

The Westwood Pack
Book 7

Bound by

Fate

F.D. FAIR

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This is a medium burn paranormal romance.

Trigger warning.

This book has scenes where torture and abuse are mentioned.

This is book 7 in the Westwood Pack series.

If you find any errors in this book, please email me directly at f.d.fairauthor@gmail.com.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my amazing Alpha Readers, Brenda Messenger, Rachel Hicks, and Sandi Wilhelm! I can't thank the three of you enough for everything that you do to keep me on track and motivated to write.

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Chapter 1

Zeke - 11 Years Ago

“I’m not like you Axel!” I yell at my twin.

“I know you’re scared Zeke. Hell, I’m scared. But this is what we were born for. What we trained our entire lives for,” he says as he runs a hand through his short brown hair.

“That’s not it...” I begin but rethink my words. “Maybe it does have something to do with being scared. But that’s not all and you know it! This isn’t what I want for my life.”

“Dammit Zeke! I know you’ve never taken this position seriously but...” Axel starts but I cut him off with a laugh.

“Don’t take this position seriously? Axel, I want nothing to do with being an Alpha. I’d be a horrible Alpha and you know that... Hell, the entire sleuth knows that.” I pause to take a deep breath before I say something I’ll regret.

“Axel. I’m not asking your permission. I’m going whether you like it or not.”

He takes a seat in our father’s chair behind his desk, scrubbing a hand over his face and making some of my anger fade. My brother and I are in no way small men, but when he sits in the chair he looks so small, and I’m instantly transported back to my childhood.

How many times were Axel and I in here playing while our dad dealt with his Alpha business? A pang of loss flows through me at the thought of him. He was my hero. The biggest and toughest man I’ve ever known. Each time he went out in search of lost shifters, everyone else

worried for him, but not me. I knew better than to be worried—nothing was going to touch him. Well... every time except that last one. I had a bad feeling in my gut. As soon as the intel crossed his desk, I knew something was wrong. It all seemed too easy. A young girl, rumored to be a tiger shifter living in the woods alone a couple of hours north of here. I mean what was a tiger shifter even doing in Northern Ontario? Let alone in Canada?

I begged him to take Axel and I. After all, we were eighteen years old and ready to join him on his missions, but he walked out of the door with a promise to take us next time. Little did we know, there would be no next time.

That was the last time I saw my father... alive that is. The hunters left a string of body parts strewn throughout the forest, and his head was sent back to us with a note warning they were coming.

I wanted to launch an attack immediately—how dare they take my father from me. But Axel disagreed. He wanted to move the sleuth deeper into the forest, and since my mother agreed with him, I was outvoted. So our sleuth moved, and we contacted Constance to ward our new location, vowing we would have nothing to do with hunters ever again... Which is why he doesn't want me to go, but also why I need to. Someone needs to make them pay.

"I can't lose you too." He whispers it so softly that if I wasn't a shifter, I wouldn't have heard him.

I walk around the desk and place my hand on his shoulder. "You won't." I pause until he raises his head to make eye contact with me. It's like looking into a mirror. We have the same green eyes, same brown hair, and the same stocky build with broad shoulders. We spent years decorating our skin with tattoos to differentiate ourselves from each other. But even then, we seem to have the same style and unless you pay close enough attention to the designs, you won't be able to tell us apart. "But you know that I need to do this."

He nods his head but his shoulders slump in defeat. There's nothing else to say, no argument either of us will be able to put forward that will sway our opinions.

So, I muster up all the courage I have and walk away from my twin. It's harder than I anticipated. We're not regular twins; our soul was split in the womb. We each hold a quarter of a soul, which gives us a stronger bond

than most. The other half of our soul belongs to our mate. The one person that was made specifically for us. How the Mother found a woman that will be a perfect match for our very different personalities is beyond me, but I trust in her judgment. When the time comes and we meet her, I have no doubts in my mind that she will be anything less than perfect. It's not exactly common, but also not unheard of for two shifters to share one mate. I sometimes worry how it will work with the three of us, or how she's going to react to the knowledge that she has multiple mates... I've known since before I could walk that we would share her, and I still struggle with it sometimes. Which is why, unlike Axel, I'm not in any hurry to find her.

The pain fades a little the further away from him I get. Hopefully I can get my need for revenge out of my system before I weaken us both by being apart for too long. Our souls will not settle as long as we're apart—slowly fracturing more and more as time passes—much like it would be for two bonded mates.



Six months have passed by and at first it was thrilling—hunting down the men and women who ruined my life. In that time, I was able to rid the world of over a dozen hunters, getting my much-needed vengeance for my father's murder. I have to admit though, it has taken me a lot longer than I expected, and admittedly, I've become a little sloppy and careless. Which is why I'm currently on the run from a group of hunters. I was too confident in my ability to take them all on and left a trail of bodies leading them right to me.

At first, I thought I could pick them off one by one, using my supernatural abilities to hide in the shadows. But they caught onto my tactics quickly and they are never alone now—not even when they do their business—making it impossible for me to take out any of them without interference. They've caught my trail as if they're shifters themselves, having no issues keeping up with me, which should be impossible.

I'm tired. So tired. I haven't had a good night's sleep in days, and I just want to go home. Not something I thought I would ever say. My soul has always been restless, yearning for adventure, and since my father died it's been bloodthirsty for revenge. But after seeing this side of his missions—the running, the fighting, trying to stay under the radar—I finally understand

the saying ‘the grass isn’t always greener on the other side.’ I had romanticized the idea of going after the hunters, of being a hero like my father. I didn’t understand the strain it puts on you. Even with the hunters being evil incarnate, each death by my hands has taken a small piece of me with it.

I’m currently making my way back home to Parry Sound, and to my family. I shouldn’t... but I need to see Axel one last time before the hunters catch up with me. And I know they will. Which is why I won’t be staying. I don’t want to put my family in danger, but I have to see him one last time. I need to tell him that I love him and that I’m sorry for everything. Maybe warn him too, he’s going to feel my death and that’s what scares me the most. Not dying. Not being tortured. But knowing Axel will feel everything. Maybe I should stop and see Constance to see if there is a way to break the connection, so he won’t. With my luck there won’t be. My only saving grace is that over the past six months, I’ve become really good at blocking him out of our bond. If my bear adds his strength to it, maybe he won’t feel it.

As I’m walking through the forest, just north of home, I smell the sweetest thing: it smells like fresh honey and lilacs. My body begins to move on its own. Following that sweet scent.

I hide in the bushes and watch as a group of women walk, laughing and talking amongst one another. I scan each one, searching for the source. When my eyes land on the beautiful blonde woman with a perfect hourglass shaped body, beautiful long blonde hair, and the face of an angel, my entire body freezes. ‘Mate’ my beast growls in my head.

No. No. No. This can’t be happening. I can’t find my mate now. All I’m going to do is put her in danger. Crap. What should I do?

I turn my body and start to run but my beast takes control, forcing me to stop. I place my hands on the trunk of a tree and bend slightly, breathing heavy while internally warring with my beast.

“Mate,” he growls once again.

“I know. But we can’t. We will only put her in danger,” I try to reason.

“We protect mate,” he huffs, as if it’s ridiculous that I was insinuating we couldn’t protect her.

“We can’t. There are too many of them. Axel will take care of her.”

“No!” he snarls. “We protect mate. Claim Mate. Have cubs.”

I never thought that would appeal to me, but after seeing my angel in the flesh, that's all I want. To settle down with that gorgeous woman and watch her stomach swell with my cubs inside her. I'm about to tell him why we can't when a voice rings out behind me.

"Hello," her voice matches her nickname perfectly. It's soft and sweet just like her, my angel.

I spin around and place my back up against the tree, wrapping my arms around it behind me to keep me in place.

"Are you okay?" she asks and takes a tentative step forward. I snarl and move to the tree behind me.

"It's okay. I promise I won't hurt you. I just want to help you." She takes a few more steps forward, holding her hands out to me. I want to run away, to fight this connection. Not because she's not absolutely perfect, but to protect her. The wind shifts and carries her scent straight to me.

"MATE," I growl and watch as her eyes go wide in shock. She doesn't slow her movements though. She continues walking up to me until she's only an inch away.

When her hand comes up to caress my cheek, I lose all control. Shit. *I'm going to regret this in the morning* is my last thought as my beast takes control, ready to claim our mate.

Chapter 2

Opal - Present Day

I'm running around like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to help the supernaturals that are coming in by the dozens. I think we really underestimated exactly how many people they were keeping in that place... We've had witches, vampires, shifters, fae—and a few others that I have no clue what they are—come to heal before being able to be transported back to their homes.

Looking around, I can't help but wish that Phoebe and Sophia were able to stock up on some more tears. Understandably, the majority of the tears are with them at the laboratory for the supes who come out with wounds too severe to be teleported. But it would definitely help here too. Each person that comes in is not only starved and severely dehydrated, but they are covered in bruises and lacerations. If the state of the people here is anything to go by, those hunters were *monsters* and I'd hate to see the ones who actually get the tears.

I rush back over to my work station and put some more electrolyte packages into the bottled water. Even with the number of witches that we have helping, it's still not enough. After all, we had to leave quite a few in the bunker on pack land to take care of the kids.

I wipe my damp face. The last thing these people need is for me to be crying over them. They need us to be strong for them. Which is why I

know that I shouldn't be here helping... But there simply aren't enough people to help. With my gift of *sight*... it's extremely overwhelming. With each person I touch, I get a glimpse of their time in captivity or of their future. I can't choose what to see, it simply comes. The one small girl I touched—she must have been around fourteen—I got a glimpse of her future. I saw her take her own life. I don't know when, I can never tell, but I do know that one day she's going to give up on this life and slit her own wrists. It makes me want to hug and squeeze her, take her home with me and ensure that never comes to pass, but I know I can't. If I did that for each of these people who I saw taking their own lives, I would need a bunker bigger than Alaric's to house them all.

I shake my head and try to clear my mind of the negativity. Easier said than done. But I have to try. The best I can do now is help them heal, and perhaps I can talk to Skarlyt and Alaric about creating a program, like a support group, or hiring a counselor for everyone we are saving now and in the future. Maybe, just maybe, we will be able to prevent some of those deaths.

As I walk over to the next row of beds to start handing out the water bottles, a tingle goes up the back of my neck. It's happened a few times now but each time I turn to look, I can never find what it is. It's the same tingling I felt right before I met my mate. The mate who went on to give me the best and worst night of my life. As I turn around, I lock eyes with said mate, and in a flash I'm brought back to that night...

It's two days after my eighteenth birthday. The girls and I are walking home after a night of drinking at Supernatural. Sure, we could've taken a cab home, but where would the fun have been in that? It's a mild night anyway, and we all feel more at home in the forest. Besides, I could use some of nature's energy right now. I didn't anticipate how hard it would be to be in a club, dancing and brushing up against other people. I love my gift--I truly do--but sometimes it's more of a curse. Which I also figured out, gets harder to block when I'm drinking.

As we're walking through the forest, not far from home, I get a tingle that runs right up my spine. I stop dead in my tracks and look around. I know someone is watching me, but it doesn't feel malicious... It feels... like longing.

"Everything okay Opal?" Jillian asks.

“Yeah, you’re not going to puke or anything are you?” Jillian’s twin sister Jennifer asks.

I let off a nervous chuckle. “No. I’m just not ready to head home yet. You two go ahead. I’ll meet you there.”

Jenn, the responsible one, looks around. “Are you sure? There could be someone lurking in the shadows waiting for you to be alone.”

I laugh out loud at her antics. “Yes. I’m sure. Being around that many people drained me. I need to stay out here for a while. Besides, if anything were to happen to me, the entire coven would hear me scream.”

“If you’re sure...” Jenn says while Jill is already grabbing her arm and pulling her towards the coven.

“See you tomorrow, Opal,” Jillian yells behind her.

“Not too early,” I yell back. I hear them giggle as they walk away.

Once they’re far enough away, I rush in the direction of the tingling. It continues getting stronger the closer I get to whatever it is.

I walk deeper into the forest when I see the source. It’s a man. A beautiful man. His clothes are torn, and his beard is a little longer than a normal person might keep it, but that doesn’t take away from his beauty. He’s well over six feet, with large broad shoulders. I can’t see his physique under his clothes, but somehow I know that he’s full of rippling muscles that would put The Rock to shame. It’s his eyes though that make me catch my breath. I feel like I’m getting lost in them. Twin pools of green that remind me of the moss that grows on the trees. It’s enchanting.

“Hello,” I say as I walk towards him. He spins around and places his back up against the tree, wrapping his arms around behind it. Like he’s scared of me.

“Are you okay?” I ask as I take another tentative step forward. He snarls at me, and I can immediately tell that he’s some type of shifter. The sound should scare me, but it doesn’t. It sends sparks straight down to my core. He quickly moves to the next furthest tree away from me.

I hold up my hands to try and show him that I mean him no harm. “It’s okay. I promise I won’t hurt you. I just want to help you.” I watch his eyes shift from left to right looking for an escape route. There is no way that this huge guy could think that little me would be able to hurt him in any way. That would just be ridiculous.

All of a sudden, his nostrils flare and he speaks for the first time. “MATE.” His deep, growly voice makes the throbbing in my core increase

and my knees go weak. Wait... did he just say mate?

I continue to make my way towards him. As witches, we don't instantly know who our mates are, not like shifters. They get one look into each other's eyes, a smell of their intended's scent, or hear the other's voice and they feel the pull of the mate bond. I wish it was like that for witches too; however we do feel drawn to our mates, even if we don't know why until we consummate our relationship.

Once I'm close enough, I reach my hand up and rest it on his cheek. He closes his eyes for a split second, leaning into my touch before he takes control, spinning me around so my back is up against the tree and merging his mouth with mine.

I moan in delight at the taste of him as he licks at the seam of my mouth and thrusts his tongue inside. Goddess above, the way this man is kissing me... leaves absolutely no doubt that he is going to be fantastic at other things.

I pull back reluctantly, breathing hard. "I'm Opal," I whisper. I want this man so badly, but I at least want to know his name. Sure, I'm no virgin, but I have enough self-respect to know the names of my two previous partners prior to letting them fuck me silly. And I'm confident that's exactly what Muscles here is going to do.

He blinks once... twice... seeming to have a hard time getting his mind to work. Finally, after what feels like an eternity, he says, "Zeke."

"Zeke," I whisper. His name feels amazing coming from my lips.

That's all the time I get to appreciate his name though, before his mouth is once again back on mine. I snake my arms around his shoulders, and he lifts me up, allowing my legs to wrap around his waist. As my core brushes up against him, I let out a gasp. If he's packing what I just felt, Goddess help me. There is no way that thing will fit.

I go to say just that, but before I have the chance, he gently lays me on the ground and moves his head beneath my dress. Within seconds, my panties are ripped off and his tongue is sliding through my folds.

"Oh Goddess," I cry out as his tongue thrusts inside. There's a rumble coming from his chest, making his tongue vibrate increasing the pleasure. I feel like I could orgasm simply from the feeling of his tongue fucking me, but he moves so that he is now latched onto my clit and sucks the ever loving fuck out of it. There is no way this is real. This amount of

ecstasy is IMPOSSIBLE. There is no being on this earth that is this good at eating pussy. This must be a dream.

I open my eyes and look down, seeing his mossy green eyes staring right back at me. I fall over the edge as he thrusts a finger inside of me.

“OH MY GODDESS!” I scream. My legs are shaking from the force of my orgasm. Never in my life have I felt anything that euphoric.

I barely have a chance to breathe before he’s kneeling before me, lining his length up with my core.

“Are you a virgin?” he asks with that gravelly voice that makes my core spasm once more.

I can’t get the words out, so I just shake my head no. That’s obviously all the answer he needs as he begins thrusting in and out of me. I feel so full. Like sooo full. There was a slight pinch of pain with the first thrust, but it quickly dissipated.

He grips me under my ass and raises me up to adjust the angle. “Yes!” I cry out as he hits the delicious spot inside me and triggers my orgasm.

I watch as his canines grow with the urge to mark me, at the same time as my magic begins to flare. But instead of marking each other as we should be, Zeke has flown backwards and is now up against a tree.

I sit up, confused. I thought he said I was his mate? My magic recognizes him as my mate. So why is he acting this way?

“Zeke?” I ask as I adjust my dress and move to my knees. “Is everything okay?”

“Sorry,” he growls out through clenched teeth. I can see clearly how hard he is holding onto the tree; his claws are extended and digging into the bark as if he is warring with himself, trying to keep from coming to me.

“Sorry for what?” I stand up and walk towards him confused. I just really want to understand.

“I reject you,” he whispers.

It takes a minute to realize what he says... There’s no way he said what I am pretty sure I just heard... At least, until the pain begins. It’s like my soul is ripping in two. “Why?” I cry, clutching my chest.

“I can’t,” is all he says. I think I see a tear trailing down his face as well, but I must be hallucinating. There is no reason for him to be crying when he’s the one who just rejected me.

I curl up into a ball, there on the forest floor, covered in sweat from our love making, sobbing while clutching my chest. My mate just rejected me. The one person who is supposed to be made specifically for me just walked away...

As the memory fades, I scream, “GET HIM THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!” before I fall to the ground, sobbing. The pain is just as intense as it was in the forest.

I vaguely feel myself being surrounded by my friends, who are all asking if I’m okay and what happened. I search each of the eyes in front of me before I find Sarah. “It’s him,” I whisper. The look on her face is one I know well. It’s pure fury. I’ve been on the wrong side of that look before and it’s not pretty. I don’t envy Zeke. And he deserves every last bit of her wrath.

It took me a long time to get over that night. Although looking back now, I’m not sure I really did. I simply invented a new version of myself who didn’t care about anyone or anything and latched onto Sebastyn. I knew he wasn’t my mate—after all my mate had already rejected me—and yet, I made a fool of myself trying to create a mating bond with him. I see now that I was just trying to fill the hole in myself that Zeke left, and thought Sebastyn was the way to do that. Thankfully, he and his mate Sarah forgave me, and we’ve moved past it. In fact, Sarah was the first person I told about Zeke. Ever.

She didn’t pity me like I thought people would; she held me while I cried and told me everything was going to be okay. If only that were true. For a while, I thought maybe she was right. Since confiding in Sarah, I’ve let down my guard, gained friends and got back to being the real me, but now after seeing Zeke... I have a feeling all the work I’ve done healing myself has just been for nothing.

I vaguely hear people talking and shouting around me, and can see the purple hue that I know is coming from a very pissed off Sarah, but I just close my eyes and block them out. At least until I feel everyone let go of me and a pair of arms wrap around me. I know exactly who it is—Sarah. She smells like the air right after a storm and I allow myself to sink into her embrace.

There was a time, not that long ago, where I would never have believed she would be the one to comfort me about anything... But Sarah, being the amazing person that she is, inched her way into my life and I’m

proud to say that she is my best friend. My ride or die... The one person in this world that I know without a doubt if I asked her to hide a body for me, there would be no questions asked—she would simply grab some shovels. Which is also how I know that I don't need to worry about seeing Zeke anymore. That man won't get within a foot of me without Sarah going tornado on his ass.

I sit there and cry until I feel strong arms reach underneath me and lift me up. I know instantly that it's Sebastyn. As he walks, Sarah rubs my hair and murmurs that everything will be okay. I thought the pain would only be present at the moment of rejection, but after what I just felt, I know that's not the case. How am I going to live through this again?

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Chapter 3

Axel

As usual, I sit in my chair going over the budget for the Sleuth. I knew what I was signing up for by becoming the Alpha. I trained for this. I wanted this. But some days, I wish I could just run away. I drag my hand over my face, trying to clear my eyes that have gone blurry staring at the numbers. I've been staring at the same page for the last hour and a half. Everything I've tried to take my mind off of what's happening today hasn't worked... Alaric is storming that facility, the facility run by Hunters.

I push myself back, stand up, and begin to pace. They are the only thing in this world that I truly fear anymore. I used to fear losing my family, but after my father's death and then my brother's disappearance—making that fear a reality—the only thing left is the hunters.

