smoothly. “That’s why yours are so tiny.”

“Leave some decibels for the rest of us, C!” Tank Man shouted, the octopus tattooed on his head wrinkling as he laughed.

The twins continued trading insults as we played. The rest of the guys chatted while Logan ordered more food.

“Yeah, she marked me twice. See?” He pointed proudly, showing off his new mark to everybody. “Here…and here.”

“Consider a muzzle too, Yvaine,” Callum told me, shielding his pizza slice from Killian.

“She can leash me anytime,” Logan drawled.

They demolished every scrap of food like the ravenous wolves they were, their good moods contagious. Maybe one day Lachlan could join and I could have all of them together. More quality time.

“So, Luna, how’s your bro?” Tank Man asked. “Does he need some tissues?” *Then again…maybe quality time altogether isn’t possible.*

“Maybe he’d have a better chance in the Scottish league.” Greg winked at me.

“Dunno, man,” Logan said lazily. “Bunny Doc’s uncles could easily kick your fat ass.”

That launched another debate about the various wereball leagues, complete with exaggerated claims about their victory and how Comet was still licking its wounds.

An hour later, I kicked Logan and Killian’s butts at *Call of Duty*. I couldn’t have contained my proud smile if I’d tried.

I hadn’t.

“Want some ice for that burn?” Tank Man snickered, punching Killian’s shoulder.

“You can cram it up your ass!” Killian barked.

Callum raised his beer to me. “Our Luna here has some secret powers.”

“How did you do it?” Killian threw the controller onto the floor as I calmly sipped my nightly ginger tea.

Logan gave me a lazy grin from the other couch, his meaty arms stretched along the backrest. “She’s an Easter bunny. Full of surprises. That’s how.”

“I grew up with a brother. And aloe vera is more effective for burns.”

“Oh, so it’s like the Islander beat you up, Killian!” Greg hooted.

“*Buuurn!*” Tank Man shouted.

“I want a rematch, Sweet Pea!”

Logan let out a breathy laugh, taking another swig of beer.

“It’s okay to lose sometimes, Killy.” I patted his shoulder as he pouted, arms crossed.

“I don’t lose! I never lose!” Killian stole a burger from a guy I’d never seen before. These werewolves were ravenous. And numerous.

I stifled a yawn. “I’m tired now. Next time.”

Logan shot me a glance. *That* kind of look.

I gulped, not so tired anymore.

“I’m going to see Amaia. You enjoy yourself with the boys.” I blew Logan a kiss and ruffled Killian’s hair.

“*Meet me in our room in one hour.”* Logan’s sultry voice seeped through the mind-link. *“Remember the rule to enter.”*

No clothes allowed. He needed to feel the sparks.

And he called it *our room*.

“Same for you,” I shot back. *“You need to shave though.”*

“If you wanted me to shave Rudy Junior, all you had to do was ask. Naughty bunny.”

“Not there! I meant your face!” I was equal parts laughing and blushing by the time I reached the dark-green door. A photo of Amaia on her tiptoes, kissing a grinning Callum, was stuck to it.

Her new study room.

“Come on in!” she called, already knowing it was me.

Amaia was sprawled on Callum’s bed, in his wereball shirt and a pair of shorts, so I invaded his desk. I grabbed one of her books. No need for pointless chitchat.

“This is nice.” I beamed at her twenty minutes later. She nodded, her cheeks a cute pink color.

I resumed my reading, happy simply to be near my friend.

Everything had been going well lately…apart from Tiziano.

After Lucien killed his mate and the Comet wereball team was disqualified, Tiziano left. He had family in Canada and decided to finish his medical studies there.

“I only wanted to take you away from the game. Just distract your mates for a while.” Tizzy’s voice was barely there. “Not by force, just… coffee together. Like the old times.”

He was sitting by the bus window, pale and hollow, a ghost of who he had been before.

“He was supposed to join us so you could meet him.” His eyes dropped. “He wasn’t supposed to hurt anyone.”

“Don’t leave!” Makena punched the side of the bus. The driver glared at her from behind the closed door.