Contrary to what everyone else thinks, Zeke is still out there somewhere. I'd know if he was dead. I would've felt it. I just need to find him without bringing the wrath of the hunters onto us.

"Axel, sweetheart. Are you in there?" my mother calls through the door.

"Yes. Come in mom."

She slowly opens the door and steps through, her eyes shining with tears. She knows what they're doing today, and like me, she understands the

reasons, but is fearful. Who would blame her? Not only did they kill my father, but they're the reason that my brother left as well.

"Any word yet?" she asks with hope. I know she's counting the minutes until I can tell her it's over, so that she'll actually be able to sleep. There is no way either of us are going to sleep until Trixie lets me know it's over. As long as they kill everyone, we will at least have a few days before they come. But there's always that chance that they will be followed back, and if they follow them back, it's not a stretch to think that they could find us. Which is why I already have all the vulnerable members of my sleuth holed up in a bunker. Sure, it's not as fancy as Alaric's, but it's hidden and safe and that's all that matters.

"No. Not yet," I tell her, slipping back into my chair. It's one thing for her to know how stressed I am... it's another thing entirely for me to show her. I'm the one who is supposed to be strong, the one she can lean on. Of her two children, I'm the only one left.

"It will be okay Axel," she says as she takes a seat. She's trying to put on a tough face for me, but I know it's just a mask. She's broken-hearted. She lost her mate and her son. She believes them both to be dead, and each of them have taken a piece of her with them. She's a shell of the woman I grew up with, who was always vibrant and outgoing. Now, there are days when she doesn't leave the house. Days where she wouldn't eat if I didn't bring her food. It's painful watching her go through that. And at first, I'd tell her that my brother was still out there and that he would come home one day, but after a while I realized how much worse I made it with those statements.

"I know mom. Alaric would never allow anything to get near his family. We just have to trust that he can take care of this."

"If you would have agreed to help him, you could've made sure of it," she argues. It's the same argument we've had for the past few days. She believes I made a mistake by deciding to stay out of this.

"And if we would've failed and I didn't return, or worse, I led them here? Then what?" I ask.

She lets out a deep breath. She knows I'm right. "I understand your reluctance. Truly I do. But what if the same happens to the pack or pride? What if us being involved could've prevented that?"

She walks around the desk and places her hands on my face. "You're an amazing Alpha, always taking care of everything and I trust

your judgment. But in this decision, I think you made the wrong choice. *‘Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is acting in spite of fear.’* Your father used to say that whenever he was asked why he went on missions and why wasn't he afraid. He would always admit that he was afraid, but just because we are afraid of something does not mean we shouldn't act, or let it stop us from doing what is right.”

I let my eyes slip closed. I've repeated those words in my head over and over since I walked out of Alaric's kitchen. What if by not agreeing to go I've damned my friends?

“It's too late now to change my mind. I just have to trust in Alaric, Drake, Skarlyt, and Trixie, that they can accomplish this,” I say with a sigh, opening my eyes back up.

She nods her head, placing a soft kiss on my cheek. “I'm going to go make us some coffee and a snack while we wait.”

I don't respond, I just lay my head on the desk and wait for her to return. After a few minutes, I finally raise my head and begin to look back at the documents in front of me—no point putting it off. I need to figure this out. Someone has been draining the general account bit by bit for the last year. It began as small increments, here and there, but they've gotten bold. In the last two months alone, over fifty thousand dollars has been withdrawn, and the shitty thing is, I don't know where it's going or who is taking it.

I look up as my mom enters the door, and suddenly I freeze up in pain. Excruciating pain. All over my body. She drops her tray and rushes over to me as I fall on the floor, crying out.

“What is it? What's wrong?” she pleads with me, roaming my body with her hands and eyes, searching for the source. Only it's not my pain... It can only be one person.

“Zeke,” I whisper. She steps back quickly as if I slapped her.

“Wha... What?”

“It's not me. It's Zeke,” I grind out through the pain. Her hand flies to her chest as the tears flow from her eyes.

And just like that, the pain stops. I worry for a minute that he's gone, but when I search our bond, I can feel him... For the first time in a decade, I can actually feel my brother through our bond. I don't know how he blocked it for this long, but whatever just happened blew the locks off, allowing me to feel him. He's close, probably unconscious.

“Sorry mom,” I tell her as I rush from the room, shifting immediately and charging in the direction of my brother. Right towards the Westwood pack.

I roar as I approach the clearing between the coven and the pack. The closer I get, the stronger I can feel Zeke. I shift back quickly and scream as I run. “WHERE IS HE?”

A group of people rush toward me, and I skid to a stop, my chest heaving as I watch Alaric move to the front of them. “Axel,” he says calmly.

“Alaric, I swear to all the Gods that if you do not give me my brother right now, I’ll slaughter each and every one of you,” I growl out, more animal than man.

“Your brother? But he went missing years ago,” Alaric responds, not reacting to my threat.

“I know he’s here. I can feel him,” I growl and grab Alaric by the shirt. I know that I should try and control my temper—Alaric is my friend. But I have to admit that although I felt in my soul that Zeke was alive, I had lost hope of seeing him again.

Phoebe steps up to the plate, her hands already lit with flames. “Axel, I don’t care who you are or who you are looking for, but you touch my mate again and I swear on all the Gods that you won’t live to find him.”

My eyes move to her briefly, and I release Alaric. “Sorry.”

“I just don’t understand Axel. If we had your brother, we would have called you,” Darren steps in to explain.

“He’s here. I know he is.”

“Maybe he’s one of the shifters we rescued?” Drake’s sister, Drusilla, offers as an explanation, and my rage-filled gaze lands on her. What the fuck does she mean rescued? She gets pushed behind another large male, and with a quick inhale, I realize this man is very old, very large, and very dangerous. Someone I definitely don’t want to fuck with.

“Rescued?” I turn my question back to Alaric and Darren.

“Yes. We asked you to join us in raiding the hunters’ facility. You wanted no part of it, remember?” Darren snarks.

Again, I can’t control myself, snatching Darren by the shirt, and roaring in his face. Next thing I know, his mate Sophia steps up, her entire arms on fire, but doesn’t say a word. She doesn’t need to. I quickly let go of Darren and back away with my hands raised. I’m in a rage, but I’m not

stupid. I know that she will do a lot of damage to me before I even get the chance to shift.

“We can go check. But you need to put some pants on and control your temper. There are supernaturals in that building, including children, who have been held captive and tortured for years. Seeing a large man screaming and thrashing about is bound to give them a panic attack,” Alaric says, handing me a pair of shorts.

I slip on the shorts, allowing some of my rage to fade, and shame seeps in. These are my friends. I know that if they had any knowledge of where Zeke was, they would’ve called immediately. But I let my rage blind me. I wasn’t thinking straight.

As I am finishing up, I hear the most beautiful voice in an extreme amount of pain scream out, “GET HIM THE FUCK OUT OF HERE! NOW!” I freeze on the spot as the rest of the group rushes inside the building. I don’t know who that was... but the sound of her in pain... feels like I'm being stabbed through the heart, and I want to do anything and everything in my power to make it go away.

I stand frozen, rooted to the spot just watching the entrance. I have no idea why that voice affected me so. My mind is running rampant, throwing out theories as to why. Is she part of my pack? Is she important to me in some way?

As I mull over the possibilities, Zeke stumbles outside, arms around Darren and Alaric, and I fall to my knees. I want to be the strong Alpha that I was born to be, but seeing him in the flesh after eleven years... I can’t. I roam my eyes over his body. His clothes are dirty and torn, his hair is overgrown and unkempt, and he has lacerations and bruises everywhere that is visible. A pang of regret sparks. If only I had searched for him harder, maybe I would have found him. Drusilla said he was rescued, was he held up in that facility for the last eleven years? Did he not truly leave of his own accord like I had thought?

“Axel,” he croaks out, his voice sounding like he hasn’t spoken in years.

It snaps me out of my inner reflection, and I jump up, rushing to him just in time to catch him as he collapses. I pull him to me, wrapping my arms around him as we sink to the ground.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I didn’t look harder for you,” I whisper, tears streaming down my face.

“Axel, we need to talk,” Alaric interjects.

My eyes snap up to him. What could he possibly need to talk about right now? Can’t he see that I’m holding my brother for the first time in eleven years?

“We can talk tomorrow. I need to get my brother home,” I snap at him and go to stand.

“We really need to talk now. There are some things...” He shares a look with his brother. “Things you need to know,” Darren says. I can see that both of them are warring with themselves, hating to interrupt this moment.

“What could be so important that it can’t wait? Zeke and I will come and see you tomorrow once he’s had time to rest.” I grab my brother and as gently as possible throw him over my shoulder to begin our trek home.

“That’s just it. Zeke is banned from pack and coven land,” Alaric says looking ashamed.

“What?” I roar in response.

The brothers look at each other before turning back to me. “Zeke rejected his mate eleven years ago; she is one of the witches in the coven. Seeing him here has caused that pain to resurface for her. Sebastyn’s mate, Sarah, is a good friend to Opal and has banished him from the coven and pack lands,” Alaric says.

“But she’s not the Alpha or Coven Leader, how can she...” I begin.

“We agree with the decision. Until Opal forgives Zeke, he is not welcome on our land.” I open my mouth to interrupt but Alaric raises his hand. “How would you feel if you had to see the mate that rejected you in your sleuth? You’ve seen how much pain is caused by rejection. You know what it’s like. Until Opal is ready, Zeke is not welcome.”

At his words, a moment of clarity hits me. Wait... if this Opal is Zeke’s mate... she’s mine too. That’s why the sound of her pain affected me... “Am I welcome? Would it be okay if I talked to her?”

The brothers look at each other again, seeming to have some silent communication. “Axel...” Darren begins, putting his hand on my forearm. “You are always welcome here, but you and Zeke look so similar that she might think you are him, and it could cause the same pain.”

The last thing I want is to cause our mate any pain. But I also need to try and find a way to fix this. And I desperately need to talk to my

brother and find out what in Goddess's name he was thinking when he rejected our mate.

I nod at the two brothers. "Call me when she's ready to talk. I don't care what time it is; I will come."

With that said, I walk away towards my sleuth. As happy as I am to have my brother in my arms, I'm fucking furious with him. How dare he reject our mate? He has one day to heal before I expect answers. Twin or not, I will get the answers I need.

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Chapter 4

Opal

I wake in a panic, pain radiating through my entire body. Pain I haven't felt in years. Pain that at one point I thought would never go away... But it did... Or at least it lessened enough that I was able to function. I'm not sure if I will be able to survive this a second time.

I curl into a ball and let the tears fall. This is too much. Never in my wildest dreams—or nightmares—did I imagine seeing him again. And even then, I thought once you got through the pain of rejection, it would lessen and go away. Maybe I should talk to Lennox about it. He was around his first mate who rejected him for years. Maybe he'll have some advice. But not today. Today, I'm allowing myself the next twenty-four hours to feel the pain, to wallow in it, but after that, no more. I will not allow him to ruin my life once more.

“Are you hungry?” Sarah asks from the doorway of my room. Seeing the look of pity on her face makes my tears fall harder. I know she's not trying to make me feel worse, and I know that I don't have to worry about being anything but myself with Sarah, but it's still hard not to slip back into my old habits of pretending to be a bitch and lashing out at everyone.

I shake my head no and roll over facing away from her. I hate that I'm being like this. I can't even stand myself, but I also don't have enough emotional strength to care.

"I'll be here when you're ready to talk," she whispers as she leaves the room. I curl into myself and sob, letting it all out.



I thought I was being generous giving myself twenty-four hours. Turns out I was under-estimating what I was feeling.

Three days have gone by, and I haven't moved other than to use the bathroom. The only reason I know that it's been three days is because Sarah has brought me in food for each meal, making me sit up long enough to eat. I don't know why I'm allowing myself to sink into this depression and I desperately want to stop. But at the same time, I don't know how to change it. Every time I think I have gained enough strength to get up and have a shower, something in my brain flicks to Zeke and I end up curled back under the covers with the tears streaming down my face.

"That's it. Enough moping. Time to get up," Sarah says forcefully, storming into my room and ripping the covers off.

I panic and attempt to grasp at the covers to pull them back over me, but she stands beside the bed and scowls at me.

"Nope. You're getting up and getting into the shower right now." Her hands are on her hips, her eyebrows pinched together, and I can tell she means business.

"I can't," I whisper, hating how weak I sound, and my eyes drop down to the floor.

"You can and you will. I've given you three days. Now that's over. You won't gain any of your strength back if I allow you to wither away in here."

I bring my eyes up to meet hers, pleading for her to just leave me alone to languish in here. I can't do this. I thought I could get past what Zeke did to me. I thought I was past what he did to me, but now... tears begin to form in my eyes.

"None of that. I'm doing this because I care about you," she says, softening her features. "Trust me Opal. Once you shower and get dressed, you'll feel much better."

I know she's doing this for me. And because she's been such an amazing friend, I can do this for her. It may not be the miracle she's expecting but I can at least try.

"Okay," I mumble as I climb out of the bed and make my way to the bathroom.

Once I step under the hot spray, it's hard to admit, but Sarah was right. I begin to feel a little better, and by the time I'm done washing my body and hair, I almost feel human again. The pain in my chest is still there but I feel like I'm able to function normally. Or at least as close to normal as I can get.

"Are you feeling any better?" Sarah asks from the door of the bathroom as I'm turning off the water and grabbing my towel.

"I actually do feel a little better," I admit.

"Good. Get dressed and come to the kitchen," she closes the door behind her, not giving me the option to argue.

Once I'm alone again, my mind wanders back to Zeke. I'm hurt and devastated about his rejection, but when I allow myself to think about what he looked like the other night, a different pain flows through me. He looked like absolute shit and I wonder what he went through in that place. If the snippets of information I gathered from the other rescued supernaturals are anything to go by, it wasn't anything good. And as much as I loathe him for hurting me, I still don't want to think about him being tortured.

It also makes a flicker of hope light in my chest at the possibility that maybe there was a legitimate reason for him rejecting me. Like maybe he was trying to protect me or knew he was going to be captured.

I don't allow myself to think that line of thought too long though. If I do, it will crush me to find out it wasn't the case.

Almost on auto-pilot, I go through the motions of getting dressed. I don't throw on my sweatpants and hoodie like I want to, opting for my boho pants and a flowing tank top. I want to be comfortable but feel good at the same time, and I know I look very hippy-ish, yet hot, in this outfit.

I make my way out of my bedroom for the first time in three days, and I'm immediately greeted by the scents of bacon and coffee. I let a small moan slip out of me and wander over to the table where Sarah, Sebastyn, Skarlyt, Lennox, and Kayne are currently sitting.

I feel like I should be embarrassed about my actions over the last few days with Skarlyt and Lennox, and I am, momentarily. That is, until I

remember that they were both rejected, so they know. They are probably the only two out of my friends who truly understand how I have been feeling.

“Are you feeling any better?” Skarlyt asks, her eyes full of empathy. Someone else would probably have mistaken it for pity but I know it’s not.

“I’m not one hundred percent, but the shower definitely helped,” I tell her. Lennox nods in understanding, scooping up a forkful of food and shoving it into his mouth.

“It will get better,” Skar tells me with a promise.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“But I came here for something else too,” she says sheepishly. Sarah and Sebastyn both send her a scowl, obviously not wanting her to bring up whatever it is.

“What?” she asks. “It’s time sensitive and we only have a few people we can trust.”

They groan but don’t argue anymore, going back to their food as I dig into my own.

“It’s okay. I want to know. Maybe a distraction is just what I need,” I tell them.

Skarlyt shoots her brother and Sarah a triumphant look before turning her chair towards me.

“So, I have a brilliant idea...” she begins.

“Let’s hold off on calling it brilliant until we see if it actually works,” Seb interrupts.

Skar shoots him a glare that, if looks could kill, he’d be six feet under by now, but her smile is back in place when she turns to me. “As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted...” She shoots one last look at her brother before continuing. “I have a brilliant idea and I want to know what you think.”

I nod at her. “Okay. What is it?”

“Well, I was thinking, you know how we used our magic to make the structures from the vines in the clearing...” I nod again following along, not quite sure where she is going with this, but I can tell she’s really excited about it. “What if we could do that with dirt?” She finishes with a triumphant look like I should understand what she is implying, but I don’t. I look around the table searching for someone to give me a clue as to what

she is actually talking about, but no one gives me anything more, so I look back to Skar in confusion.

“I don’t know where you’re going with this.”

She sighs in exasperation. “I want to pull up earth from the bottom of the lake or ocean—wherever we decide—and make an island for supernaturals. I have it all mapped out. It will be easier to keep us safe, we can cloak it so that it can’t be found, and if the prophecy means that there is a war coming, it will be the best way to protect us.”

“That’s a brilliant idea. Well, if it works. But I don’t understand what you want from me. I’m not as good with manipulating the earth as the three of you are.”

“You may not be the strongest earth witch, but we have a small amount of people we can ask. We don’t want to create mass panic or give false hope if this fails.” I nod in understanding, and she continues. “So far it’s the four of us, my mom, and Ruth that will be helping and we need to start today.”

“Wait, today?” Seb asks.

Skarlyt nods her head. “Yes. Alaric found the locations of five other facilities, and he and his rescue crew want to take them all within the next two weeks. If things were to go sideways, we need to have a safe place to go. Goddess knows that not all supernaturals are going to want to help us, and it’s going to be hard enough to coordinate five attacks at once. If we need to hide from five different hunter groups... Let’s just say, I don’t know how well that’s going to go.”

I am about to respond when Ruth and Constance walk through the door. Constance, being the mother hen that she is, rushes over to me, wrapping her arms around me. “Oh Opal, how are you doing my dear?”

I squeeze her back as much as I can from my sitting position. “Better.”

She steps back with a smile. “Good.” She claps her hands together and looks at the table with a large smile. “Are we ready to do this?”

We all nod and shovel the food into our mouths faster as Ruth helps Constance clean up our breakfast.

Shocker: Lennox is done first. He gathers Kayne up and gets him ready to go. “I’m going to take Kayne over to Alaric’s for the day to play with Aurora,” he announces, giving Skarlyt a kiss on the head and turning to leave.

“Lennox. Wait,” I say, getting up and rushing after him onto the porch. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” he says, turning back towards me.

I look down at the ground a little embarrassed, but after a few breaths I look up into his eyes. “Does it get easier? Seeing them I mean?”

His eyes soften and he adjusts Kayne in his arms so he can place his hand on my shoulder. “Not at first. That’s why I stayed away from my old pack for so long. And even then, the pain didn’t really fade, I just got used to it I guess.”

That’s not necessarily the answer I was hoping for, but at least it’s something. “Thank you,” I whisper, and he gives my shoulder a small squeeze before turning to head to Alaric’s.

The wind whips around me softly as I stand on the porch thinking. I don’t understand how anyone could get used to this pain, but I’m sure I’m going to find out. I have a weird feeling that I will be seeing Zeke again sooner than I hope.

I’m met on the porch by the rest of our group. I’m the only one who hasn’t mastered teleporting, so I link my arm through Sarah’s and we’re off.

We land on a small floating dock in the middle of the lake. Now I’m glad I didn’t attempt to teleport; I can imagine it’s hard enough to land in a solid spot, let alone one that moves.

“Okay, we’re only trying for something small, maybe ten feet by ten feet. We will all start to focus on the center and once there is a decent size circle, we will each take a direction and spread it out,” Skarlyt explains.

We immediately get to work, each of us closing our eyes. I focus on sensing the earth beneath the water and pulling it up. It’s slow and tedious, but eventually I open my eyes and see a small patch of earth, maybe a foot around.

“Okay, try to spread it out on the surface of the water. Eventually, I would like to detach it from the bottom so that it can move as we need. Sarah you take the north, Seb take the north east, Mom take the east, Opal you take the south east, I’ll take the south, while Ruth can take the rest since she has the strongest earth magic,” Skarlyt instructs, not giving us a chance to say anything before I see her portion grow larger, and the rest of us get to work.

It's a lot easier to expand the surface than it was to create the base, and within minutes, it is the desired size. "What now?" I ask.