Amaia said nothing, just hugged herself. Tiziano had avoided her the most since the incident.

“We forgive you, Tizzy.” My voice broke. “Come back. Please. Things can be the way they were.”

Only, they couldn’t. No matter how tightly we held on, things changed. People changed. Our friend group had changed. No more Wednesday afternoons at the Pumpkin Hide, no more movie nights, no more croissant breakfasts, and—

No more Tizzy.

“Comet was disqualified and you almost got killed. And now? Now, I don’t have a heart left.”

My chest ached.

“I’m just this useless piece of nothing.” A tear escaped. He wiped it away quickly, almost embarrassed by it. His mouth twisted into the faintest, saddest smile. “I need a new start.”

The bus began to move.

Our last picture of him was through that bus window: Tizzy sitting against the glass, a Comet cap pulled low over his face.

His hand rose; ours found each other—three friends holding on while a piece of our hearts drove away.

“We’ll be here.” I sent it through the mind-link.

Tizzy looked at us one last time. “I know.”

Then the bus disappeared behind a curve, smoke rising from the exhaust pipe.

None of us moved. We just stood there, holding hands, pretending that goodbye wasn't the end of something.

Time healed everything…even losing a crazy mate who never deserved our Tizzy in the first place; he was abusive to him, but fed into Tiziano's hatred for Dark Diamond. The fact that we had mates here hurt him more than we all could have foreseen.

Makena was the most inconsolable of all…especially after officially rejecting Gaius as her mate—a good decision, considering he had cheated on her again. She'd finally accepted that their relationship wasn't healthy and decided to join Logan and me in Europe this summer. Deep down, I knew she hoped she'd find a second-chance mate there.

Second chances could happen. If your first fated mate passed away, rejected you, or things simply didn't work out, sometimes another soulmate found their way to you. If you were brave enough to open up your heart again, or if you had more love left to give. And Makena had plenty of it.

Part of me hoped Archie and Makena would be mates. Or Archie's cousin, Spencer.

The Black Devil wolves had become something of a fantasy for women here. Real warriors that trained hard and hunted for their own food.

"When are you guys going to Black Devil?" Amaia asked, legs dangling from the bed, chin resting in her hand.

"We booked our flight for the end of July. I might stay longer since they need medical help."

Her book closed. "Why?"

"Not enough doctors. Too many patients. Archie said they've been rescuing several women and pups that had to leave a problematic pack."

"What if you brought some volunteers?" Amaia asked. "Makena is already coming…" She trailed off, thinking. "I could come too. At least for a few weeks."

"Oh, that would be amazing! I'm sure Archie would be thrilled."

"Do we know anyone else who might be interested?"

"I could ask around…" My mind immediately went through the list. *Maybe Teresa?* She had no plans for the summer. She was a doctor, too.

Only potential issue? She was human. And at Black Devil, humans sat at the very bottom of the food chain.

Sending Teresa there might be the best idea I'd ever had.

Or the worst.



“I NEVER UNDERSTOOD YOUR OBSESSION WITH MY HAIR.”

“Are you complaining?”

A guttural, playful sound rumbled from him, though it didn’t interrupt the trail of kisses he was placing along my neck.

“Hell no. You can touch it as much as you like, Bunny Doc. As long as you keep touching me.”

“Thought so.” I squeezed him tighter. “And what about your addiction to my neck? Should I mention all your other *little habits*? The list is getting longer.”

He smirked against the skin of my neck—*see?*—before sucking at my neck again and making me muffle a moan.

“Is that why you were screaming before? Were you telling me you are unhappy with my *little habits*?”

“I never said that. I like them.” Forming a coherent comeback was difficult with two hundred and fifty pounds of lycan on top of me.

“*Thought so*,” he teased.

We were in his bed engaged in an extreme cuddling match. His friends had gone out, while Amaia and Callum had retired for the night.

Well, almost all of his friends had gone out.

The door swung open with a bang, smacking against the wall.

The title of best friend gave Killian some confidence. Or maybe the alcohol. Either way, he had momentarily forgotten one very important rule: never disturb a lycan with his mate…especially when they were almost naked. I was wearing Logan’s boxers while he wore another pair.

Logan shot to his feet, covering me with the sheet *and* his body, just in case. You could never cover your mate enough was his philosophy; just last week, he’d tripped a guy for looking at me for longer than his personally approved staring limit.

“Killian! What the fuck are you doing?” The voice was so deep and thunderous I wondered if Lucien had taken over.

An intoxicated Killian staggered inside, jeans on, Hawaiian shirt hanging open, looking perfectly at home. In the doorway, a tall girl with

short black curls lingered. A Comet wereball player.

"*Ohh*, here they are!" Killian whistled through his fingers, unaware of or simply ignoring Logan's irritation. "You know Steffy!" He hooked an arm around the woman's waist and dragged her forward. "She's from Comet but"—he cupped his mouth—"*shhhh*! Don't say anything! It's a secret. The danger of sleeping with the enemy."

"*I* sleep with the enemy," I reminded him.

Logan's heated eyes met mine. "You're one of the Diamonds now, Bunny Doc."

"Killian…" Steffy muttered, grabbing his ear and pulling. "Let's go."

"But I wanted a night-night kiss." Killian winked at me, ducking just in time as Logan hurled shorts and a T-shirt at his face.

"Sorry for interrupting you lovewolves!" Killian laughed, hurrying behind Steffy. "I just wanted to check in on you. Well, mostly Sweet Pea."

"Leave," Logan gritted out. He was possessive on a normal day, but adding Alpha blood, a lycan background, and a mate wearing his boxers into the mix? His territorial settings were monumentally upgraded.

"Rudolph!" I scolded him.

"*Sweet Pea*! Calm down our *Rudy*. We all know that his blood circulation isn't great. Since you, all his blood has been concentrated in his co—"

"That's it." Logan lunged.

I caught his hand just in time and he stopped. He looked back at me with one raised eyebrow. I grinned and tugged him closer.

One look.

One touch.

And my terrifying lycan turned into a giant, grumpy puppy.

"Later, *lovewolves*!" Killian shouted as he dashed. "Love you! Stay hydrated!"

Steffy, shuffling on her feet, stared very intently at the hardwood floor. "Um…nice to meet you guys."

After they left, we were just settling in to watch a movie when a very loud moan echoed from down the hall.

We glanced at each other and I slapped a hand over my mouth, giggling. Logan's face went blank, then he grabbed my head and shoved my face between his chest and pillow. "You are not listening to that."

I was laughing too hard to answer.

The bed in the next room began thumping against the wall.

Logan groaned. “Okay. We’re leaving.”

We abandoned the movie, fled the apartment, got ramen from the twenty-four-hour shop two streets away, then headed to my place instead.

We managed a few hours of sleep. Mostly.

Even after escaping Killian, we still weren’t very good at going straight to sleep.

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

YVAINE

Twenty-four hours and one death, one amputation, and three ICU patients later, I pushed through the swinging glass doors of the hospital but stopped, watching the rain hammer its frustration onto the world.

Wonderful.

I had a long, wet walk across campus to my car, followed by a forty-five-minute drive to Dark Diamond for Killian's birthday. Had it been anyone else, I would have gone home; shut myself away with another episode of *Grey's Anatomy*, pointing out all the medical mistakes and impossibilities of the show with my roommates; and gotten free cuddles from Zeus.

Killian was worth the soggy commute.

Tucking a strand of hair behind my ear, I mentally scolded myself for leaving my umbrella at my apartment. After spending the previous night at my pack, I hadn't had time to prepare properly for today.

Normally, I checked the forecast—precipitation probability, expected UV levels, wind speed. Organization kept me sane between university, work, and relationships. Especially now that a certain blond lycan had claimed a rather large portion of my schedule.

Flashbacks of my time in the Highlands, wild, rain-soaked, and happy, crossed my mind. Here, I had books to protect and an outfit to keep dry for the party. *Note to self: be wild again in Italy.*

Accepting my wet fate, I stepped outside, the rain attacking me immediately.

"*Yvaine?*"

Blinking, I glanced over my shoulder and hurried back under the overhang.