"Now we make it thicker and compact it so that it's strong enough to hold us," she says, and once again we all get to work. With each fleck of dirt I bring up, I press it into the form as hard as I can with my magic.

Before long, the rest are done while I'm still working, and they help me finish up.

"Time to test it," Skarlyt says excitedly and jumps straight onto the small island. Surprisingly, it holds her up and she begins jumping up and down celebrating.

"Wait. We need to make sure things can grow on it before we get too excited," Seb says, and Sarah and Ruth both sweep their hands over the area, followed by small blades of grass beginning to sprout. I guess that answers that.

"See!" Skarlyt shouts, still doing a happy dance. "I told you it would work. Now let's go talk with Alaric and Phoebe and start planning how our island should look, and where it should be."

Her excitement is infectious and before long I feel myself smiling right along with her. Besides, if I'm living on an island in the middle of who knows where, the chances of me running into Zeke are even smaller, right?

Chapter 5

Zeke

I wake up with a groan and roll over on soft sheets. Wait. Soft sheets? I open my eyes quickly and look around, finding my old room. Then the events of last night—or what I think was last night—come back to me. I was rescued, I saw my angel, and I was banished from seeing her again. Not that I deserve any different. I just wish I could explain to her why I rejected her. I didn't want to, and it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I stretch out my muscles and feel them protest the movements, but I'm definitely not in as much pain as I should be.

I throw the covers off of me and slowly sit up, dizziness hitting me instantly, just as my mom walks in the door. As soon as her eyes meet mine, she drops the tray she was carrying and rushes to me, wrapping her arms around me.

"Hi mom," I say, pulling her tighter into me.

Sobs wrack her body as she shakes. "Zeke... my baby... I thought I'd never see you again."

"I know mom. I'm sorry."

She sits back, letting me go and slaps me on the arm. "Why are you sorry? Did you intend to get captured and held in that horrible place?"

"No."

“Did you want to come home to me?” she asks.

“Of course,” I say.

“Well then you have nothing to be sorry for. You weren’t gone because you wanted to be, and you came home to me,” she says, running her hands over my face and arms, as if she is making sure I’m real.

“I messed up mom,” I tell her, meeting her eyes, tears floating in my own.

“Shh. It will all be okay. You’ll see,” she tells me, pulling me back into her arms.

“You don’t understand. What I’ve done... can never be forgiven.”

She pulls back once more to look into my eyes. “So, tell me,” she encourages, and I do. I tell her everything about my night with Opal—well, the version of it that I’m comfortable with my mom knowing. I also tell her the watered-down version of my time in that place, and then I tell her about last night. About the pain in my angel’s voice when she saw me.

“Now you listen to me,” she begins, pinning me with her glare that I know well. “If that girl is truly your mate, she will understand. I don’t agree with what you did. I probably never will. We could’ve fought this together, but we can’t change the past. We can only move forward. Besides, your brother has been working on a plan to win over your mate while you’ve been sleeping for the past few days.”

“Few days?” What the fuck?

“You’ve been asleep for three days Zeke. Your body needed to heal.”

Three days? Shit. I try to get up, but my mom tightens her arms, holding me in place, and I let her. I sit there and hold my mom as we both cry. We cry until neither of us have any tears left.

“Oh good. You’re awake. We have some things to discuss,” Axel says walking into the room.

“Axel...” My mom shoots him a warning about his tone.

“Don’t Axel me, he rejected our mate. He could’ve brought her here. We could’ve kept her safe. He could’ve at least told me about her so I had the knowledge to seek her out and take care of her after the pain he caused her. Then, to top it all off, he went and got himself captured.”

“He’s right mom. Axel is justified in his anger. Yes I hoped he and Opal would have found each other while I was gone, but I should have told him about her at the very least.”

She tsk-tsks at us both. She never did like when we were fighting, but this time, I don't think there is anything she's going to be able to do to fix this. This is something that I'm going to have to do myself.

Reluctantly she lets me go, and I get up. "For what it's worth Axel, I'm sorry."

"I know you are," he says, his eyes still hard. "Go shower and shave. We can talk after."

I give my mom's shoulder a quick squeeze as I walk past her on my way to the bathroom. Let's see if I can remember how to make myself look presentable.



What has to be an hour later, I look at myself in the mirror. After taking the clippers to my hair and beard, and scrubbing myself in the shower until my skin felt raw, I'm finally starting to look like myself. Sure, I've lost a lot of muscle mass, my cheeks are sunken, and my eyes are a duller green—all obvious signs of starvation and malnutrition—but the bruises and lacerations are gone. Although only a minor visual improvement, it's a step in the right direction, and I'll take it.

Amping myself up, I leave the bathroom and head to the office to talk with Axel. I know this is going to be a fight. Axel is pissed at me, and rightfully so, but it doesn't mean I'm looking forward to it.

I walk into the office and find a tired looking Axel sitting in his chair behind the desk, his head in his hands. As he looks up, I see the dark bags under his eyes which show me just how much sleep he's had since I returned: close to none. "Talk," he growls out as he meets my eyes and crosses his arms over his chest.

I run a hand over my face as I take a seat in the chair opposite him. I'm sure at one point he would have been thrilled to have me home. But now that he knows I rejected our mate, that happiness has turned to something else; knowing my twin, he's warring within himself.

"First I want to say I'm sorry," I begin, and Axel just growls at me, so I push on. I don't have to ask him what he wants me to talk about, I already know. He wants to know what happened with Opal.

The pain flows through my chest at reopening this wound, and my bear goes even more feral. I didn't think it was possible for him to get

worse but just hearing Opal's name is causing him to lash out at me. I haven't shifted since that night, he won't allow me to, and it's been hard. I've tried to reason with him so many times that she's safe because of the rejection, but he simply growls at me in response to that. In his mind it's simple: he's big and strong and could've protected her... But I know that's not the case. She would've been captured along with us—at least this way she was free to live her life.

"I met Opal eleven years ago, when I was coming back home to see you. The hunters weren't far behind me, and I knew that it was going to be my last chance to say goodbye, so I took the risk and came back. Obviously, I didn't make it to you like I'd planned because I saw her.

"I wasn't far from here, trying to take precautions, leaving false trails for the hunters when I saw her. She was perfect. An angel. I couldn't stop my bear from trying to claim her, and if I'm being honest, in that moment I didn't want to... But after it was done, reality came crashing down on me, and I rejected her and ran off. I know you think I was stupid, and I made the wrong call, but not even two hours after I left her the hunters caught me and brought me to that facility. That's how I know I made the right choice.

"Hate me all you want, but the only reason she wasn't in a cell next to mine is because of my rejection. Imagine what the hunters would've done if they had a mated pair?" I shudder at the thought. "What they do to the supernaturals is bad enough without having that kind of leverage."

I watch his face as I say my piece; a level of understanding is there, but not forgiveness.

"What about your bear?" he asks.

"What about him?"

"How does he feel about the rejection?" I hear it in his tone, he already knows the answer.

"He's pissed. I can't shift, haven't been able to since that night. He doesn't even talk to me, he only growls when I try to reason with him. But the only way I made it through the last eleven years has been because he sent me some of his strength when I really needed it. So as pissed off as he is at me, he must understand to some degree." My bear takes that opportunity to growl at me once more, turning his back in my mind. He knows I'm being honest—he must understand to some degree, otherwise he would've let me die in there. Hell, he should have let me die. Maybe that

was him punishing me, keeping me alive to feel their torture and experiments over and over again.

Axel's eyes drop down to his desk as he lets out a big breath. "I know you think you did the right thing Zeke, but you're wrong. We could've protected her. We should've protected her. Because of your selfish decision, we missed out on eleven years with our mate. Who knows what she went through in all that time."

"SELFISH?" I yell. "What I did was the furthest thing from being selfish. I kept our mate safe and away from the hunters. I kept you safe from the hunters. I could've led them here. We would've been slaughtered, Axel. SLAUGHTERED. The hunters that were after me were sick and twisted—they got off on torture simply for the pleasure of it."

"I can understand how you would feel that way from your point of view. But you need to look at it another way. You thought that if you came here with our mate, they would've followed, but what if it were the opposite. What if you brought her here and we could've kept her safe? Kept you safe? What if all you went through was for nothing?" I get my breathing under control as much as I can, trying to calm down. I don't want to fight with my brother. I've missed him so damn much. For the first time in eleven years, I'm safe. I won't be cut into over and over again, or have to take all kinds of drugs to force the shift.

"I know how you feel Axel, but you weren't there, you don't know what they are capable of. It's better that she hates me and is still living, than to have been trapped in that place with me."

He nods, and I rise from my seat to embrace him, but he stops me with a hand. "I'm glad you're home Zeke. I truly am. I missed you more than you will ever know. But... you kept my mate from me and I don't know if I can forgive you for that."

"I truly am sorry Axel. I honestly thought with you two living so close together that you would've found one another by now. I trusted in fate to bring you together in my absence." Tears brim in my eyes. That is the biggest regret I have. Yes, I wish I didn't have to reject Opal, but I don't regret it. No matter what anyone says... she's alive right now because of that. No, what I regret is not telling her to find Axel, or trying to somehow get him a message to find her.

He scrubs a hand down his face once more and whispers, "I know you did, but we never crossed paths, and I've missed out on eleven years

with my mate because of it.”

I nod, trying to think of what to say. I know there’s nothing I can say to make it up to him or change the past, but I have to try. Somehow, some way, I have to earn his forgiveness, and Opal’s.

I’m about to tell him that is what I’m going to do when his phone rings. “Yeah,” he answers gruffly.

I can’t hear what is being said by the other person, as my bear doesn’t feel like helping out, so I sit back down and wait.

“Does it have to be right now?” he barks out and after nodding a few times says, “Fine. I’ll be there in twenty.”

He hangs up and slams his phone down on the desk. “I have to go to the pack.”

“Is everything okay?” I ask. I would offer to go with him, but after the scary storm woman screamed at me and banished me from the lands, I wouldn’t dare try. She is terrifying.

“I don’t know. Alaric wouldn’t tell me over the phone. I just know that he wants me there and reminded me that you are not permitted on his lands until Opal gives the word.”

“How am I supposed to get Opal to agree to revoke the banishment if I can’t see her and plead my case?” I ask.

“That isn’t my concern right now. You’re just going to have to find a way.” Tears rim his eyes as he looks at me and says, “If you can’t find a way. You’re going to have to leave. If given the choice, I will choose our mate.”

My face freezes with shock momentarily, before I nod in understanding. If I was given the choice, I would make the same one.

“I’m sorry Zeke, I truly am, and I hope for all of our sakes you’re able to repair the damage you did.” He gives my shoulder a small squeeze on his way out the door and my shoulders slump.

If I know anything at all, I know this: I will either earn the forgiveness of Opal and Axel or I’ll die. There is no alternative. I refuse to live in a world where my mere presence will hurt the two people I love most.

Chapter 6

Sarah

Reluctantly, I leave Opal at her house and make my way over to Alaric's. Today was good for her, I can see part of the woman I've grown to care about coming back to us. The past three days have been excruciating watching her in such pain and not being able to do anything about it. I wish I could snap my fingers and make it all go away—after all, we do have magic—but I know that's not the way it works. She needs to feel this... Just as I had to deal with Joe for all those years in order to come out stronger and become the person I was meant to be.

“Are you sure we should be leaving her? Maybe you could just go and I'll stay with Opal?” I ask Sebastyn as we step onto the porch.

“She will be okay love,” he says as he rubs my arms. “She's a tough one. Besides, you and Skarlyt are the ones who made all the plans for this. You need to be there.”

I take one look back inside the house before nodding at him, and together we teleport to Alaric and Phoebe's. Today, we are talking with the leaders of the local supernatural factions about the island. When Skarlyt first brought it up to me, I thought it was absolutely insane and was about to tell Lennox to have her committed, but the more she explained about it, the better it sounded... An island cloaked from the world where only

supernaturals live. An island where we would be free to be ourselves; shifters could take any form that they wanted at any given time without worry, and witches could use magic without fear of being burned at the stake... Not that it happens anymore, but it did, and that's enough for me. We just need to get all the faction leaders on board, pick a location, and begin construction. We've even talked about getting the input of some of the supernaturals we rescued, but most of them are still healing, both physically and mentally. We decided we can always expand if they decide to join us later...

Landing on the porch, I can already hear the loud voices coming from inside. "Maybe we should've just made it and damn the consequences. It's going to be impossible to get this many people to agree on anything," I whisper to Seb.

He slings his arm over my shoulders. "It will work out. You'll see."

"Oh good, Sarah you're here," Skar says as we walk through the door. "Please tell these idiots that since we're doing all the work, we should get first dibs on which portion of the island we want."

"And so it begins," I mutter under my breath.

"That isn't what we discussed Skarlyt, and you know it," I bite back to her and face the rest of the group. "We need to know what each faction needs first, then we will go from there. We have a basic design made up, but ultimately we need to know if there are certain things other races can't live without. We know that the shifters need wooded areas, as do the witches, and that the vampires need somewhere to hide from the sun. But we also need fresh water, and some places to have fields for crops and livestock. This isn't a small task and there will be some bumps in the road. Heck, we will probably forget some things and be adding onto it over time anyway. This is just to get us started."

"I can help with the construction," a deep gruff voice adds, and my eyes find his. An inhuman growl comes out of my mouth. What the hell is he doing here? My purple magic starts to cover my body as I stare him down.

"Wait Sarah, that isn't Zeke. This is Axel. He didn't reject Opal." I can hear Sebastyn trying to reason with me but my magic is almost too far gone to care. It's not until he steps in front of me, blocking the non-Zeke man from view, that I begin to calm.

“If that isn’t Zeke, why the fuck does he look just like him?” I yell at Seb. The rest of the group flinch at my tone but not him—he knows it’s not him I’m mad at.

“Because they’re twins,” Sebastyn answers me, and my eyes flick to Axel, who nods.

“We’re identical twins. Believe me, I’m just as upset at his actions as you are,” Axel says, and I snort. Not likely.

“I highly doubt that. You haven’t been the one watching her the past three days. Did you know that she didn’t even tell anyone that she was rejected until a few months ago because she was ashamed? That she let the pain and embarrassment twist and churn in her gut until it turned her into a person she hated? No you didn’t. Your brother fucked up, and although it is not your fault, you’re going to have to prove to me that you’re different. As of right now, you’re no better,” I snarl.

“Wait a second—” Alaric begins but Axel cuts him off.

“I promise you, I mean your friend no harm, and I will spend each day from here forward proving to you I am nothing like him. Proving it to her.”

I nod at him, approving of his response, but still not trusting it. I don’t even fully understand why I’m feeling so irrationally angry at this man; I’ve never been one to take the sins of the family out on the rest. But there’s something about this guy that makes me feel like I need to keep him away from Opal.

“We need to bring the team building the island here for the rest of the meeting so we can assign a witch to each faction to figure out what their needs are,” Trixie pipes in and I groan, stealing a look at Sebastyn.

“You’re right,” Skarlyt says and I shoot her a murderous look. “It’s the smartest way. Two witches to each faction, that way nothing gets lost in translation.”

She’s pleading with me to understand the need but I can’t. “Over my dead body.” My hands start to glow once more. I can’t bring Opal here, she can’t be around this man. I won’t allow it.

“Okay. What’s going on?” Phoebe steps up to me, her hands on her hips in her no-nonsense stance.

I drop my hands to my sides. “Opal is on the team.”

Her eyes widen in surprise, then her brows furrow in concentration before she softly grabs my arm and leads me over to the living room.

“Listen, Opal needs to be here for this if she’s going to be part of the team. If you’re really that adamant she doesn’t see Axel, that’s fine, but she will need to be replaced.”

Now it’s my turn to be shocked. I didn’t think of it like that. On one hand, I don’t want her to be around Axel, but on the other hand, watching her earlier today starting to feel like she has purpose—it’s exactly what she needed. She needs something to focus on to help her out of the slump she’s in.

I groan and move away from Phoebe to pace. *What the fuck am I going to do?*

“Listen, I know you feel protective of Opal. We all do. But put yourself in her shoes. How would you feel if I would’ve made decisions for you while you were having a hard time after Joe?” she asks and I look into her eyes. She’s right. I’m trying to make decisions for Opal without consulting her. She’s a grown woman. It should be her choice.

I let out a heavy breath. “You’re right.”

“I usually am,” she says with a saucy wink and walks back into the kitchen.

I chuckle a little to myself. Goddess I love that woman! She always knows what to say or do to get through to me and improve my mood.

“Okay, I’ll go talk to Opal. It will be her decision whether she stays on the team or not,” I tell everyone as I walk back into the kitchen. Once they all nod, I teleport back to her house. I don’t even know what to say... *Hey, so the leader of the bears is a guy who looks just like the mate who rejected you, and you need to come with me to meet him...* I’m sure that will go over swimmingly.

Chapter 7

Opal

I'm sitting on the couch with my tea, watching *Twilight* for the millionth time. Yeah, yeah, I know. It's wrong in so many ways. I mean, they literally got everything wrong in that movie, but I love it. I'm just at the part where Jacob shifts into a wolf for the first time in front of Bella when Sarah walks into the room.

I press pause on my movie and turn to her. "Hey, I thought you'd be gone longer. Want to watch *Twilight* with me?"

She rolls her eyes at me with a smirk. She hates these movies with a passion. She says she doesn't understand why a vampire would sparkle in the sunlight. It also poses the question: what if some of the animals they hunt are actually shifters? Wouldn't it be just as bad as drinking human blood?

"I have to go back, but I needed to come talk to you for a minute—" she begins, but I cut her off.

"Listen. I'm okay." I stand and walk over to her. "I promise. I know I'm not one hundred percent but I'll get there. Today was exactly what I needed to snap me out of the funk I've been in." I pull her into a hug as I finish and she sighs.

"I know. But that's also why I'm here. I need to tell you something..." She pulls away from me and begins to pace. Oh no. This

can't be good. "So we're meeting at Alaric's about the island with all the faction leaders, and they want the entire team to attend so we can go through the details."

"Why didn't you just say so? I'll go get changed," I say, turning around and rushing to my room.

"Wait. That's not all," she spits out following me. "Axel..."

"The bear Alpha," I say.

"Yes. Well it turns out..." She pauses and I turn to face her.

"What?"

"Zeke is his twin brother." She grimaces with the last word and a strike of pain flows through me at the sound of his name.

She rushes over to me seeing my face, but I back away. If she hugs me right now, I'll cry. And if I start crying, I won't stop. No. I won't let Zeke ruin this for me.

"Okay," I say with more strength than I feel.

"Okay?" she questions and I nod. "When I say they are twin brothers, I mean they are identical twin brothers. They look exactly the same."

"Surely there must be something different." She shakes her head no. Shit. I thought since they're twins they might look similar, but at least have some differences. If what Sarah is saying is correct though, it may hurt just as much seeing Axel as it would seeing Zeke. Can I do this?

Turning, I look at myself in the mirror, seeing my vulnerability expressed on my face. Glancing down at the floor, I give myself a pep talk. I am a strong, independent woman. I've lived with being rejected for eleven years on my own. If I can do that, I can do this.

I raise my eyes back up, seeing my hardened gaze in the mirror. I refuse to let Zeke take anything else away from me. He already took my happily ever after with my fated mate, and my friends I pushed away when I became the bitchy Opal, but he will not take being part of this away from me too.

"Let's go," I say to Sarah, and she looks at me in shock before raising a brow and gesturing to my clothes. I look down at myself and realize I'm in my comfy clothes. "Oh, right." I rush over to my closet, throwing on my ripped jeans, fitted tee, and hoodie, before slipping on my flats and walking back over to her. "Now I'm ready."

The words are barely out of my mouth before we're landing on the porch of Alaric and Phoebe's. "Are you sure?" she asks as she reaches for the door handle.

"Yes," I tell her, making the decision and pushing the door open, walking purposefully into the house.

I'm greeted warmly by everyone in attendance, most of whom I know, but when I get to Axel, I freeze and suck in a breath. Sarah steps in front of me, breaking our eye contact, and he growls at her. When I say growl, I'm not even sure that describes it; it shook the floor, that's how deep and menacing it is. But it doesn't scare me. In fact, it does the exact opposite.

"Uh, Axel... Something you want to tell us?" Alaric moves to stand in front of Sarah while the rest form a line in front of me.

Axel growls more and I have the urge to walk around them and comfort him. As if some part of me knows he won't hurt me.

"Get away from my mate," he snarls.

Mate? Not again. I peek around the wall of my friends, meeting his gaze. Sure enough, when I look into his eyes once more there's nothing but love staring back at me. No hate, no menace. Just undiluted longing.

"What?" Sarah yells. "But you're not her mate."

I walk around my friends, dodging their hands reaching for me, until I reach Axel and place my hand on his arm. He sucks in a shaky breath and the tension drains from his body.

Without looking away from me, he explains, "Zeke and I share a very unique bond. Rather than each being born with our own half of a soul like the rest of you, we share one half. Because of this, we share a mate, with Opal holding the rest of our soul."

I take an involuntary step back. Two mates? That's not possible. Besides, Zeke rejected me. Surely Axel and I could never truly bond together because our soul would never be whole.

"I..." I begin, trying to figure out what to say. Do I want him? Hell yes I do. Just like Zeke, he's sexy as fuck and makes my entire body vibrate with need. But am I ready to be claimed? I don't think so... Although being close to him does make the pain of Zeke's rejection hurt less. But... what if he rejects me too? He said they're twins... What if he feels the same as his brother, that I'm not worthy to be their mate?

"I know you're not ready and I would never force you to be. I also know that I will have to prove to you that I am not my brother, and though he feels his reasoning is just, it was wrong what he did to you." Axels brings his hand up to brush my hair behind my ear.

"Wait. He thinks he had a good reason for rejecting me?" I try to keep the hurt from my voice, but I know I fail when he flinches.

"Yes, but we can talk about that another time. When we are alone." I nod, basically agreeing to be alone with him. Given the way my traitorous body is reacting, it shouldn't be anytime soon or I will be demanding his mating bite.

"Okay," I whisper and my vision flashes.

All of a sudden I'm looking at a younger version of Zeke and Axel. They look like they must be about thirteen years old. Even then, they were extremely handsome.

"I wonder what our mate is going to be like," young Axel asks. How I can tell them apart is lost to me, they look exactly the same, but it's like my soul knows.

"She's going to be perfect. Strong, smart, loyal. Everything we could ever dream of and more," Zeke says while walking over to sit on his bed.

"But do you really think the two mate thing isn't going to send her running for the hills?"

"Of course not. Like I said, she's going to be perfect," Zeke speaks up again.

"Goddess I hope so. I can't wait to meet her. I wonder what she's going to look like," Axel says with a sigh, laying back on his bed.

Next thing I know, the vision is twisting into another.

This time, it's Axel alone in some sort of office. His eyes are rimmed red with dark bags under them. He's scouring a map laid out on his desk.

"I don't understand," he whispers to himself. "Where are you Zeke?"

He frantically looks over the map, which I recognize as a map of our area. A woman walks into the room with similar features to them both, and I can instantly tell this must be their mom. "Any luck?" she asks, her own eyes showing exhaustion.

"None yet. But I'm not giving up. I can't," Axel tells her, not looking up from the map. His mom nods and walks back out of the room,

her shoulders slumped in defeat.

“Come on Zeke. Give me a sign. Two years is too long for you to be gone.”

Time seems to flash before my eyes, and soon I see Axel sitting behind the same desk going over paperwork. He still has bags under his eyes but he looks healthier than he did in the last one.

“Axel.” I see Alaric poke his head into the office.

“What is it?” Axel asks, motioning for Alaric to come in and sit down.

Alaric walks in, sitting in the chair opposite him. “I was told you’ve given up searching for Zeke.”

Axel’s eyes snap up to his with a growl. “Yes.”

Alaric’s eyes widen in shock. “But why?”

“Not that it’s any of your business, but it’s been four years. He left on his own. If he wanted to be found, he would’ve called,” Axel grinds out through clenched teeth.

“Are you sure that’s what you really want?” Alaric sits forward leaning closer.

“Listen, it’s none of your business. I think it’s best if you leave. I don’t come to your office and question your decisions about your family.”

Alaric stands up and walks to the door, but before he leaves, he turns. “All I’m saying is that if it was Darren, I would never give up.”

I watch Axel scrub a hand down his face as Alaric walks out of the door.

I shake myself out of the vision and turn back to my friends who are all staring at us with their mouths hanging open. I’m going to have to wait to process everything I just saw until I get home.

Sebastyn is the first one to recover, clearing his throat. “I’m going to get Drake and Rayne.”

“Shit. She’s going to be so pissed she missed this,” Phoebe says and Skar agrees.

Before anyone else can say anything, Drake, Rayne, and Sebastyn stand before us.

Rayne looks around at everyone with a smile until she registers she must’ve missed something big, judging by the looks on our faces. “What did I miss?”

I look around at everyone, not wanting to be the one to spill the beans. I've grown to love Rayne, but she can be a little scary sometimes.

Skarlyt steps in. "Apparently Opal here is one lucky bitch who gets two mates." If I thought that having two mates wouldn't be accepted by my friends, that is blown out the window with her statement and the confirming nods from the rest of the women.

"But I thought her mate rejected her?" Drake asks.

"He did. Well... one of them did. It was Axel's twin brother, Zeke, who rejected Opal. Apparently the three of them share a soul. Oh, and Zeke apparently thinks he has a good reason for rejecting her." Skarlyt's last statement has a bunch of growls and snarls going around our group. My heart swells with love for my friends—I haven't felt this much love in the last eleven years. But I guess that's what happens when you turn into the biggest bitch in the world. You lose people. If I could turn back time, I would stop myself from becoming bitter and lashing out at everyone. But I can't. My only option is to be thankful my friends forgave me and gave me another chance.

"Girls night?" Rayne asks after taking a look at me. The guys all groan while the women all yell out, "Hell yes!"

"Fine," Alaric says, turning towards Axel. "But you and I will be having a talk as well." I can hear the hurt in Alaric's voice, and if I hadn't seen the vision, I wouldn't know why. It seems Alaric and Axel used to be friends, so he probably feels a little hurt—possibly even betrayed.

With our plans set for the night, we get back to work. By the end of the meeting we have a location for the island—in the middle of the pacific ocean—with a witch or two assigned to each faction and a general map laid out of every faction's location.

As expected, I've been assigned to the bears and I'll be traveling to their sleuth tomorrow to discuss their needs. Axel promised I wouldn't see Zeke and I'm happy about that, but at the same time, I don't want to force him to leave his home. Even if it's only for a couple of hours.

"As long as the island is complete, the bears will fight alongside you when you raid the rest of the facilities," Axel says to the group.

"We will be calling our shifter friends from the Amazon to assist too," Phoebe adds.

"I know you wanted to do this in a week, Alaric, but I'm not sure if that's feasible," Skarlyt says, looking at the sketch of the island.

“It needs to be. We need to make it feasible. The chatter Opal’s brother, Eric has picked up from the lab is that other hunters are getting suspicious. He estimates we have less time than we thought before they come to check it out for themselves.” Rayne looks worried as she speaks, and for her to look like that, it means we should all be terrified.

“Shit,” Skarlyt says, looking up at her. “Okay, then we need to recruit everyone. Those here will be assigned a team. You have two days to get your designs finalized before we leave. Axel, can you have a team of your best builders ready to leave by then? We need a crap ton of houses built in a very short time.”

“I will make it happen,” Axel nods.

Everyone agrees, so we disperse for the evening, with Axel slipping my hand in his and tugging me out the patio doors. “I...” he begins, stepping away and starting to pace.

“It’s okay Axel, I know you’re not like Zeke. But I do have a question for you.”

“Anything.” He takes my hands in his.

“Are you planning on rejecting me too?” My voice is small and laced with fear.

He pulls me into him, wrapping his arms around me. “I would never reject you. I can’t wait to claim you as my mate,” he whispers into my ear, his breath tickling my neck.

My heart beats rapidly at his words. He’s not going to reject me. He wants to claim me as his mate. I pull back to look into his eyes. “Can I kiss you?”

He doesn’t answer, he just nods and moves his mouth closer until his lips are pressed firmly against mine. Heat spreads through my entire body like flames. Our kiss deepens and he licks my lips, requesting entrance, which I grant instantly. As our tongues tango together, massaging each other, a moan slips out.

I wrap my arms around his neck tighter and my legs lift off the ground, wrapping around his waist. My entire body screams at me to get closer to him.

He forces himself to break our kiss. “Angel... If we keep this up, we’ll end up doing something you’re not ready for.”

“What if I don’t want to stop?” My entire body is buzzing with need, demanding I make this man mine now before he has a chance to

change his mind. Or maybe I've just gone too long without sex.

"We have to. I don't want to claim you in the backyard of Alaric's house." A small irrational part of my body feels like this is a rejection, even though I know it's not. I let my legs slip back to the ground and put my head down so he can't see the tears brimming in my eyes.

Axel places his hand under my chin. Moving my face up to look at him. "This is in no way a rejection Opal. I want you more than I have ever wanted anything in my entire life. But I also know my brother hurt you and you need time, even if you don't feel like you do right now. I don't want you waking up tomorrow morning and regretting anything." He places a soft kiss on my lips to solidify his words.

"Besides, we'll be spending a lot of time together over the next few days. If you wake up tomorrow and still want to claim each other, we will."

"Okay," I whisper against his mouth once again, merging my lips with his. It's not as hot and heavy as our first kiss, but slow and sensual, each of us putting our feelings into the kiss.

Hearing a throat clearing from the doorway, we break apart. "Until tomorrow angel," he says, and he and Alaric walk to the dock, leaving me staring after him. I want nothing more than to claim him as mine, but I know he's right and I need to be sure.

Chapter 8

Axel

Grudgingly, I walk away from Opal with Alaric to the dock. Each step feels like a piece of my soul is being ripped out.

“What the fuck Axel?” Alaric growls out once we hit the dock.

I run a hand through my hair and begin to pace. I know what Alaric is thinking: he’s feeling betrayed because I didn’t tell him about Zeke and I sharing a mate. In hindsight, I probably should’ve... and I certainly don’t blame him for feeling this way. There was a time when we were closer than brothers. We shared everything. Alaric, Zeke, and I were like the three amigos—when Skarlyt wasn’t there—and we were always together. But after Zeke left—or, I guess more accurately, was captured—I pushed Alaric away with my grief. There are so many times when I wish I had reached out to him, and I know he would have dropped everything to help, but my pride didn’t allow me. Instead, I did the only thing I know how to do: focus on the sleuth and dedicate myself to it. I would say I dedicated my life to it, but the reality is, I didn’t have a life. Not really. I ate, slept, and took care of the sleuth. Rinse and repeat. Every single day for the last six and a half years since I stopped searching for Zeke.

“I don’t know...” I try to find the words but fall flat. What do you say to the man who was once a brother to you, after you’ve kept things

from him and pushed him away?

“Why wouldn’t you have told me? I understand not wanting to broadcast it to everyone, but I thought we were closer than that.” I can hear the vulnerability in his voice, proving to me what I already know... When I pushed him away... he felt like he not only lost Zeke, but me as well.

“I guess I was worried what you would think when we were younger. It’s not exactly common for shifters to have multiple mates.”

“Really?” he asks. “You really think I would have been judgmental? Sure, I would have been curious about how that would work, but come on Axel, we were best friends. At least I thought we were.”

I stop pacing to look at him. “We were. And now I’m older, and thinking about it, I know you would’ve been supportive, but I can’t change the past. At least you know now.”

Alaric lets off a growl. “Yes I know now. But it would’ve also been nice before we brought Opal into our home and surprised her like that. I’m sure she would’ve appreciated a heads up as well.”

“You’re right.” I blow out a breath. “I’m sorry Alaric. Not only for not telling you tonight, but for pushing you away. I have no excuse for it, only that I wasn’t in my right mind.”

He walks up to me and clasps me on the shoulder. “You don’t have to apologize for pushing me away. I get it. When Darren was taken, I lost my mind. I didn’t know what to do. If it wasn’t for Phoebe forcing me to interact with other people to find him, I would’ve taken it upon myself to shut myself away until he was back. The days Darren was missing is nothing compared to the years Zeke was, but I understand better now what you were going through.

“We both made mistakes. I could’ve fought harder to stay in your life, just as you could’ve reached out to me. We’re both at fault. But I need to know if there are any more surprises. I can’t subject Opal to any more—she’s been through enough.”

I nod and make my way over to the edge of the dock, taking a seat.

“Zeke thinks rejecting Opal kept her safe. He believes if he hadn’t rejected her, then she would have been captured right alongside him. I don’t know if that’s true or not. We will never know. A part of me is ecstatic to have both my brother and my mate in my life now, while another part of me is furious with Zeke and wants to keep Opal as far away from him as possible so he can’t hurt her again.

"I feel like I'm going to have to choose between them..." I pause and take a deep breath. It's hard to admit out loud but it's the truth. "And I would choose Opal every time. But I don't want to be placed in that position. I just don't know how to fix this." I spit out everything I've been feeling for the first time in a long time, finally having someone to confide in who isn't my mother. And even then, with my mom I always watered everything down, not wanting to add to her burden. With Alaric, I know whatever I say will stay between us and that he has my back.

"That's a lot to unpack," he says, coming to take a seat beside me. "Why does Zeke think Opal would have been captured with him?"

"Because he said he was captured two hours after he left her. He said he was coming home to see me one last time, and he knew the hunters were hot on his trail when he ran into her." I recite what Zeke has told me, wondering what Alaric makes of it.

"Well he could be right. They could've captured them both. Or they both could've been safe and the sleuth would have beaten the hunters. Either way, we can't change the past and Zeke needs to work through all that with Opal. You can't force her to forgive him, just like you can't force her to stay away. The Mother deemed the three of you would be together—rejection or not, that doesn't change.

"What you need to do is talk to Zeke about what he wants to do. Make sure he knows with certainty what he wants before you bring Opal anywhere near him. I'll be honest, she wasn't my favorite person over the last eleven years, and I guess her attitude makes more sense now. But over the last few months, she has changed and is someone Phoebe has grown to call a close friend, and I don't want to see her hurt," Alaric tells me.

"What do you mean her attitude makes more sense now?" I ask.

"Well for years, Opal was horrible. She was the biggest bitch to everyone except Sebastyn. Would act like she knew they were going to be mates one day even though he had never shown her any inclination of feelings." A growl slips out of my mouth. "Calm down," Alaric chuckles. "It was all an act. She didn't take the rejection well, and latched onto Sebastyn. At the time, it seemed like she was punishing herself, going after him even though he rejected her advances at every turn. And I guess that's exactly what she was doing."

"Maybe." We sit and stare out at the water, neither of us saying anything for a long while. "I have to go talk to Zeke," I tell him, and we

both rise to our feet.

“I think that’s a good idea,” Alaric says, patting me on the back as I turn to walk away, feeling a thousand times lighter than I did when I got here earlier. Even with the conversation I need to have with Zeke looming over my head, getting some of that off my chest was freeing.



Zeke

Axel has been gone an awful long time. I wonder if he saw her? And if so, is that why he’s been gone for so long? Are they claiming each other right now? Pain shoots through my chest at the thought. Pain that I deserve. Not because I don’t want them to claim each other, because I do... But the thought of being left out cuts me deeply.

“Zeke? Are you in here?” Axel calls out from the front door.

“Yeah,” I say, rushing to him. “Did you see her?”

He has a big stupid grin on his face, showing me I didn’t need to ask that. “Yes I did.”

“And?” I ask. I want to know everything. No matter how much it is going to hurt.

“Let’s go to the office and talk. There are a few things we need to clear the air about,” he says, not answering my question, the smile fading from his face. Great. This is it. This is the moment I lose my brother. Not that I blame him in any way. I know he feels like he has to choose between me and Opal, but I would never make him. They both deserve to be happy. If what they need is for me to disappear again for it to happen, consider it done.

I follow him into the office and he takes a seat. “Opal will be coming here tomorrow.”

“What?” I exclaim.

“I promised her that you wouldn’t be here when she did. We’re working on a project together. A project I think would normally be right up your alley, but until you make it right with her, you can’t be a part of it.”

“What project?” I ask, and he dives in, telling me about the brilliant idea to make a floating supernatural island where we can all be safe from

the prophecy. After a few probing questions, he realizes I missed out on the whole prophecy thing, and after he explains the small amount that he does know, it terrifies me... An old enemy? Time for supernaturals to come out of the shadows? Holy shit. What does this mean for the world?

“You’re right, that’s something I would love to be a part of... But back to Opal. How is she? Is she okay? Do you think she would talk to me?” I spit my questions at him and he lets off a little chuckle. That’s the first time I’ve heard him laugh since I’ve been home. Opal being in his life is already making a change for the better, and he’s only known her for a few hours.

“She’s perfect!” He gets this far away look on his face for a moment. “We talked a little, but we were in a large group, so there wasn’t much time for us to be alone. I plan on having a more in-depth conversation with her tomorrow on how we move forward... But before I do, I need to know what you want.”

“What I want? What do you mean?” I ask in shock. Surely I have nothing to do with whether they mate or not, and there is no way she wants me now. Not after what I put her through, not now when my body is covered in scars.

“I need to know, if you were given the chance to make things right with Opal, what you would do. She can’t go through that hurt again, so if you plan on sticking to the rejection, you’ll have to leave.” I can see how hard this is for him to say. But honestly, this isn’t what I expected. I expected him to just tell me to leave, not give me the option to make it right.

“If Opal can find it in her heart to give me another chance, I will spend the rest of my life making it up to her. I will do everything in my power to be worthy of being her mate,” I tell him. He can hear the honesty in my voice and the corners of his mouth tilt upwards in a small smile. I guess I said the right thing.

“That’s exactly what I wanted to hear. I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, and you’re going to have to work, but Opal asked about your reason for rejecting her and I would like to tell her, if that’s okay with you. I don’t forgive you for it, but I understand from your perspective how you would think your reasons were justified.”

I nod because what can I say? Was what I did the right thing? At the time I thought it was, but after talking with Axel and then my mother,

maybe I was wrong and my bear was right. Maybe we could have protected her.

“Let’s go for a run. It’s been too long since our bears were together,” Axel says excitedly, breaking me out of my own thoughts.

“Uh...” I begin. “About that...” Shit. I know I glossed over the issues with my bear, not wanting to scare him.

“What?” he asks, concern lining his features.

“My bear is feral. If I were to shift—more like if he actually lets me shift—I can’t control him. He will probably destroy anything and everything in his path. In his mind, I’ve kept him away from his mate and caged up for eleven years.”

“What do you mean? I thought you said he just wouldn’t let you shift. You didn’t say anything about him being feral,” Axel raises his voice to me.

“I’m ashamed. Not only have I hurt my mate, but I’ve destroyed my bear; the two parts of me I’m supposed to protect and cherish. I honestly don’t know how to fix it.” I lower my head in shame.

“You’re going to shift and I’m going to talk to your bear.” I go to interrupt him but he holds up his hand. “We will shift in the cells so you won’t hurt anyone. Besides, I don’t think it’s possible for your bear to hurt mine. We share part of the same soul, remember?”

His idea, although extremely dangerous, may just work, so I nod and we head downstairs to the cells.

Just like I said, as soon as I shift, my bear pushes me to the background and takes complete control. I can’t see or hear anything that is happening around us... I can only hope and pray to the Mother that he doesn’t hurt Axel.

Chapter 9

Opal

Last night was amazing. I haven't had that much fun in years. Sure, at the beginning of the night I had to recite the entire Zeke story though. After I explained what Axel told me about Zeke believing he did the right thing by rejecting me, the girls threw out some crazy reasons. The only one that remotely came close to what I could forgive was that he knew he was going to be taken. But then why would he have had sex with me? Why not just run straight away?

The more I thought about it though, the more I realized that's what he was trying to do. He tried to get away from me but I kept walking toward him. At one point last night I even questioned whether it could've been my fault...