"Hey, Daisy." I recognized her thick glasses right away. The lenses were dotted with rain, partially hiding her pretty brown eyes and long lashes. One of her hands clutched a Thermos covered in black cat stickers, while the other held an umbrella topped with little cat ears, complete with painted eyes and whiskers.

"How's life?" I winced, remembering our last encounter. Logan had basically spooked her out of the library. "Look, I meant to apologize…" My fingers toyed with my half-moon necklace. "My mate can be a little much, but he doesn't mean it."

Daisy shook her head, her braids swinging out of the hood of her red raincoat. "No, no! I shouldn't have bothered you guys. You weren't that noisy."

I wasn't sure I believed her.

"It was my fault. I had a really stressful day. Week." Her lips curled into a sheepish smile. "It was two days before that evil anatomy exam."

"Oh, how did it go?"

"Another subject off the list!"

We chatted for another minute until I glanced at my watch. "Oh shoot. I really need to go."

Daisy shrugged off her raincoat and held it out. "Take this."

"Oh, I couldn't!"

She pressed it against my chest. "My car's right there, and I'm done for the day. And I have my umbrella. I'd give it to you too but my sister wants it back!"

Appreciating the gesture, I smiled and wrapped my arms around her small frame. Daisy gave a tiny gasp before tentatively patting my shoulder.

"Thanks!" I released her. "Hey, do you want to come with me?" I added, not just to be polite; I genuinely liked her. "I'm going to a friend's birthday. It should be fun."

Her eyes brightened. "Um, where?"

"At Dark Diamond."

She paled. I hid my amusement; their wereball team's reputation preceded them.

"Oh, no. Thanks. My cats need feeding, and I already thawed a lasagna. I can't waste food."

I smiled. "That's me on a normal night!" Just the cat was a raccoon and the lasagna was a lentil soup.

Before we parted, I added her on Instagram, promising to keep in touch.



IMAGINE STANDING ALONE IN THE SAVANNAH AT NIGHT WITH NOTHING BUT A flashlight. You sweep the beam across the darkness and find a dozen glowing eyes, all looking back at you. Eyes of predators.

That was what walking into Killian's birthday party felt like.

Dim strobe lights sliced through the darkness, and yellow eyes flashed between bodies as deep techno rattled the walls and shrieks of laughter rose above it. Killian was at the top of the popularity chain and had rented an entire club, and it was packed with Dark Diamond wolves, a scattering of Golden Furs, and exactly one Comet.

Me.

"*Yvaa*!" I contained an *oomph* when a larger body swallowed me in a hug. "Finally!"

"Bella!" I laughed, pecking her on the cheek. My future sister-in-law looked stunning in a metallic-blue dress, the snake pins in her blond hair catching the flashing lights.

She bounced on her toes. "I'm so excited about your trip! You have to send pictures of my brother getting his ass kicked by those Black Devils!"

"Oh, I will!"

Our flight to Italy was in two months and I had some very exciting news to break to Logan.

Bella looped her arm through mine, guiding me toward the bar. "Drinks first, before my brother locks you in his den!"

"Speaking of your brother, where is he?" His scent lingered beneath the alcohol and smoke.

“Upstairs with the boys doing whatever boys do…minus women.”

I snorted. “You should come with us, you know. Black Devil is beautiful, ancient. And I’m sure Archie would love to meet you.” *Maybe they’re mates.* A tiny spark of hope flickered.

“Not with your twin coming.”

Ah. Lachlan had decided at the last minute to join Logan and me. Logan still had no idea.

“He’ll invent some tropical disease to avoid me.”

I fought a laugh. “Last time he came to dinner, *you* were the one with a mysterious illness.”

“I misunderstood my symptoms.” She waved me off, her snake bracelet shifting. “It may have been fatigue.”

“Oh, I think they call it *avoidance*.” I poked at her ribs.

She elbowed me. “Whatever! He hates my guts anyway.”

“Lachlan asked about you the other day,” I said casually, smiling at people. Goddess, my facial muscles hurt already, thanks to all this extra smiling.