But no, I realize now that it can't be. Besides, Zeke could've always told me what was happening. I'm sure we could've found a way to protect the both of us. All he needed to do was speak up, but did he do that? No. Like a typical male, he tried to decide what was best.

Crap, I have to stop revisiting this train of thought. I'm already acting as if that was the case, and until I speak to either him or Axel, I truly have no clue. I'm getting my hopes up that his rejection was justified in order to keep me safe, and if it turns out to be something different, I'll be

crushed once again... No, until I speak to either of them, I'm not going to allow myself to hope. Not when it comes to Zeke.

Thinking back on the rest of my night, instead of letting me dwell on all the what-ifs, the girls were quick to change the subject to happier things. Turns out, Rayne and I are the only ones not knocked up and could drink, and the others found us to be hilarious the drunker we got.

Even my hangover this morning can't dim the happiness flowing out of me. For the first time in what feels like forever, I'm happy. Truly happy. The pain from Zeke is still there, but the anticipation and excitement for Axel drowns it out. And today I get to spend the entire day with him.

The question from last night burns in the back of my mind as I shower. Do I still want to claim him? After a long night of drinking with the girls—well Rayne—and some very XXX rated dreams starring a certain sexy Alpha, the answer is yes. A thousand times yes. If nothing else, the events with the mages and hunters have shown me life is too short.

A knock on the door startles me as I'm hopping out of the shower. "One minute," I yell out, quickly wrapping myself with a towel and rushing to the door.

Knowing I'm not expecting anyone, I peek through the peephole. The last thing I expect to see is Axel pacing back and forth on my front porch.

I swing the door open and he turns to look at me, his mouth wide open in shock. "Hi. I wasn't expecting you," I say with a smile.

He doesn't respond, his eyes just roam my body with a look full of heat. I glance down and remember I'm only wearing a towel, and a giggle slips out.

That seems to snap him out of the trance he was in, and his eyes snap up to mine. "Uh, hi. Sorry if I interrupted you." He shuffles from foot to foot looking nervous.

"No worries. I was just getting ready to come see you." I open the door wider and gesture for him to come inside. He glances around as if he's unsure if he wants to, but ultimately decides to follow.

"Is there a reason you came over?" I ask as I head to the kitchen and start making us coffee.

"Well... yes... the thing is..." He stumbles over his words.

I walk over to him and place my hand on his arm. "You can tell me anything."

He glances down at my hand touching him, and back up in my eyes, before taking his left hand and rubbing the back of his neck. For such a big burly man, he sure is cute when he's nervous.

He clears his throat. "I was hoping to ask for your help, but now that I'm here, I don't know if it's a good idea."

"Of course I will help you with whatever you need," I tell him honestly, feeling a little concerned now. What could he possibly need my help with?

He steps back and begins to pace. "It's for Zeke."

The sound of his name doesn't hurt as bad as it did yesterday before meeting Axel, but it still sends a small pang through my chest. I take a few deep breaths to center myself.

"What's wrong? Is he okay?" As much as I am pissed he rejected me and I want to hate him for it, after the conversation with Axel last night, and now knowing Zeke feels he was justified in rejecting me, I can't.

"It's his bear. He's gone feral." He blows out a deep breath and takes a seat on one of the stools at the counter, placing his head in his hands. "I convinced him to shift last night. He warned me his bear was feral after rejecting you—that he couldn't control him—but I didn't listen. He was right though, his bear immediately took over and tried to attack me even though we hold part of the same soul. I've never seen anything like it. And because we are both Alphas, I couldn't stop it; our strength is matched." Holy shit. I mean, I know shifters can go feral when their human counterpart rejects their mate if it's a decision they don't agree with—it's what happened with Kirnon when he rejected Skarlyt—but it honestly hasn't even crossed my mind that it could be happening to Zeke.

"What can I do?"

He looks up into my eyes, surprised at my answer. "You really are an angel."

A soft blush creeps up my neck at his words and I wave him off. "I'm no angel. But no matter what Zeke has done to me, his bear doesn't deserve to be in pain because of it." I try to justify my need to help him by saying I'm just helping his bear, but the reality is... I want to help the man too. He looked so broken the last time I saw him, and if I'm going to mate his brother, I suppose I need to get used to seeing him around. I would never make Axel choose between the two of us.

“I was hoping you would have a potion or something that could calm his bear long enough to let Zeke shift back.” I jump at his words.

“You mean Zeke is still a bear?”

He nods his head. “Yes. He’s locked in the cells at the sleuth so he’s not a danger to anyone. Well... anyone but himself.”

I rush around the counter and sprint to my room, throwing on whatever clothes I find lying around. I had plans to dress sexy for Axel today, but after finding out Zeke is stuck, I don’t have that luxury.

“Come on,” I call out to him as I open my bedroom door and head to my work room in the back.

“Wow,” he breathes as he takes in the room. It’s nothing special, definitely not as amazing as Constance’s or Skarlyt’s, but it’s mine. Walking in, the back wall is lined with bookshelves filled to the brim. I can find anything that I need in those books: spells, medicinal uses for plants, basically anything I would need to create my own spells. There is a long counter running through the middle of the room filled with beakers and mortar and pestle. On the remaining two walls, I have shelves lined with plants that I use for my potions.

I grab one of the spell books that specializes in shifters off the wall, and flip the pages. I don’t know exactly what I’m looking for, but I’ll know it when I see it.

Out of the corner of my eye, I watch Axel as he walks around the room looking at everything.

“Ah ha,” I say as I find exactly what I’m looking for.

To tame a beast: How to heal a disconnect between human and shifter.

- *Dandelion Root*
- *Rose Petals*
- *Butterfly wings*
- *Honey*
- *Lavender*
- *Oregano Oil*

Bring 1.5 cups of water to a slow boil.

Blend all ingredients together thoroughly, using your mortar and pestle.

Slowly add your dry ingredients to your boiled water.

Let simmer for 15 minutes, infusing it with your magic and intent.

Strain into a cup using cheese cloth.

****Do not discard strained ingredients. For better healing, the shifter should ingest the entire contents of the cup and then chew on the herbs. Potion should be effective within 10 minutes.*

I get to work gathering all the supplies. I crush up all the dry ingredients before adding the oregano oil and honey, mixing it thoroughly so it becomes a paste. Once the water is boiled, I add in the contents, turning my burner down to simmer and letting it combine.

"We have about fifteen minutes to wait until this is ready," I tell Axel.

"Are you sure this will work?"

I give him a small smile. Do I know this will work? No. But I'm hopeful. "Not one hundred percent sure, I've never needed to do something like this before, but it should."

"But it won't hurt him, right?" he asks.

"No, it shouldn't hurt him. And if it doesn't work, we can always ask Constance or Skarlyt. The hardest part is going to be getting him to drink it while he's still in bear form."

"I didn't think about that." He begins to pace, his earlier nervousness returning with a vengeance.

"Don't worry. I have a plan," I tell him. I do have a plan. Is it stupid? Absolutely. Could I be hurt? One hundred percent. But will it work? I'm pretty confident, so it will be worth it.

"And what is that?" He turns to face me.

"Well his bear is upset that he rejected me, right?" I ask, and at his nod I continue. "Then, theoretically, his bear should calm with my presence alone, long enough for one of us to pour it down his throat."

"No! Absolutely not. You're not going in there with him. You could be hurt."

I walk over to Axel and place my hands in his. "I trust you to protect me, and I need you to trust me when I tell you I can do this." He doesn't respond, simply pulling me into him, wrapping his big strong arms around me.

After a few moments, I step back. "I have to stir the potion." I walk over to the cauldron and stir the contents, letting small amounts of my magic seep out of me. I focus my intent on wanting Zeke to get better—even if it is just so he can tell me his side of the story. I then think of Axel—not Zeke—as I pour more positive magic into it. I could think of Zeke, but I'm

sure some negativity would seep out, and that alone could be disastrous. No, I think of Axel. The way tingles slide up my arm when he touches my hand. The heat and longing in his eyes when he gazes at me. The way my heartbeat races when he's near.

I open my eyes as the timer goes off, and I proceed to carefully strain the potion. I take a small whiff and I'm glad to find the oregano oil is masked with the sweetness of the honey. That's probably why it was put in there.

"Okay, we're ready." I turn to Axel, sealing up the potion in a thermos and placing the loose contents into a baggie.

Together we head out the door and begin our trek to Axel's home. "Is there anything I should know before I get there?" I ask.

"Only that my mom is extremely excited to meet you and will probably want to keep you all to herself," he chuckles.

"Do you think she'll like me?" I hate how vulnerable I sound. The fake Opal never would have shown she cared what other people thought of her, but the real me is absolutely terrified of making a bad impression.

He stops in his tracks, taking my hands in his. "She's going to absolutely love you."

I look into his eyes, seeing only honesty there, and relax a little. Plus, the glimpses of her I saw in Axel's past show me that she's a wonderful mother.

"I should tell you something," I say and look down at the ground.

I don't give him the option to respond before spitting it out. "My gift, along with earth magic, is the *sight*. And when you touched me last night, I caught glimpses of your past." He looks a little panicked at my words so I push forward. "It was nothing bad, and it's not something I can control all the time."

He relaxes a little, but not as much as he was prior to me revealing my power to him. It's the same reaction I get from most people. Nobody wants someone in their head, able to see things they don't want them to.

"What exactly is the *sight*?" he asks.

"It's hard to explain and a very rare gift. If I touch a person or object, I catch glimpses of their past or future. I can't choose what I see. I spent years trying to train my gift so that I don't invade others' privacy, but I have found I can't. Last night I saw three visions of you in the past. One of you and Zeke as teenagers talking about your future mate, another one of

you and your mother when you were searching for Zeke, and the last one was a conversation between you and Alaric after you had given up on finding Zeke." One glance and I know what he's feeling: violated. Whether it's consciously or not, no one likes their privacy invaded like that.

"I'm sorry," I whisper, releasing his hands and looking down at the ground.

A couple heartbeats later, his hand touches my chin, bringing it up so our eyes meet. "It's okay. I was a little shocked but I trust when you say you have no control over it. It's strange, but even though we just met, I feel like I've known you forever and I trust you with my life. I guess that's what happens when you meet your mate. An instant connection. The only thing I ask is you tell me if you see anything else, no matter what it is. There are parts of my past... I would prefer you not to see."

"I feel the same about you. And I promise if I get any more visions from you, I will tell you instantly." I go up on my tip toes and place a soft kiss on his lips. "There are parts of my past I'm not proud of either, so I would never judge you."

"The past is the past, and all that matters is our future. Whoever you were—or I was—in the past doesn't matter." That was the absolutely most perfect thing for him to say, and I agree wholeheartedly.

"Thank you," I say as we turn to continue making our way to the sleuth.

For the first time since Zeke's rejection, I don't fear seeing him. I know it's still going to hurt, but with Axel by my side, I feel strong enough to get through it. Was it only four days ago when I thought I wouldn't survive seeing him again? It's incredible how much has changed in such a short time, and for the first time in eleven years, I'm actually looking forward to my future. A future that includes a caring mate and something I never thought I could have... children. All we need to do now is claim one another.

"By the way, I still feel the same way this morning," I say with a small wink in his direction.

He looks confused momentarily before he realizes my meaning. "Really?"

I stop once again, turning to face him. "Really. Let's go take care of your brother and maybe we can sneak off somewhere private."

A low growl escapes him before he's kissing me, lifting me up off the ground and placing my back up against a tree. It reminds me of my time with Zeke, but rather than pain at the memory, hope flutters through me. Maybe I can replace that bad memory with a good one.

I wrap my legs around his waist, grinding myself on him as we kiss. It's hot and heavy, and soon we are pawing at each other's clothes, wanting skin to skin contact.

Way too soon, he's pulling back. "As much as I hate to say this, we really need to go help Zeke."

I nod and lower my legs. "Yes we do. But after..."

"Immediately after, I'm whisking you away where we will be undisturbed," he growls, placing one last kiss on my lips.

With a reason to hurry, we speed walk to the sleuth. Let's get this done so I can claim my sexy mate and make this man mine.

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Chapter 10

Opal

I am not sure what I expected when Axel told me about Zeke, but a huge feral bear throwing himself at the bars was not it. I stop dead in my tracks in the doorway, staring at him while he snarls and growls through the bars. He raises his snout and sniffs the air a few times, spinning quickly, his eyes locking with mine. There is so much pain there.

Without my permission, my body begins to move. "Wait," Axel says, grabbing my arm and pushing me behind him. Zeke's bear doesn't seem to like that, not one bit, if the growls and bangs coming from the cell Axel is shielding me from are anything to go by.

"It's okay, he won't hurt me. Don't ask me how I know because I have no idea. I just feel it." Axel looks at me skeptically but nods.

I reach up and place a kiss on his cheek before I walk around him and towards Zeke. Once his eyes find mine once more, he calms, the glaze in his feral eyes beginning to fade.

"Hey there big guy. You're not going to hurt me are you?" I say softly, keeping my arms out in front of me—the same way I had approached Zeke that night eleven years ago.

His big meaty head shakes from left to right, and I shoot a triumphant look in Axel's direction. Once again, Zeke begins to growl,

obviously not wanting my attention off of him.

“Now you stop that,” I scold the bear. “That’s your brother.”

The bear lowers his head slightly as if he is sorry, but with him being a bear and not being able to communicate with me, I’m not quite sure how sorry he actually is. I get close enough to the cell that I can feel the hot air escaping his mouth and nose, and stop.

“I need you to do something for me,” I say to the bear, maintaining eye contact. He tilts his head in question and I continue. “I need you to give Zeke back please.” I figured it’s worth a shot, but the bear just swipes a paw on the ground and lets off a low growl. Guess that’s a no.

“But I can’t understand you. You want to fix what Zeke broke, right?” I ask again. I’m not even sure if that is what I want... But I do know the longer he stays in bear form like this, the less likely he will be able to regain control and shift back. Ever.

Ordinarily, when a shifter relinquishes control to their animal counterpart, each has a level of consciousness and the ability to make decisions. With his bear fully in control, it’s entirely possible for Zeke to be trapped within, never able to shift back or take control.

The bear gives a slight incline of his head, showing he agrees, but is still showing no signs of shifting back. “I need Zeke to come back so I can understand you,” I say softly to the bear while reaching my hand out through the bars. I hear Axel suck in a breath at my movements but I don’t stop. The bear looks at my hand and back at me before rubbing his face over it. “I need to give you a name. I can’t keep calling you bear in my head,” I say while I rub his cheeks and ears.

“How about Shadow because your fur is so black it almost blends in with the dark?” He must like the name, as he sticks out his tongue and licks my hand, leaving a glob of saliva behind. “Eww Shadow, that’s gross.” I pull my hand back and wipe it on my pants.

“Okay, since you won’t give Zeke back, will you take this potion I made for you? It will make you feel all better, I promise,” Shadow looks at me in confusion, tilting his head side to side, before making a humming sound that I take as his agreement.

With slow calculated movements, I reach into my bag and pull out the thermos, pouring some in the cap and holding it out to him. He takes a couple of sniffs and then dives in with his huge tongue, lapping up all the contents.

It only takes a few breaths before it starts to work, and his body slowly sinks until a very naked Zeke is standing before me. "Opal," he whispers and reaches out a hand to me. I step back quickly. I thought I was ready to hear his side of the story, but I guess I'm not.

"I can't," I say with tears brimming in my eyes, turning to look at Axel. "Let him out and take me home. Please."

"Opal... I'm sorry," Zeke's pained voice calls out as I reach the doorway. I turn to look at him one last time.

"I'm not ready to speak to you... yet. I'm working on it. Please, until then leave me alone. It hurts too much to look at you." With that said, I turn back to the door and head back the way I came.

I know Axel will be releasing Zeke—I'm sure he'll want a shower and some sleep in a bed, and not in a cell. Besides, just because I'm not ready to speak to Zeke, doesn't mean Axel needs to ignore his brother.

"Ready angel?" Axel asks, coming up behind me a couple minutes later.

"More than ready." With that, the two of us walk hand in hand to return to my home. We had plans to spend the day here working on the list of requirements for the bears, but I didn't anticipate how seeing Zeke would affect me.

Before I know it, we are walking up the front porch to my house. It's as if the entire walk didn't take place. My mind's completely void of everything and anything.

Axel shuffles quietly by the door as I punch the code into the electronic lock and open it wide. As I turn toward him, I can see he is unsure of what to do: does he come in, or does he bid me goodbye?

I roll those options over in my brain for a moment. Do I want him to stay? Or do I want him to go? With the latter thought, a wave of loneliness flows through me. I definitely don't want him to go.

"Want to come in?" I ask, walking through the doorway, leaving it open for him.

"I wasn't sure if you would want me to." His voice is low and doesn't hold his usual confidence. It seems like I have the ability to make this big strong Alpha unsure of himself.

"Of course I do. Besides, we need to figure out what your portion of the island needs." His shoulders slump, so I quickly add, "And we can

get to know each other better when we're done." I give him a bright smile, which he returns, but it doesn't quite reach his eyes.

Taking his hand in mine, I lead us toward the kitchen after he gently kicks the front door closed with his foot.

"Would you like something to eat or drink before we sit down? I'm sure I have something I can whip up quickly." Being in such close quarters with him is making my body burn with desire—proof of it lining my panties, which I'm sure he can smell with every breath he takes.

I quickly begin pulling out boxes of crackers from the cupboards, along with bricks of cheese and packages of deli meat from the fridge.

"Here let me help." He comes around the kitchen island, taking the cheese, cutting board, and knife. He slices the cheese as I place the crackers on a tray and roll the deli meat. Within minutes, we have completely filled the tray and I begin to wonder for a moment if we'll be able to finish it all. Who am I kidding? Of course we will, he's a shifter after all.

"So, if you had to pick... what's the one thing the bears can't live without on the island?" I ask as we sit down at the table, quickly grabbing a pen and notebook off the counter so I can keep track.

"Honestly we don't need much. Obviously we feel at home in the forest, so an area densely covered in trees would be best." I write that down with some stars beside it.

"How many are in your sleuth? How big of an area will you need?" That's the only thing I can find wrong with Skarlyt's plan. If she plans to eventually bring all supernaturals to the island—which I know she does—eventually we're going to run out of space.

"We have two hundred and fifty-two adults and twenty-three cubs right now. But a few of our women are pregnant so that number will grow." He pauses and runs a hand over his beard. "I would think about twenty acres would be enough... That way if we expand in numbers we have the room."

My eyes go wide at that thought. Twenty acres is a big number. If we figure that each shifter species will need that much space, we're looking at a massive island.

"Do you think the rest of the shifters are going to need that much space?"

He nods as he chews a cracker and cheese sandwich. "Probably. In all honesty, we're going to need an island approximately the size of Cuba—if

not bigger—to accommodate everyone. I thought Skarlyt was crazy when she first brought it up, but as long as we design it right, it will work.”

“I suppose you’re right. Okay what else?”

He takes the pen and paper from me and begins to draw an outline. “Well, if we figure that each shifter is going to need approximately twenty acres, plus the witches and any other factions we pick up along the way... The smartest thing to do is design the island to have at least ten acres of farm land between each faction to provide food for each.” I watch as he draws a large shape, breaking each section up with lines. I can tell by the way he is confident in his design that he’s done some sort of planning before. He even makes marks to show where each small village will be.

I watch in complete awe as he continues. He seems to be getting lost in it, going as far as marking how thick the land needs to be, where freshwater streams should go, and a bunch of other little details. “This is amazing. Where did you learn to do that?”

He blinks up at me with a soft smile. “It’s what we do for money. We run a construction company. We mainly build for other supernaturals since some—like the vampires—have specific needs that human builders wouldn’t know about.”

“That’s so cool! I didn’t know that.” It makes sense though, supernaturals hiring other supernaturals to complete their work. “How many homes do you think you can build in the short time we have?”

He looks down at the drawing of the island, seeming to calculate it in his head. “Provided that we work section by section, we should be able to at least have temporary housing for each faction within the week, and can complete the rest once we’re on the island.” He looks back up at me. “But what we really need to focus on is making sure the basics are covered. We need to ensure there is running water, plumbing, and solar electricity. Most supernaturals would be able to survive in tents for an extended period of time if we needed to. And if we can convince some others to join us in building, it would be even quicker.”

“You’re amazing,” I say, walking in front of him as he glides the chair backwards and wrapping my arms around him.

He grabs onto my waist and pulls me so that I’m straddling him on the chair, moving his face to my neck and taking a deep inhale. “So are you,” he whispers, pressing a light kiss on my neck.

My entire body shivers, pulsing with need. I pull my head back, not giving him a chance to say anything before I place my lips on his, immediately snaking my tongue out to taste him. A low moan slips out as he pulls me closer.

I move my arms from his neck, sliding my hands down his chest slowly, feeling each hard well-defined muscle along the way, until I get to the bottom. I slowly grasp the bottom of his shirt, raising it up, breaking our kiss momentarily to pull it over his head. With a clear view of his physique another shiver rolls through me. My tongue darts out to lick my lips in anticipation of tracing each muscle and tattoos that paint his body.

"Your turn," Axel says, pulling my shirt up and over my head. Funny. I didn't even feel his hands move.

I watch his eyes flare with heat as he takes in the upper half of my body, instantly bringing his mouth down to my breasts. He pulls my bra to the side, capturing my nipple in his mouth and sucking. My back arches from pleasure. Each flick of his tongue makes my core throb with need.

I grind myself on him with vigor, the expert use of his mouth on my nipple making me increase my speed, yearning for release.

He breaks away. "Where's the bed?"

I can't seem to get my mind to work so I point to my room. He lifts me up so I'm still straddling him and carries me over to my room. Once inside, he kicks the door closed and gently lays me on the bed. "Beautiful," he says as he reaches for the waistband of my pants, shimmying them down with ease.

Once they're off, he throws them into the corner and begins kissing and licking up my leg, making more wetness pool in my panties. "Is this all for me?" he asks as he reaches the apex of my legs.

Still unable to speak, I nod my head yes. He hooks a finger under my panties and swipes it through my folds before bringing it to his mouth. "Delicious. Just like I knew you would be." Watching him suck my juices off his finger has to be the most erotic thing I've ever seen, and it has me wishing that it was me he was licking rather than his finger.

My wish is granted within seconds; he uses his teeth to rip the panties off my body, as if the material is his enemy.

"Are you sure you want this angel?" he half growls at me.

I nod my head. "Words, angel. I need your words. Once I start, I will not be able to stop until you are mine in every way."

Goddess if that is not the hottest thing I've ever heard. "Yes," I pant.

As soon as the word is out of my mouth, his tongue reaches my center, slowly thrusting in and out of me while his thumb slowly circles my clit. A feeling of pure euphoria hits me, and I begin to move my body in time with the thrusts of his tongue.

"Axel!" I scream as my pussy clenches his tongue, coating it.

He waits until the spasms slow, before rising up and slowly removing his pants. As he lowers them down and his cock springs free, I lick my lips. Goddess this man is perfect. His cock has a slight curve upward, and it excites me beyond belief knowing that he's going to hit my G-spot with each thrust.

He leans over me, lining himself up. "Last chance angel."

"I want you Axel. Make me yours," I whisper. He thrusts in without warning and I cry out. He stays buried inside me, not moving, allowing me to acclimate to his size. But I need him to move. I try to use his shoulders to push myself up and down his cock, causing him to let off a low growl.

"I need you to move," I snarl at him, delirious with the need raging inside of me.

He places his lips on mine for a couple of heartbeats, before doing just that. He begins hammering in and out like a man possessed, unable to stop until he's made me his.

With each thrust, I am proved right as he hits my g-spot, quickly pushing me over the edge in pleasure over and over again.

I feel the first tingling of my magic forcing its way to the surface and a moment of panic hits me. This is when Zeke pushed me away. I look up to Axel's eyes as I place my hands on his chest and watch as his canines elongate, ready to claim his mate. I let my head fall to the side, giving him access.

As his teeth break through my skin, my magic flares, marking him as ours, and we both tumble over the edge one last time.

As the bond snaps into place, an emptiness I didn't realize I had begins to fill. Not fully though, as if that spot is reserved for Zeke. I wonder if we can get past this or if that spot will forever be hollow.

Axel pulls his teeth from my neck, licking the mark, and my entire body trembles. Even after the mind-altering sex we just had, my body is ready for more.

“Mate," he growls.

“Yes. Mate," I whisper back, giving him a soft kiss on his lips.

He removes himself from me and rushes over to the bathroom, returning with a wet washcloth. After cleaning me up, he climbs onto the bed behind me, wrapping his big arms around my body.

I finally have a mate. *But not the only one.* A small voice filters through my mind. The last thought I have before I finally succumb to sleep is... ‘*Can Zeke fix what he broke? Or will this hole be a permanent fixture in my soul?*’

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Chapter 11

Zeke

I stare at the doorway Opal just walked through. To say I am surprised to be back in human form is a gross understatement. My bear pushed me so far down into my subconscious that I thought it would be impossible for me to regain control.

Shadow, my bear says to me through our bond. I almost weep at hearing him speak. It's been years since he has done anything except growl or huff at me.

Shadow? What is that? I question.

He huffs at me in exasperation. *The name my mate gave me.*

What? When did she give you a name? I am so confused right now.

He allows his memories from when Opal was here to flow through me and jealousy rises up inside me. She touched him, petted him even. She didn't flinch at the sounds he was making as she does with my voice. She even seemed to have started a bond with him. He's also correct, she gave him a name, a name that she had no tremble in her voice while saying. Not like she does with me.

I know it's irrational to feel jealous of a part of me, but it is what I feel. *I need to fix this*, I tell him.

Yes. Mate doesn't like you. He doesn't say anything else, simply curls up in the corner of my mind and goes to sleep with a peaceful look on his face. It's the most settled he's been since that night.

"You okay?" Axel's voice startles me from the door of the cage where he's holding the keys.

"I think so," I nod and he places the key in the lock.

"I need to fix this Axel. I know she said to give her time but..." I begin, but he fixes me with a glare.

"You have hurt her deeply. It will be a miracle if she even allows me to bond with her now..." He looks defeated, his shoulders slumped.

"She will. It wasn't you who hurt her. She knows that. Just promise me that you will take care of her since I can't."

"I will," he says with determination before walking out of the room.

With the cell unlocked, I have free reign to leave but I don't want to. I slide down the bars onto the cold concrete floor. What if I can't fix what I broke? What if Opal will never forgive me? I place my head in my hands and cry for what feels like hours, until my eyes are red and puffy.

"Enough of that," my mother scolds me from the door. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself and show your mate why she should bond with you. No woman wants to bond with a weak man who wallows in self-pity. No one can fix this but you."

Taking in her words, I realize she's right. I am the only one who can fix this. Opal said she's not ready to talk and that's fine. I need to make sure when she is ready that I am strong enough to explain everything to her without breaking down.

"You're right as always mom," I say and get up off the ground. I give my mom a kiss on the cheek as I pass. Time to go become the mate Opal deserves—a man worthy of her.

∞∞∞∞

Opal

Loud knocking startles me awake, what feels like only moments later, but judging by the darkness of the sky, it's been hours. I try to roll

over, only to be pulled into a hard wall of muscle. I sink into Axel where he is laying beside me, reveling in his body heat and about to sink back into sweet oblivion... when the knocking starts up again.

“Who is it?” Axel mumbles.

I let off a small chuckle at the sound of his voice heavy with sleep.

“I don’t know. I’ll be right back.” I place a soft kiss on his head and shimmy my way out of his arms and off the bed. I throw on my fluffy bathrobe, ensuring that everything is covered before heading out to the door.

The knocking gets louder this time and I yell out, “I’m coming,” before I pull the door open.

“Thank the Goddess,” my brother Eric says, grabbing me by the arms and looking me over from head to toe. “When Drake and Rayne came back and told me about this whole mate business—which I’m insanely pissed at you for not telling me about by the way—I rushed over to make sure you’re okay.”

“I’m okay. I promise,” I tell him as he pulls me into a hug.

“Good. Then you can explain to me why I didn’t know that your mate rejected you.” He pushes me away slightly so I can see the determined look on his face, and I can’t help but laugh. My nerdy little brother, complete with the glasses and slicked hair, is attempting to look fierce when I know he’s anything but.

A low growl comes from the direction of the kitchen and Eric’s back snaps straight as he peers over my shoulder. “I would not touch her that way right now if I were you,” Axel growls. Eric immediately drops his hands and I spin around to face Axel.

“This is my little brother, Eric. Eric, this is my mate Axel,” I introduce the two. Axel seems to relax at the knowledge that he is my family, but Eric is still tense. I usher Eric inside and guide him to the love seat in the living room.

“I... What... When did this happen?” Eric stammers over his words.

“Today,” I respond, turning to walk over to Axel.

“Can I have a few minutes to talk to my brother?” Axel runs his hands up and down my arms before placing a soft kiss on my lips.

“I’ll go take a shower.” With that, he turns back around in the direction he came, and I go take a seat on the couch opposite Eric.

He looks at me in confusion, so I take a steady breath and I tell him everything, starting with Zeke's rejection on my eighteenth birthday and finishing on my mating with Axel today. He is somewhat appeased by the knowledge that he wasn't the only one left out of the loop when it comes to my rejection, but is still pissed because he is one of the last to know.

"This makes so much more sense now. I thought you just became a bitch for no reason—no offense." I wave my hand in a gesture of 'none taken.' "I always wondered if there was another reason for it. I mean one day you were happy and we were best friends and the next, you were eighteen and wanted nothing to do with anyone or anything except Sebastyn."

"Yeah." I wring my hands in my lap, looking down. He's right. We were close. Closer than many siblings who are only a year apart. And after Zeke's rejection, I not only pushed my friends away, but him as well. I didn't want to see the pity on anyone's face, especially his.

"I just couldn't stand to see you look at me as the poor Opal who got rejected by her mate. I didn't know how to tell you, or anyone, what happened. So I did what I thought would make me strong. What I thought would fill the hole left by Zeke. I faked it until I made it, turning myself into an uncaring, cold bitch. I'm so sorry I hurt you." He's at my side in seconds, wrapping his arms around me.

"I never would've looked at you like that. I would've helped you find him and cut off his dick." We both let out small chuckles at that thought. "You did nothing wrong. He did. No matter how noble he seems to think his reasoning is." I can see the fire in his eyes. It's a family trait. Our blue eyes glow brighter when we are angry, almost as if there are small flames simmering behind them.

"I know. I truly do. I wanted to stop myself from being that way and tell you so many times but it was like another person took over my body and I couldn't break through."

He leans back out of our embrace and nods before whispering, "So that's Axel?"

I wipe the tears from my eyes. "Yup. He's amazing." I look back at the hallway where Axel is now standing, completely dressed, with wet hair from his shower.

He walks over and shakes Eric's hand, properly introducing himself before turning to me. "I'm going to head home to check on Zeke and let

you catch up with your brother.”

“Okay,” I say sadly. I don’t want him to leave, but I also want to know if Zeke is okay after the potion, so I give him a kiss and watch him walk out the front door.

“Wow. Is that what it’s like when you have a mate?” Eric asks. I look at him in confusion, not understanding what he’s talking about.

“What do you mean?”

“The way you two look at each other. Like your sun rises and sets with each other. Like you would die without one another.” He has a dreamy look on his face.

“I never thought about it that way, but I guess in a way you’re right. Axel is now the center of my universe. If it weren’t for you being here right now, I’m sure I would be a mess without him near me.” I don’t know how else to explain it.

“At least you two are better than Drake and Rayne. I swear those two don’t know the meaning of privacy and have made it their mission to do it on every surface in every room of that lab. It’s gross.” A disgusted look crosses his face and I laugh.

“Sounds about right. Want to have a movie night like old times?” I ask.

“Sure. But first I want to hear about this new project you’re working on with Skarlyt and Sarah. Rayne told me ‘it’s need to know’ and apparently I don’t need to know.” He tries to look hurt but ends up laughing in the end.

So I do. I tell him all about the island, pulling out the drawing Axel made and explaining what all the ‘squiggly’ lines are, as Eric calls them.

Then, before I forget, I take a picture of it with my phone and send it off to Skarlyt and Sarah through our group text. The responses are immediate:

Skarlyt: OMG That’s AMAZING! Tell Axel he’s moved up to head designer.

Sarah: Wow! That guy’s really talented. Glad I didn’t banish him too.

Me: He really is.

Skarlyt: Okay enough with the project talk... What I really want to know... is he as good at other things too? *Wink wink*

Sarah: Skarlyt Moon! You can’t ask things like that through text.

Me: Ha-ha. He sure is. Lol

Skarlyt: OMG I need all the details. Wait. I'm going to put Kayne to bed and come over.

Sarah: Me too.

Me: I'm having a movie night with Eric. We can talk in the morning. Come over for breakfast.

Skarlyt: Fine. But I'll have to bring Rayne and Sarah will pick up Phoebe and Sophia. Dru is still in her pocket world or she would want to be involved too.

Sarah: I'll call them right now to let them know the plan.

Me: See you in the morning.

"He literally just left," Eric says, watching as I text back and forth with the girls.

"It wasn't Axel. It was Sarah and Skarlyt. They wanted to come and interrupt our movie night but I told them to come for breakfast in the morning instead." With that, we grab some popcorn and blankets, getting comfy on the couch. We decide to watch the newest Disney movie Encanto to see just how much the humans know about magic.

As I snuggle into my cocoon next to my brother, suddenly my life feels almost perfect. I cemented the bond with my mate—no, one of my mates—and I have my friends and my little brother back. The only thing that would make this better is if my other mate wasn't such a douche. I'm going to have to talk to him sooner rather than later. I planned on making him sweat it out, but my awareness keeps turning back to the hole in my mate bond. The hole that only he can fill.

Worse case, I talk to him and don't like what he says and have to live with the hole forever. Best case, his reasoning makes sense and we complete our bond.

Knowing there's nothing I can do about it tonight, I turn my attention back to the movie. Tomorrow, I will figure it out.

Chapter 12

Opal

I wake up surrounded by heat. Sooo hot. I try to roll over and rip the covers off of me, but I can't. It takes me a minute to realize that it's not the blankets that are making me so hot, it's an arm and a leg. I turn my head as much as I can and see Axel snuggled into my back. I glance around. I'm pretty sure I fell asleep on the couch with Eric. How did Axel get in? And when did I come to my bed?

"Good morning angel," he rasps, still half asleep.

"Good morning. I don't remember you coming back or crawling into bed."

"You fell asleep on the couch, so Eric let me in and I carried you in here." He places a soft kiss on my neck making me tingle all over my body. I twist to face him, and this time he lets me, so I eagerly bring my lips to his and kiss him. Dame, I can't believe this sweet, sexy man is all mine... I lose myself in the kiss until I hear laughter and the smell of bacon coming from the kitchen.

"Who..." I begin and Axel chuckles.

"The girls have been here for about half an hour waiting for you to wake up."

"I better go help before one of them comes in here," I say, wiggling myself out of his hold.

“Too late,” I hear Rayne say at the door. “I heard you talking so I knew you were up.”

Of course she did. “Damn vampire hearing,” I grumble under my breath.

“I heard that too,” she sing-songs as she heads back to the kitchen.

“I’m going to head home for a bit this morning. Zeke is feeling much better now, thanks to you,” Axel says joining me in getting dressed.

“I was going to see if it was okay to come and talk to him at some point today. I figured putting it off for too much longer is only going to make it more awkward, especially since we cemented our bond.”

Axel stops pulling his shirt over his head and turns to look at me in shock. “I didn’t know if you would want to... He was asking last night but I told him I wasn’t going to bring it up to you.”

I close the distance between us. “Is it an issue for you? Because if it is, I won’t go. You’re my mate first and foremost...”

“But he is also your mate. You don’t have to worry, there will never be any jealousy over you spending time with him. If what you decide is to cement the bond with him as well, I will support you. Zeke and I have always known we’d share a mate and are prepared for it. But I will also support you if you don’t feel ready, or end up not wanting to bond with him at all. Even with his reasons for rejecting you, I still hate the fact that he hurt you, and it will take time for him to prove that he won’t do it again.”

I place a soft kiss on his lips. “It will take time for me to trust him as well. But without knowing his reasons I don’t know how I feel about it yet. I just know that I need to let him tell his side of the story.”

“I’ll be back in a few hours to pick you up and give Zeke time to prepare his groveling,” he tells me with a wink, walking out the door. I hear him talk to the girls for a minute before the front door closes, followed by the sound of pounding feet down the hallway coming towards me.

Skarlyt is somehow the first through the door. “OH MY GODS,” she squeals, wrapping me up in a hug.

“Can’t breathe,” I wheeze.

“Sorry,” she steps back. “It’s just after everything you’ve been through, I’m so glad you finally found a mate who deserves you.”

“He does deserve you right?” Sarah pipes in. I step into the bathroom to brush my teeth and do my business. But I leave the door open so I can still be an active participant.

“Psh. Of course he does. Look at her, she’s practically glowing. He must have a wicked tongue or a really big d–” Rayne starts, but Phoebe wraps her hand around her mouth.

“Did you just lick me?” Phoebe shrieks, moving her hand away and wiping it on her pants.

“If you didn’t want your hand licked, you shouldn’t put it that close to my mouth,” Rayne snarks back.

Sophia snickers and her twin gives her a death glare while Sarah just rolls her eyes and shakes her head in disapproval. “I can’t take you guys anywhere.”

“I think it’s fun. Just think about how much more fun our lives have been since Rayne came into the picture,” Skarlyt says, making Rayne preen under the compliment, sticking her tongue out at Sarah.

“Oh no you don’t. Keep that thing away from me,” Sarah says, holding her hand up to keep Rayne away.

A normal person—wait, no, a sane person would’ve put her tongue away, but normal and sane are not words used to describe Rayne at all. No, Rayne proceeds to stick her tongue out further and chase Sarah all the way back to the kitchen.

The rest of us follow slowly, allowing Rayne to have her fun. It’s easier that way. If we don’t, it’ll go one of two ways. Either she’ll pout throughout the entire breakfast, making everyone uncomfortable until she deems our punishment over... or she will turn her sights on one of us, and trust me when I say it will be worse than licking someone. That bitch is crazy with a capital C.

Breakfast is pretty normal by our standards, filled with lots of laughter and a lot of questions about how Axel is in bed. Of course I don’t tell them. A girl should never kiss and tell, unless you’re Rayne or Skarlyt and then you tell anyone who will listen.

“So I heard you say you’re going to talk to Zeke today,” Rayne says.

A round of “What?” goes around, everyone’s mouth hanging open in shock.

I narrow my eyes at Rayne. Like I said, ‘damn vampire hearing.’ “Axel says that Zeke believes he had a good reason for rejecting me.” Sarah goes to interrupt, but I already know what she’s going to say so I hold up my hand to stop her and continue. “No, Axel isn’t pressuring me to talk to

him. In fact he has made it clear that he fully supports my decision either way. But after Axel and I completed our bond yesterday, I feel a hole in my soul where I know Zeke is supposed to be. If I ever want the chance to be truly happy, I need to talk to him and let him explain. Otherwise, I'll live with this hole and always wonder." I take a deep breath. I didn't intend to have the conversation steered in this direction, but now it is, and I might as well get it all out.

"At least if I hear his reason and don't agree, I'll never wonder and be able to live with the hole in our bond, or maybe it will get smaller, I don't know. All I know is right now, I feel like a piece of me is missing even though I have a mate."

Everyone nods, and to her credit, Rayne even looks a little sorry she brought it up. Although I'm sure it won't last long.

The next hour goes by and I show everyone the design for the island with all of Axel's ideas, the others giving their input. They all agree Axel needs to be the lead designer and that we should be building based on his specifications. Rayne and Drake—with Eric's help—have even narrowed down an area in the Pacific ocean where we should start the island.

"I called a coven meeting for this afternoon to discuss everything with the rest of the coven, but since you're going to talk with Zeke, you don't have to come," Skarlyt tells me as they all start getting ready to leave.

"Thank you. I don't want to rush the conversation, but I will if you need me there," I tell her.