“Pardon?” Bella’s cheeks flushed as I tried to figure out their relationship.

“*Lachlan* asked whether you were coming to Italy—”

“Probably so he finds himself on a different flight *by mistake*.”

I clasped my hands together, surveying the bar. “I’m pretty sure he looked hopeful.”

Bella pursed her lips and changed the subject. “So, tell me about this famous Archie. Is it true his eyes are purple?”

“Very true. Look into them and you’ll turn to stone.”

She chuckled. “Is he the Alpha?”

“Kind of, but not yet.”

“Do they really eat humans there? Is it true Archie’s father killed his own father, the Pack Destroyer? And that Archie is a hybrid who looks exactly like his murderous grandpa? And that they capture rogues to train their pups to kill and—”

“Most of that is exaggerated,” I cut in.

Ears turned, conversations quieted, and curious eyes drifted our way. Our topic had attracted attention.

Everyone wanted to hear about the Black Devil pack. About Archie, an unclassified species and the mysterious Alpha-to-be who had no mate

because, according to half the rumors, he didn't deserve one.

The Black Devils had become a legend. The stories of Alpha Tiberius were practically part of our school curriculum. The wars. The massacres. The packs he had wiped out. The mates he had killed.

Rough. Dangerous. Untamed.

I snorted, shaking my head, when the hair on the nape of my neck rose.

There he is. Rudolph. My mate. The reindeer of my heart.

Logan stepped into the main room, shoulders nearly as broad as the doorway behind him. At his height, he towered over almost everyone, and people naturally shifted aside as he walked through the crowd.

I watched him move like a predator, head turning, searching. He was carrying a bottle of pear cider, clearly for me. My silly smile grew.

Logan was also sunlight; he simply attracted people. *"Bugs too,"* Ruby grumbled, glaring at a girl who grabbed his arm, but he shook her off without looking. Apparently two marks were not enough to discourage his fan club.

His head snapped toward me. Our eyes met almost instantly. I could perfectly distinguish happiness and heat swirling through those silver pools before his lips curved into a slow, breathtaking grin—a promise of a long night ahead.

He prowled forward, eyes glowing in the darkness, and not because of the lights. Even the predators from the savannah would transfer to another habitat.

"Thought I sniffed heaven," his voice purred through our mind-link.

"Just my new, amazing lycan scent." Butterflies filled my belly.

"Mmm. It's even better mixed with mine." His tone sharpened. *"When did you arrive?"*

I almost laughed at his slight irritation and glanced at my watch. *"Thirty-four minutes ago?"*

He scoffed. *"You didn't tell me? You like making me come find you?"*

"Yes," I said without shame.

"It's pouring out there. I was worried."

Bella elbowed me. "So? Do you think I could train at Black Devil someday? Would they admit me?"

"Huh? Sorry?"

She followed my gaze and let out a huff. "Of course he's already hunting you down. Can't he stay away from you for a day?"

“Nope. He can’t,” Logan answered as he approached, eyes on me. “Trix, go play with your friends now.” He took my wrists and pulled me close to him, ignoring his sister’s scowl.

“Sorry, Bella, I’ll catch up with you in a minute.”

“In a day.”

Our lips brushed. Logan slid his arms around me, holding me. His tongue stroked mine, deepening the kiss. I relaxed into him with a happy sigh.

Goddess, I love this lycan so much.

After more kissing, Logan rested his forehead on mine and stared down at me. He guided my hand to his cheek, leaning into my touch.

“When are we moving in together?” The slight urgency in his voice melted me.

“I’ve missed you too.” I hid my face under his chin.

“That wasn’t an answer. *When*, Bunny Doc?”

“When you and my brother start getting along better.” I peered up at him with a grin. “And you and Zeus, too.”

He scoffed, silver eyes calculating me as if I were a complex wereball game. “They hate me because I’m too awesome. There’s no cure for awesomeness, and you should know. You’re a doctor.”

“Yeah, I’m *your* doctor.”

“That’s right. The doctor of my heart.” His voice dropped to a husky tone as he leaned in to kiss me again. “And raccoons don’t live very—*ouch*!”