"No, no, you need to focus on you for today. Everything else will fall into place. Besides, we need a basic design by tomorrow morning, so I'm hoping if you have time you can ask Axel to get that started." I nod at her in thanks and agree to talk to him for her.

Everyone is saying goodbye as the man himself walks up the porch. "Ladies," he greets them.

"Axel. Just the man I wanted to see," Skarlyt says before Rayne can say whatever dirty thing that was going to come out of her mouth. Rayne gets a pouty look on her face before Sarah teleports her away, and I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. I love Rayne. I truly do. But sometimes she has no filter.

Axel chuckles at Skar. "Uh huh. What about?"

"Well Opal showed me your design and we were hoping that you would take over the designing phase of the island, and possibly have it done

by tomorrow." She mumbles the last words so it's hard to hear them and Axel's eyes widen in shock.

"Do you know how much work that is?" he asks.

"It doesn't have to be a complete design, just the foundation. How thick the dirt needs to be, how wide or long... You know, those sorts of specs. We need to start construction tomorrow at the latest. Even if the rest of the details aren't ready we can at least have a base." She has her puppy dog eyes and pouty lip on full display.

Axel rubs the back of his neck, showing he's uncomfortable, but sighs in defeat. "I will see what I can do."

"Yay!" Skarlyt jumps up and gives him a kiss on his cheek, quickly teleporting away with Sophia and Phoebe before he can say anything else.

"You're such a pushover," I laugh.

"Did you see the look she was giving me? I don't know how Lennox ever says no to that woman."

"I don't think he does," I admit. He nods in response, sweeping me up in his arms and placing a kiss on my lips.

Axel releases me after a moment and I step back. "I need to take a quick shower and then we can go."

"I'll clean up the dishes," Axel says and I look around at the mess the girls made cooking.

"Don't worry about that. I can clean it when I get back," I call behind me, still heading to the bathroom.

I hear him grunt in response, but a few seconds later, I hear dishes clanging together. Who am I to complain if he wants to clean?



An hour later, we're just outside of Axel's house and I'm trembling from nerves. Am I really ready to talk to Zeke? No, probably not. But should I? Definitely. I begin to pace back and forth trying to figure out which side my mind is going to take.

"Breathe angel. You don't have to make any decisions today. If at any time you don't want to hear any more, all you have to do is walk away. Zeke will not try to stop you, I promise." Honesty shines in his eyes and it cements my resolve to do this.

“Okay,” I tell him, going up on my toes to give him a light kiss. “Lead the way.”

Axel leads me into his office where Zeke is already waiting in one of the chairs. He stands immediately as I enter the room. Axel leads me over to his side of the desk and guides me to sit in his chair. It’s a power move so I feel that I have all the control. And if it bothers Zeke, he doesn’t show. He simply nods at his brother and sits back down in the chair across from me.

“I’ll be in the kitchen. If you need me just yell,” Axel says as he walks out of the room and shuts the door.

“Opal.”

“Zeke.” We say each other's names at the same time and both let out an awkward laugh.

We then simultaneously gesture for the other to go first and laugh again.

“You go first,” I say, being the first to stop laughing.

He takes a deep, unsteady breath, revealing his nervousness. “I don’t know where to start...”

“How about starting where you were coming from the night we met,” I offer. I still really want to snap at him and yell that he should start with why he fucking rejected me, but seeing how nervous he is, that will probably make it worse.

His eyes meet mine and he nods. “That makes sense... I’ll start further back than that. After all, that’s where it truly begins and I really need you to understand.”

His gaze lowers to the table for a beat while he collects his thoughts, then his focus returns to me and he begins. “My father was murdered by hunters. His job—other than running the construction company—was that he would go out and rescue lone shifters all over Ontario. It was one of the things he felt extremely passionate about. The last time he went out though, I begged him to take Axel and I with him. There was something about the report of a young lion shifter in the woods a little north of here that just rubbed me the wrong way. And I was right. A week after he left, his head was shipped to us in a box with a note saying they were coming for us next.

“Axel and I gathered up some of our strongest men and took a trip to the area where our dad was meant to be. It was a bloodbath; they tore

him apart. We gathered as many body pieces as we could, and we still don't know if we have all of him or not, but it was all we could find." Tears prick at my eyes at the thought of the two of them finding their father's body like that. What kinds of monsters would do that to a person?

"After that, Axel was convinced the only way for us to stay safe was to move the sleuth and get the witches to ward our new location. Me, on the other hand... I wanted to take the fight directly to them. I wanted revenge for what the hunters did to my father. My hero. I was bloodthirsty, completely filled with rage. So that's what I did. I left and went to get my revenge.

"For the first while, it was fine. They didn't know what hit them—I went from group to group taking out dozens of hunters before they could do that to anyone else's father. But that's where it went all wrong. Not only did they wise up to what was happening, but I started making small mistakes and the tables turned. Where I once was the hunter, I then became the prey."

His gaze lowers to the table again, his body radiating tension. "I had been running for days by the time I first saw you. I was on my way to say goodbye to Axel. To tell him that I loved him one last time before they caught up with me.

"When I saw you..." His eyes flick up to mine, our gazes lock, and I see the raw emotion there. He truly believes whatever he is going to say next. "When I saw you, it was love at first sight. You looked like an angel, and for a few brief minutes I fooled myself that I would be able to keep you. But a moment of clarity ruined that for me. The hunters were coming. If I were to have bonded with you, they would have captured us both, and you can't imagine what they would do to a bonded pair." A shudder runs through us both at that thought. I didn't know what to expect when Axel told me that Zeke believed he had a good reason.

"How long after you left me did the hunters catch you?" I need to know. Before I decide whether his reasoning is just or not I need him to answer that question.

"Two hours." I suck in a sharp breath. Holy shit. He's right. If he hadn't rejected me, we both would have still been laying there in the grass.

I'm frozen in my spot, unable to speak or move. Even though it's been eleven years, how close I came to danger makes fear flow through me.

The only reason I wasn't locked in a cell next to Zeke, or dead, is because he rejected me. He hurt me in the worst possible way to save my life.

"Do you believe me?" he asks, leaving his chair and coming to crouch next to me. He waits there, close enough that I could reach out and touch him, but far enough away that I still feel comfortable.

I turn the chair to look into his eyes. "Yes."

He lets out a deep breath, losing some of the tension he was carrying in his body. "Thank the goddess. Do you think I could ever have a second chance?"

Everything I've believed for the last eleven years, every ounce of hate I've held inside towards this man... was for nothing. I hated the one man who sacrificed himself for me.

With shaky hands, I reach out and grab the sides of his face, rubbing my thumbs along his cheeks. His eyes slip closed and his hands come to rest on top of mine.

Instead of second guessing myself, I lean forward and capture his lips with my own. It feels like coming home, like the hole in me is getting smaller with each brush of our lips. I lick at the seam of his mouth, wanting to deepen the kiss. Just like the first time I kissed him, it's all consuming. Like a fire is raging and the only way to extinguish it is for the two of us to complete the bond.

Before things get too far, he pulls back. "Is that a yes?"

"Yes. It's a yes," I say with a smile.

The smile I'm rewarded with is huge. "Can I take you somewhere tonight? Just me and you?" he asks.

"Of course, but we have to help Axel with some designs for the new island first," I tell him and his smile gets even wider.

"Can I help? Axel told me some of the details and I'm really excited to get involved," he says.

"Of course. The more help the better."

Hand in hand, he leads me to the kitchen to meet with Axel. Seeing us, Axel smiles widely at our linked hands. We don't have to say anything—he already knows.

The three of us work on the design for hours. It's a good thing that Zeke decided to help, he and Axel make an amazing team and the designs are nearly complete, other than the individual needs of each faction.

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Chapter 13

Zeke

My hands still tremble under the table where I sit with Opal and my twin. That conversation went better than I could have ever dreamed. The way she almost immediately accepted me back into her arms was incredible. I thought she was an angel and she just proved me right. Only an angel would be this perfect.

She forgave you? Axel asks through our bond.

I think so. I asked her to spend the evening with me tonight, I answer.

I see his eyes widen for a second before he responds, *I'm happy for you brother.*

Thank you.

I turn my attention back to Axel's sketches of the island. "Man this is going to be so awesome."

"It really is. Nothing like this has been done. Well... not that I've ever heard of," Opal agrees.

"If we do this right, we will never have to worry about hunters or needing to hide our true selves ever again," Axel adds.

Axel and I are in deep conversation about the thickness needed for the island when there's a knock on the doorjamb. "Sorry to interrupt, I was

hoping to meet Opal," our mom says.

"Oh, hi!" Opal says, getting up from her chair and walking over to our mom. I share a quick smirk with Axel. Mom always wanted a daughter. Opal doesn't know what she's getting herself into.

My mom wraps her up in a hug. "Oh Opal. It's so nice to finally meet you!"

After a second, Opal recovers from her shock and hugs mom back. "It's nice to meet you too."

Mom pulls back from her, looking her over. "You're so beautiful. Come, let's leave the boys and go have some tea."

With that, the two most important women in my life walk away, talking like the best of friends.

"I hope Opal likes doing girly stuff," I say to Axel with a chuckle.

"Me too," he laughs. "Okay. We need to figure out how to get all the plumbing in during the beginning stages."

"What if the witches were to create clay pipes running throughout the island when they construct it, and all we will have to do is mark the spots where they connect and end up." I don't even know if that's possible, but given that they are able to create an entire island out of nothing, it must be.

"That's not a bad idea. Providing that the witches are able to do that." He rubs his chin for a moment, seeming lost in thought. "I have to meet with the rest of the Alphas and Skarlyt in about an hour. Why don't you go and get whatever you have planned for Opal ready while I head over there?"

"Shit. I didn't think that far ahead. I honestly didn't think she would give me a second chance." I run my hands through my hair in panic but Axel just laughs.

"Just make her a nice dinner and take her to the little cabin by the lake. You may have to clean it up a little, I haven't been there in a while." That's such a good idea!

"Thanks," I tell him and rush out the door. I need to get a head start on cleaning out that cabin if I want it to be presentable for her.

A couple hours later, I've thoroughly cleaned the cabin and arranged a candle lit dinner for Opal. I head back to my house to rescue Opal from my mother.

I hear their laughter carrying on the wind from the house. They sound like they're having a good time.

I stand in the doorway and watch them as they chat like old friends. I haven't seen my mom smile like that in years—granted I wasn't around for a lot of them, but since I've been home her smile, although genuine, doesn't quite reach her eyes..

I clear my throat to get their attention. Opal is the first to notice. "Oh, Zeke. There you are. We were just talking about you."

I blanch at that thought. "I hope it was all good."

My mom waves me off. "Of course it was. I was just telling Opal some of the things you and your brother got up to as children."

"Great," I mutter. "Are you ready Opal?"

"For what?" she asks.

"I hope you planned something good," my mom adds. "Go on sweetheart, we will chat more tomorrow." She rises and helps Opal to her feet, giving her a kiss on her cheek.

"Thank you so much for all the laughs," Opal responds, wrapping my mom in a hug before walking over to me.

"Are you going to tell me what you have planned?" Opal asks, bouncing up on her toes.

"Nope. You're just going to have to wait and see," I chuckle, taking her hand and leading her down the path to the cabin.



Opal

If someone told me last week that I would be holding hands with Zeke while we were on a date, I would have said they were insane. Yet, here I am, walking hand in hand with Zeke, much to both of our surprises. I'm glad I dressed comfortably today—in my signature yoga pants and sneakers—because since I've met these brothers, I've done so much walking. If I would've worn my heels, my feet would be throbbing by now.

"Can you trust me for a few minutes?" Zeke asks. I nod, but a moment of panic hits me when he pulls out a blindfold. "It's just until we get there. Maybe five more minutes."

I turn so that he is able to secure the blindfold at the back. "Can you see?" he asks.

"Nope," I respond.

"Good," he says, grabbing both my hands and leading me forward. Just like he says, around five minutes later, we come to a stop.

"Ready?" he asks.

"As I'll ever be," I giggle. I'm more than ready to see where he brought me. A small part of my brain says that this is a trick, that he's just leading me somewhere to reject me again, but I push that voice aside. After hearing his story, I understand his reasoning. His mom—Alexa—and I talked about it quite a bit. She also understood, but agreed that there was a small chance we both would've been fine if we went straight to the sleuth. Obviously that didn't happen, so we will never know.

As he slips the blindfold off my eyes, I look around. We're by the lake, and there are fairy lights strung up from tree to tree, looking like stars twinkling in the night sky. Off to the side is a small cabin with a table for two set up on the front porch.

"This is beautiful Zeke," I whisper.

"Are you hu—" he starts, but I stop his words with a soft kiss on his mouth. This is the most romantic date I've ever had. No one has ever done anything like this for me.

"I could eat," I respond with a chuckle as I step back, and the two of us walk over to the table.

As he lifts the silver lids off each plate I get the biggest smile on my face. "McDonald's?"

"I'm not the best cook so I hope you like Big Macs," Zeke responds with a chuckle.

"Oh I do!" I exclaim as I dig in. I moan with the first bite. It's been so long since I had McDonald's.

"Keep making sounds like that, angel, and we won't make it through dinner," Zeke says with a heated gaze, and all of a sudden, I kinda want to keep making the noise just to see how far I can push him. I need a distraction so my mind doesn't keep heading in that direction... yet.

"Let's play twenty questions," I tell him. "I'll go first. What is your favorite color?"

"Okay," he says with a chuckle. "Blue. What is yours?"

I ponder that for a moment. "I have so many, but honestly, it's black. With green being a close second."

"Black isn't a color, it's a shade," he laughs.

"Well then, I guess green is my favorite color. Do you have any hobbies?"

"Hmm. Before I was taken I loved building things. I would make tables and chairs. I loved designing furniture. Watching the designs come to life was always a thrill. What about you?" He's trying to make light of his time in captivity, but eventually he's going to have to talk about it. Not that I'm going to bring it up on our first date.

"I would love to see some of the furniture you make." I take a fry and chew while I'm thinking about what my hobbies are. "I guess I'm still finding myself again. For a long time after you... well... just... *after*, I pretended to be someone else, someone who didn't care about anyone or anything. When I figure it out, you'll be the first to know."

"About that, I will never be able to say how sorry I am. If I honestly thought there was any other way, I never would have left you," he says, reaching his hand over and putting his hand on mine.

"It's okay. I understand your reasons and no matter how much I wish things had turned out different, we can't change the past." I give his hand a squeeze.

"Well this conversation took a turn where I didn't want it to go," Zeke says with a nervous chuckle.

"You're right. Let's change the subject," I agree.

"How about we go for a walk on the beach." I nod eagerly—his idea is perfect.

We walk along the beach hand in hand, just enjoying being close to one another. "Tell me something no one else knows about you," I say.

"Hmm. That one is hard because Axel knows just about everything about me. But..." He slides his hand through his hair, showing his nervousness. Axel rubs the back of his neck when he's nervous, and Zeke runs his hands through his hair. It's cute. "I guess it would be that one of my favorite movies of all time is the Princess Bride."

"Really?" That seems unbelievable. He's trying to tell me this big strong Alpha of a man loves the sappiness of the Princess Bride?

"Yes. Just don't tell Axel," he says and I give him a raised eyebrow. Rather than pleading with me like I expect him to, he begins tickling me.

“Stop," ha-ha, “No," ha-ha, “Don't," ha-ha.

We end up on the soft sand, with him on top of me. Suddenly, the tickling stops and we look into each other's eyes.

Our playfulness instantly turns to lust. Gods this man makes my blood boil, in a good way. Our mouths find one another and the heat turns up. I wrap my arms and legs around him, pulling him closer. I use my legs to pull his body even closer to me so that I can feel his erection grinding into my core.

We are a tangle of limbs, our hands roaming each other's bodies. I clutch at his back, trying to get closer. It's not enough. Even though he's right on top of me, it feels like he's still too far away. I grab his shirt in my hands, pulling it up, trying to get it over his head. I need to feel his skin.

He pulls his mouth back momentarily. “Are you sure?”

“You really want to ask me that right now?” I chuckle and begin kissing up his neck.

“Opal," he groans but I don't stop. I know he is trying to make sure that I'm not going to regret this. But right now, all I care about is making him mine.

I use my body weight to shift us so that I am on top, beginning to grind myself on him, steadily increasing my pace as I chase my release.

He grips my hips, slowing my motion. “Opal. You need to be sure.”

“Are you going to reject me again?” I ask.

“What? No! Never," he exclaims.

“Then I'm sure. Now stop talking and start stripping," I demand, removing my own shirt, revealing the very un-sexy sports bra underneath. What? I wasn't expecting to be having sexy time tonight.

Zeke takes the hint and removes his shirt as I rip off my sports bra. He sucks in a breath when he realizes I'm bare. He sits up and places one of my nipples in his mouth, sucking and flicking it with his tongue. I moan with the sensation. “Zeke," I cry out.

He pulls back with a growl, flipping us back over so he's on top once more. “I've dreamed about this so many times," he whispers as he kisses down my neck, moving to my other breast, lavishing it with the same attention as the first.

“More. I need more," I plead. In this position, I'm unable to grind on him, unable to find my release.

Zeke slowly moves down my body, trailing kisses down my stomach. "Yes," I say, willing him to go faster, to go lower.

I raise up my hips trying to push my core into his face, wanting... No! Needing his mouth on my pussy. Needing his tongue diving in, bringing me to the brink the way I know he can.

As he gets closer, a low growl rumbles from his chest forcing him to lose control. He rips my pants down, underwear and all and latches onto my clit causing me to cry out. He doesn't stop, doesn't slow. Just sucks my clit into his mouth, flicking it over and over with his tongue.

I weave my hands through his hair pulling him closer. Wishing that I could not only have his tongue assaulting me, but his cock moving inside me at the same time. I almost get my wish as he slides two fingers inside of me, pumping in and out.

"Yes. Oh my Gods yes!" I cry out as my orgasm overtakes me.

"I forgot how sexy it is when you come," he says as he pulls his fingers out of me, licking them clean.

I lower my hands, grasping at his pants. I need them off... like, yesterday.

I get frustrated after only a few seconds. "Off," I growl at him. He quickly gets to work unbuckling his belt and lowering his pants. He lines up his cock with my core, slowly pushing inside. He moans loudly with each inch.

"I need you to move," I plead.

"Just wait a second angel. I haven't done this in eleven years. If you want it to last longer than a minute..." he begins, but I start to move my lower body against him anyway. I can't stop.

I impale myself on his cock over and over, chasing the release I can feel rising within me as his cock slides over my G-spot repeatedly.

"I'm so close," I cry, desperately trying to move faster and harder.

I try to clutch at his back, unable to get a good grip unless I use my nails. As I sink them into his back, he growls loudly and begins to move, pounding in and out of me.

My power flares up and I move my hands to his shoulders, my back arching off the ground. "Gods," I cry out as my power sinks inside him and his teeth sink into my neck, on the opposite side of Axel's mark.

My orgasm kicks up a notch and my legs begin to shake, sliding off Zeke's hips. The bond snaps into place, and it's as if I am finally full for the

first time in my life. There is no hole in my soul, finally complete.

He slowly removes his teeth from my neck and laps at the newly made mate mark. I fall back utterly spent as Zeke collapses on top of me.

“Uh Zeke,” I rasp, as I’m crushed under his body weight. He pulls himself back up off of me and I suck in a breath.

“Sorry,” he apologizes and removes himself from on top of me. He runs over to the cabin, coming back moments later with a wet washcloth and cleans me up.

“Opal...” He looks at me with so many emotions flitting across his face and I worry for a moment that he regrets what we just did. “That was amazing. Honestly, I was ready to beg and grovel for the rest of my life just to be your friend. The fact that you accepted me as your mate is...”

“You don’t have to say anything. I know. And I forgive you for before. Like we said earlier, let’s focus on the future.” I sit up and kiss him on his lips.

“Okay,” he says, and he helps me get dressed once more, then carries me over to a small blanket set up with pillows on the beach.

“Well this would’ve come in handy about ten minutes ago,” I chuckle.

“It sure would’ve,” he agrees, laying us both down and snuggling in behind me.