“Don’t say that!”

“I was joking.”

“Speaking of things that dislike you…” I held up one finger, unable to contain my grin. “Guess who’s coming to Black Devil with us? Guess!”

Logan, Lachlan, Amaia, and Makena were all coming along with me to Archie and Aurora’s! For the first time ever, I’d have most of my favorite people with me.

“*Freckles*?” The groan was immediate. “So I need to pretend to like him for two whole months?”

My lips split into a grin, knowing he’d started to like Lachlan. “You could never pretend.”

“I can do anything for you,” he whispered. “Only for you, baby. Especially when you ride—”

I planted my palm on his mouth. “Shh! There are werewolves everywhere!”

“Then let’s go to my place.” He dropped his head onto my shoulder, snickering. “Bet they could hear you anyway…”

“Logan,” I spit out through a giggle. “Behave! Plus, it’s Killian’s birthday!”

“So? You came. Now we can go.” He kissed my neck, arms still belted around me.

“I just got here!”

“But I cleaned my room for you.”

“No, Logan. I need to give Killian his present. He told me he’s always wanted a terrarium kit. And we should at least invite him for a drink—!” I squealed when a pair of fangs nibbled my mark.

He gave me a crooked, thoroughly unrepentant grin. “I just want to fuck the love of my life into tomorrow and then fall asleep with her in my arms…and her cute drool on my chest.” He clicked his tongue, giving his head a small shake. “Is that too much to ask?”

“Excuse me?” I crossed my arms. “*My drool*?”

His grin grew wider.

“Where’s the birthday boy anyway?” I asked, scanning the bar. Since Killian and Callum were twins, technically it was Callum’s birthday too, but he and Amaia had escaped on a romantic getaway to the mountains, just the two of them.

“Hello, Comet girl! Terminator here was moping until you arrived!” Dylan and Tank Man joined us.

“I still kicked your ass in darts.” Logan smirked, caging Dylan in a headlock.

We chatted, Logan’s fingers drawing circles over the back of my hand. These boys were incapable of being serious for more than five seconds, always loud, always laughing.

Right then, our birthday boy strolled in with a megawatt grin, both arms thrown over two leggy she-wolves, a bottle of whiskey dangling from one hand. One girl was giggling at something he said, and the other was busy kissing his neck.

“I thought there was a third chick.” Dylan gestured with his chin toward the trio.

“There was.” A small smirk played on the corner of Tank Man’s mouth. “He left her behind…to recover.”

Dylan let out a whistle, while Logan didn’t seem impressed at all. He used to have threesomes all the time.

Logan glanced at me, hand squeezing mine. “You okay?”

I smiled back, my cloudy thoughts gone. I did say he was the sun!

“Let’s go say hi to Killian,” I offered, and Logan nodded with a fresh grin.

What happened next was anything but funny.

Killian, laughing boisterously with the two girls in his arms, went rigid all of a sudden.

He lifted his nose, sniffing once, twice, nostrils flaring.

Then his head snapped down, fangs bared, his blown pupils fixed on… *me*.

Killian was looking at me in a way that a friend never should. A way a werewolf looks at his…

“*Mate*!” he growled. “Mine!”

At least thirty feet separated us, with a crowd dancing in between, but the burning intensity in his stare traveled quickly. Too quickly.

For a moment, time paused.

Logan moved first. Eyes flashing red, one twitching, he shoved me behind him.

Then Killian—Skeleton Man, the future Gamma of Dark Diamond—lunged. People screamed and scattered.

There was a noise, a snarling that seemed to be coming from deep within Killian’s chest and a roar that definitely belonged to Lucien.

Killian slammed into Logan, and the sound was like the crash of a tsunami onto a shore. He tried to get around Logan, snapping his fangs inches from his face.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Logan shouted, flipping him to the floor. Before the rabid wolf could get up, Logan planted a foot on his chest, pinning him down.

Everyone else remained still, but Tank Man and Dylan grabbed Killian’s arms, hauling him back into their steel grips.

Killian struggled, wild eyes focused only on me.

“Mine! *Miiine*!”

I was stunned.

How…why…

Beyond the shock, there was also pain. Killian had become one of my close friends, especially after Tiziano left.

More wereball players crowded around.

“Skeleton Man found his mate!”

“But she’s our captain’s mate!”

“Maybe they’re all mates?”

Logan shoved me farther behind him, one hand locked around my wrist, keeping me there. I knew the sparks helped calm him down.

“Logan—” I tried to move but to no avail. “Let me talk to him.”

“No way. We are leaving.” He shot a murderous look at his best friend. “Before I fucking kill him.”

“But—”

“He wanted to mark you, Yvaine. It was all over his face.” His tone sharpened. “Yeah. After more consideration, I think I’ll fucking kill him.” He took a step forward but I hurried to stand in front of him.

“This has to be a mistake. I’m mated with you and he’s seen me dozens of times…”

Then it clicked.

I looked down.

The raincoat! Wrapped around my waist and smelling like…*Daisy!*

Oh my Moon Goddess, you did it again!

“The raincoat, Logan!” I squealed, jumping up and down.

“The what?” He glanced at me. His eyes were almost fully red, and his hair had taken on a darker shade.

I yanked it off and threw it toward Killian, who looked at it the same way he had looked at that rare steak last week. Killian freed one of his arms from his friend’s grip and snatched it.

Then the sniffing started. He smelled it all over, some of the plastic entering his nostrils as he shoved half the coat into his face.

For a horrifying second, I thought he was going to eat it…or build a shrine for it.

“The fuck is he doing now?” Dylan asked.

“Did he take that new werewolf drug?” Tank Man wondered.

“Don’t think so,” Greg said. “He didn’t offer any.”

Though dazed and disoriented, his frantic breathing steadied and his eyes cleared as he regained control over his wolf. He looked around at the

circle of bewildered werewolves surrounding him.

"Killy," I said carefully. "That belongs to your mate." I tried to get closer but *my* mate didn't allow it.

"My…mate?" Killian tilted his head in a new cute way that made me giggle.

"Yes! Her name is Daisy. She lent me her raincoat today."

His mouth parted.

"Daisy…"

He shut his eyes, taking in another lungful of the raincoat.

"Jeez, man, don't spill on me!" Tank Man staggered away, releasing Killian after Logan's nod.

Killian frowned. "Ah, shit. Sorry, Sweet Pea. I kinda…lost it."

"Don't worry, it's okay!" I assured him with a big smile.

Logan scoffed, as to say it wasn't okay at all.

Killian took one long look at Logan, who was giving him the hardest death stare. "Um, hello, T-Man." He rubbed his neck, looking embarrassed. "You know, I, um, didn't mean to…to…"

"You're lucky you're my best friend, dipshit." Logan's voice still had traces of Lucien's, though he shoved Killian in a playful way…maybe. "Now, Bunny Doc, tell us everything you know about his mate."

THE END.
FOR NOW.

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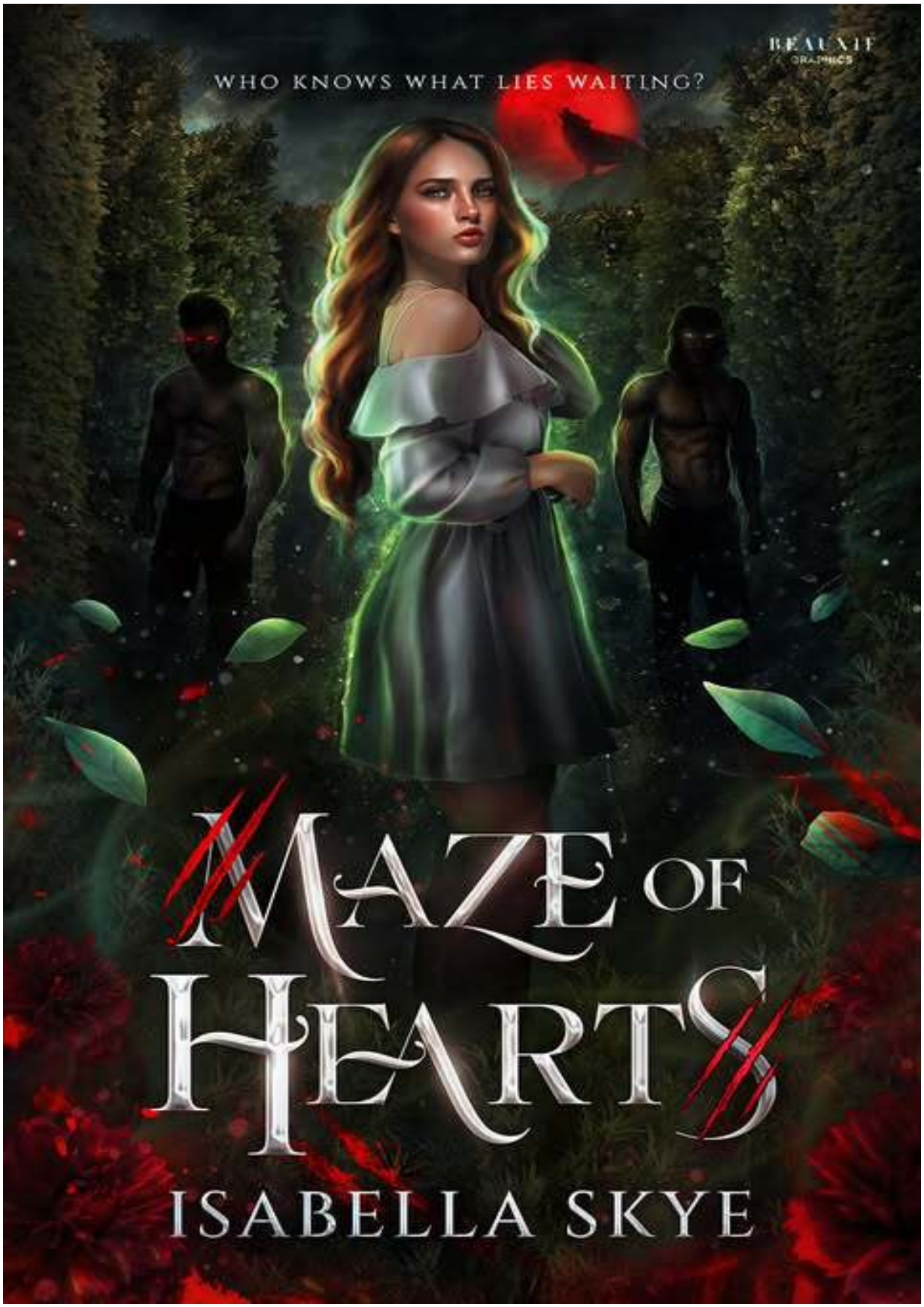
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ISABELLA SKYE is a romantasy author with a flair for comedy, a wolf girl at heart, and a professional creator of fictional men who emotionally destroy readers (with love!). Once upon a time, she was an engineer. Five years ago, jobless and heartbroken, she began posting her first draft on Patreon. Thanks to her incredible readers, she's been a full-time author ever since.

Under her former pen name, Lady Trex, she wrote ten books featuring werewolves, vampires, and dragons, amassing over 12 million reads across online platforms.

Wereball is the first trilogy she's chosen to self-publish and unleash into the world.

Italian born and bred, Isabella has lived in Australia, Denmark, and Scotland, and now calls Barcelona, Spain home. When she's not writing, she's probably rereading *Jane Eyre* with a cappuccino that contains more foam than coffee.

Her motto?

"You're always welcome to take a stroll in my world and take a break from yours."

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To my Dad, Valerio. Logan and Yvaine screaming at the night? That had to be here. It's a reminder that sometimes yelling at the world is okay. It's for you, Dad. I'll never forget that night when we came home from the theater and you, Mom, and me saw *The Nutcracker*, just two months before you passed away. How you just stopped in the middle of the road, looked up at the moon, and screamed. Yvaine and Logan's pain is our pain.

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And to you, my reader—this is all for you.

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