I would love to say that I stayed awake and enjoyed the moment, but that would be a lie. The truth is, I fell asleep instantly, feeling completely at peace for the first time in my life.

Chapter 14

Axel

Reluctantly, I leave Opal with my mother. After saying a quick goodbye and giving her a kiss, I head over to Alaric's. It surprised me that Opal forgave Zeke so easily, except it shouldn't. She truly is an angel and even I have to admit that given Zeke's options, he took the safer one. He's right that there was no knowing what would've happened if the hunters caught up to them both.

Feeling lighter than ever, I walk up to Alaric's house. "I hear congratulations are in order," Alaric says, coming from the side of the porch.

I glance over at him and he hands me a beer, which I take. "Thanks. And yes I suppose there are."

"I also heard she was talking to Zeke today," he probes. Some people say men don't gossip, but that's just not true. The difference is we only gossip with the person it's about, rather than behind their backs.

"That's true as well." I keep my response vague, knowing that he'll ask for more details. I'm not going to offer up information without him asking, so I can razz him about being a gossip later on.

"And..." He looks at me expectantly.

"Well, it seems that she forgave him after hearing his reasons," I tell him.

“You know... after our talk the other day, I was thinking, and it makes a lot more sense that he rejected her to keep her safe, rather than him rejecting her for selfish reasons. Zeke is a lot of things, but I had a very hard time believing he would reject his mate without cause,” Alaric leans up against the railing, looking out at the lake.

“Me too, but knowing it was my mate as well that he hurt, made it extremely difficult for me to think rationally.”

“I completely understand that,” Alaric chuckles.

“You guys coming?” Phoebe joins us on the porch.

“Speaking of mates,” Alaric says, snagging Phoebe by the waist and pulling her into him.

“Everyone is waiting for us,” Phoebe says with a laugh as Alaric rubs his scruff on her neck.

“Alright, that’s enough of that,” I laugh and walk into the house, away from the flirting couple.

As soon as I’m inside the house, I’m immediately cornered by Sarah. “Where’s Opal?”

“She’s with my mom right now, and then she’s going on a date with Zeke,” I reply. The anger on her face is palpable and expected.

“What? How could you let her be alone with him?”

“Listen Sarah, I understand how you feel about Zeke because you care for Opal, but it’s her decision. I could not tell her not to forgive him any more than you could. She is her own woman.”

“I understand that,” she growls at me. “But after what he did to her, how could she want anything to do with him?”

“He had his reasons for doing what he did, and it’s not my place to tell you what they are.” As much as I love that Sarah is so protective over Opal, she needs to let her make her own decisions.

“If he hurts her...” she begins, but I cut her off.

“I will be the first in line to beat him to a pulp.” I place my hand on her shoulder, letting the anger slip from my body. “But I honestly don’t think he will. I know Zeke is going to have to gain everyone’s trust, especially yours, and he knows that too. Why don’t you let him tell you his reasons, and then make a decision yourself before going into protective mode.”

“You didn’t see her before. Hell, I wasn’t there when it happened eleven years ago... But the way it affected her still after so many years, how

can I not be protective of her?" she asks.

Thankfully, Sebastyn walks up at that time to save me. "Axel is right love. I had a hard time believing Zeke was the one who rejected Opal when I found out. If you knew him before he disappeared, you would have a hard time believing it too. It's just not in his nature. Let's wait and talk to Opal or Zeke before jumping to conclusions."

She melts into his side with a nod. I know that Sarah is going to be the one that Zeke has to prove himself to, and I'm grateful that my mate found such a loyal friend.

"I just don't want her to get hurt again," Sarah says.

"None of us want her to get hurt again. I missed out on so much time with her because of his rejection. I am still pissed at him for it, and if it were up to me, he would still be groveling for a chance with her... But Opal sat with him earlier..." She goes to interrupt but I hold up my hand and continue. "I made sure I was in the house with them, and it was her decision whether to speak to him or not. Whatever he said to her made her choose to give him another chance, and we all need to respect that. If you try to get in between Opal and one of her mates you'll push her away. Imagine if someone tried to warn you away from Sebastyn, how would you feel?"

"But Sebastyn never hurt me the way that Zeke hurt her."

"No, he didn't. But you also don't know the full story. And until you do, you shouldn't make any rash decisions." She nods in response, and the three of us enter the office together where the rest of the group members—other than Alaric and Phoebe—are waiting.

"Hey Axel! Opal sent us a picture of your island, it's awesome. Have you worked on it any more?" Skarlyt asks, walking over to me.

"Actually..." I pull out the drawings and blueprints that Zeke and I worked on this morning. "Zeke and I drew these up. We think it's entirely possible to get this done in the time frame we need. But I have a few questions for you."

She looks over the papers with a smile on her face. "Such as?"

"Well, we assume it's possible but want to confirm with you... Is it within the capabilities of the witches to create pipes out of clay that run through the island while we are building it, so that we can set up running water and such?" Zeke and I discussed how we didn't want to use plastic on the island and we'd try to make everything as natural as possible. "We also

were wondering if we cut down trees to build the homes, is it possible for the earth witches to help them grow back faster than the normal rate?”

“Hmm... Theoretically yes on both accounts. I’ve never heard of it done before—the pipes part—but I don’t see why not. If we can create an island, why wouldn’t we be able to create clay pipes running through it? As for the trees, we may not be able to grow them back to the exact stage they were at, but we should be able to get them close.” Skarlyt looks back down at the drawing, seeming confused for a moment. “What’s this?”

I glance over to where she is pointing. “Oh, that’s where the fresh water spring needs to go in order to filter water throughout the island. If you’re still planning on having it in the middle of the ocean, we will need to create a fresh water spring... Unless you can use magic to convert sea water into fresh water.”

“I didn’t even think of that. Seb?” She calls her brother over. “Is there a spell or device we can make that automatically filters the salt water, turning it into fresh water?”

“I don’t know. But there is a spell we can place at the bottom of the spring right here that will automatically bring water from another source. Think of it like a portal but it’s always open, so when the water level gets too low, it will refill with the water from the source,” Seb says, looking at the both of us for a response.

“That could work,” I say, rubbing my beard. “I also want to see if we can connect it to a waterfall of sorts that flows into a stream to purify it.”

“Skarlyt, this is going to be a much bigger job than you were anticipating. I’m not sure if we will have the manpower to get it done in our time frame,” Sebastyn says, flipping through the pages.

“We NEED it to be ready sooner, because our timeline was just moved up,” Rayne says, stepping in the front door with Drake.

As one, we all turn toward her. “What do you mean?” Alaric asks.

“Eric has been monitoring the hunters from within their system and they’ve caught on. They’re planning on coming to scope out our lab in four days. So essentially we have three days to raid each facility and get the fuck out of here, or we have a large team waiting with us on day four and send smaller teams out to each. Either way, four days is the most time we have,” Rayne says.

“Fuck!” pretty much everyone in the room exclaims.

“Can it be done?” Alaric asks, and everyone turns to me and Skarlyt.

“Theoretically...” she begins.

“The biggest issue will be the vampires. We need time to build something that keeps them safe from the sun.” I look pointedly at Drake as I say that.

“We can bring them into a pocket world for now. If we create a new pocket world on the island while it’s being built, then they can stay safe during the day and help build at night. We can do that right?” Drake’s sister says, turning to her mate at the end.

“Is it possible to make a pocket world big enough for everyone until the island is ready?” I speak up before he can respond to her.

“I would think so. The issue is going to be housing. The pocket world River and I created is a copy of my home from centuries ago,” he says.

“Wait...” Rayne begins. “Is it possible to teleport houses? You know, like you teleport people. What if all we need to do is build the island and then send all of our houses over there? That would cut down the time, right?”

That would fix everything if it worked. We would only need to focus on the main construction of the island, the water sources, and other foundational stuff. Hell, if we could teleport the entire plumbing system and everything...

“I’ve never tried to teleport anything like that... But in theory it should work,” Sebastyn says.

“What about the actual ground underneath each house? Could you teleport the entire town, plumbing, everything?” I have to ask because that would honestly fix so many issues.

“It would take a lot of power, and I do mean a lot.” Sebastyn shares a look with Skarlyt, who then looks at Phoebe and Sophia.

“We can help with the power boost, but someone is going to have to make us cry. Like a lot,” Phoebe says and Alaric growls. “Oh come on. It’s not like they’re really going to hurt me. I just need to cry.”

“I don’t like it when you cry,” he says, pulling her close to him.

“I don’t know why you’re getting all upset about making her cry, all we need to do is put on A Dog’s Purpose to have her and Sophia blubbering messes within the first hour,” Rayne says with a shrug.

“Even Rayne cries at that one,” Drake says with a smirk. Given the death glare that she shoots him, I’d wager that was not something that she wanted to be shared, and I let out a little chuckle.

“What’s that?” Sophia asks.

“Ohh you’ve never seen it?” Phoebe says. “It’s a movie about this dog and how he has to find his purpose, and he gets reincarnated multiple times. I don’t want to give it away, but Rayne’s right. We will have enough tears after watching it to power up every single witch in the coven, and then some.”

“Okay, so Phoebe and Sophia will be watching that movie tonight to get the tears ready. We will need to start the island base tomorrow at the latest. My suggestion is we leave space to teleport the towns in—we will need to measure so we can make sure there is enough space. Seb, I need you to find a spell for that in your books, or at least a spell close enough so that we tweak it for our purpose.” Skarlyt takes over the conversation, and with that, we begin to plan the essentials, such as: how big the island needs to be, where certain towns will be going, how many witches will be needed for initial construction, and so on.

The sky has turned dark and we’re still trying to figure out where to place this island. We thought that detail was already hammered out... But it turns out not everyone was in agreement. On one hand, most have opted to go closer to the Caribbean where it’s warm, but others—particularly the vampires—have commented on how bright it is, preferring the shorter daylight hours of the northern hemisphere.

“If the entire coven were able to walk in the day like us, it wouldn’t be an issue. But most don’t even know that we can. If we could figure out how we are able to...” Rayne begins, but is interrupted by a beautiful blonde appearing inside the kitchen. Immediately we all go on high alert. Obviously I’m not the only one who doesn’t know who she is.

“Perhaps I can shed some light on that,” the blonde says, staring at Rayne.

“And who the fuck are you?” Rayne asks, immediately stepping in front of her mate in a protective manner.

The blonde waves her hand in a nonchalant manner. “You are not in any danger from me, granddaughter.”

“Granddaughter?” Rayne stutters.

“Well, more like great-great-great, and a few more greats... granddaughter. But yes,” the blonde says.

“Does someone want to go get my mom?” Rayne asks, pointing her look at the witches. Skarlyt nods, blinking away and returning seconds later with who I’m guessing is Rayne’s mom.

“What’s going on?” Rayne’s mom asks, turning to look at everyone before stopping at the blonde. “Artemis?”

“At least someone knows who I am. I was beginning to wonder if you had all forgotten the Gods,” Artemis says.

“Wait. Artemis? As in *the* Artemis? Greek Goddess of the Hunt?” Rayne asks and she nods. “But I can’t be your granddaughter... I’m a descendant of Ullr, the Norse God of the hunt. Right?” She turns to her mom who shrugs her shoulders.

“Ahh, now that is male chauvinism at its finest. Who you are, is the descendant of Skadi, the Norse Goddess of the Hunt. The men in your family didn’t want to admit that they were kin of a female God, so they decided to use the name of a male God instead.”

“But that still doesn’t explain why you think I’m your great-great granddaughter or whatever,” Rayne spits out.

“Well, you see, Gods and Goddesses live a very long time and sometimes we get bored. In fact, I have gone by many names in my long life, Skadi being among them,” Artemis says.

“I think I need to sit down,” Rayne says and Drake pulls out a chair for her.

“You probably should for this next part—if you thought all that was hard to absorb, this will be worse.

“Long ago there was a powerful oracle who prophesied...” Artemis begins.

“Yes we know all about the prophecy. Andres’ mother was the oracle,” Rayne snaps and Artemis shoots her a death glare. Now I know where Rayne gets it from.

“I don’t,” I speak up. I’ve heard bits and pieces of it, but never the whole thing.

Artemis gives me a small smile. “As I was saying, there was an oracle who prophesied a new enemy would awaken and bring about the time when supernaturals will need to make themselves known to defend the world.

*“When the daughter of the storm and the son of the moon become
one;
A hunter and her prey put aside their differences;
The lost daughter of air mates the first son born of magic and fire;
A son and daughter of fire join together;
The dual natured son and the dawn cement their bond;
A new age arrives where Supernatural beings will need to come out
of the shadows as a new enemy awakens.*

“Since some of the prophecy has already come to fruition,” she nods towards Sarah and Sebastyn, and then Drake and Rayne, “It’s begun awakening the gods and goddesses who gave up on the world, and let me tell you, they are not liking what they are seeing.” Andres visibly flinches at the tone in her voice. “But what isn’t said in that prophecy is that the enemy isn’t exactly new... She’s a new enemy to you, but she’s definitely not new to the world.”

“Wait. You don’t mean...?” Andres pales.

“Why yes I do, King of Dragons. She is not happy, not happy at all,” Artemis responds to him with a smile.

“Wait. King of Dragons?” Rayne pipes in, glaring at Andres. “We are definitely talking about that later... But for now, who are you two talking about?” Thankfully she has no problems asking a Goddess the questions I’m sure we all want the answers to.

“There will be time for questions later. Right now, we need every single supernatural woman within your ranks in one place so I can protect them from her first attack,” Artemis says with a wave of her hand like it’s nothing.

“What attack?” I growl. I need to get to Opal. Fuck, I don’t even know where she is. Zeke was supposed to take her to the cabin. Hopefully, they’re still there... If not, where else would Zeke take her? Think Axel. Think.

“Sound the alarm. We can get everyone in the bunker,” Alaric says.

“Where is this bunker?” Artemis asks.

“Downstairs,” Phoebe says, pointing down the stairs.

Artemis nods, waving her hand, and all of a sudden every woman in the room is no longer in front of us.

“Where are they?” Drake, Alaric, and Darren yell.

“They are in the bunker, along with every other supernatural woman within a hundred mile radius,” she says as if she didn’t just wave her hand and teleport every single one of our mates.

I rush down the stairs before the others, needing to ensure that Opal is there. If she isn’t... I’ll need to go find her. I don’t even know what this attack is. But if a goddess is interfering, it must be something big.

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Chapter 15

Unknown

I wake up after slumbering for a millennia to a world I no longer recognize. My beautiful earth. What have they done to you? The large glen—filled with wildflowers and trees—that I had chosen for my sleep, is now a small garden surrounded by stone structures.

I step out of the garden onto the stone pathway, leaving a trail of green in my wake. As I walk further away from the garden, the less green I see. Rather than trees standing tall, there are these big structures. Rather than fresh clean air, the air my lungs pull in is thick and poisoned.

I look around for my children, the ones who were supposed to look after this world for me while I slept. The dragons were tasked with keeping the peace. Where are they? How could they have let this happen?

I step into the vale and search. Traveling in the vale is faster than the outside world. A trip that would take someone two hours is but minutes here. Everywhere I look, I see only one species... human. They have bred like rabbits and taken over my beautiful world, leaving only destruction in its place.

I can feel that it's supposed to be night, but I can't tell from the sky—it's lit up with artificial light from the sides of the stone structures.

Finally finding one of my children, I step out of the vale. “What has happened to this world?” The vampire spins, baring her fangs at me.

“You have no need to fear me, my child. I merely wish to know what has happened to this world.”

“What do you mean?” she asks, confused.

“I have been asleep for a long time. I awoke to find that the world is no longer green and run by supernatural beings, but by humans.” I watch her reactions and she surprises me by laughing.

“Run by supernaturals?” She laughs harder. “The world is the human domain.”

I don’t let her finish; instead, I bring my hand to her head and absorb her memories. So much destruction. So much death.

“What did you just do?” she snaps and steps back.

She is too young... I need someone older. I need to find someone old enough to know what happened here. I step back into the vale without answering her question, resuming my search.

But the more I see, the angrier I get. How could the dragons let this happen? Everyone has forgotten about the Gods, running around in their puny little lives, only caring about money. Such was not a thing when I was awake. The world was at peace, and even the humans, weak as they were, had a purpose.

As I travel, I finally end up somewhere green, untouched by human hands, and I breathe out a sigh. Out of the entire world, only a small portion remains pure.

I wave my hands and erect a small dwelling to provide me shelter while I begin my planning. I will not allow this to stand... Supernatural and human kind alike need to be punished.

Let’s see how they fare when they are no longer able to procreate. I close my eyes and let my power wash over me, then will it to spread far and wide. Every woman on this planet will no longer be able to carry a child to term, thus giving my earth a chance. Slowly each race will dwindle and die, giving me the opportunity to regrow the earth. If they repent, perhaps I will reverse my decision... If not... then they will suffer.

I could wipe them all out with a single thought and rebuild, but I am a patient and merciful Goddess. I’m going to give them a chance to redeem themselves.

For now, I will watch and wait. I admit, I am rather curious to see how this plays out.

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Chapter 16

Opal

I wake up on the beach with Zeke wrapped around me and snuggle into him deeper. After round two, we didn't bother getting dressed again knowing that there would most likely be a round three.

My mind thinks over the last few days and I smile to myself. If someone told me last week that I would be lying here mated to Zeke, I would have called them insane and probably punched them in the face. Let alone if they would've said I would have two mates... Well I probably would've checked them into a psych ward. It's astounding how much my life has changed in just the last forty-eight hours alone.

I rub my hand over Zeke's bare arm, tracing one of his scars, and then I am immediately taken over by a vision. Unlike my visions of Axel, Zeke's visions are disturbing. I feel like I'm caught in a nightmare.

I watch as Zeke sits alone in his cell. I can hear his stomach rumbling with hunger and see his body shiver. He freezes a second before the door swings open, revealing a man in a white coat with a sneer on his face. "Ready for your interview?" the man asks with a dark chuckle.

Zeke's entire body makes sounds of protest as he tries to stand. Although his body is shivering in fear, his face remains blank, showing nothing.

I follow along as they walk down the hallway, before coming to a room that at first glance would look like a doctor's office. But after closer inspection, it is a torture chamber. The shelves and hooks on the walls are filled with whips and knives.

"You know the drill," the man in the white coat says as Zeke goes to stand by the chair, raising his hands above his head. The man secures cuffs that are hanging from the ceiling to his wrists before doing the same with the ones laying at his feet.

"Where is your pack?" he sneers. Zeke's body tenses up just before the first strike of the whip. With every inch of skin that the whip touches, blood wells up.

"You know, we brought in a female yesterday... Perhaps she is your mate. If you cooperate, maybe we will let her go."

Zeke's entire body freezes and a growl rips from his chest.

The man in the white coat chuckles and continues. "I mean how many female bear shifters could there really be in the world?"

Zeke's entire body relaxes at his words and he lets out a breath.

I'm ripped out of the vision and I open my eyes to find myself naked in the middle of Alaric's bunker.

"What the fuck?" I say loudly looking around me.

It's filled with women. Some I recognize, some I don't.

"Opal!" Sarah cries, rushing over to me.

I grab a blanket off of one of the cots and notice a lot of other women in the same predicament—meaning butt ass naked—doing the same.

The other women in our group follow Sarah as she weaves through the throngs of women to get to me.

"Are you okay?" She runs her hands over my shoulders and down my arms.

"I'm not hurt, but I'm wondering why the fuck I am here rather than naked and snuggling with Zeke," I bite out. Okay, maybe I'm a little bitter that I was taken away from my mate so soon after we found our way back to one another.

Her eyebrows shoot up to her hairline. "So you and... Zeke?" Anger laces her words. I know she's not mad at me—not really. She's just worried and being protective. That's part of the reason why she's such an amazing friend.

I give her a soft smile. "It's so much different than we thought Sarah. He had his reasons, and as much as I hate to admit it, they're actually really good reasons. Do you think I would've given in already if they weren't?"

"Well, no... I guess I didn't think of it like that." Sarah looks a little ashamed.

"Fucking Artemis," Rayne grumbles as she makes it to our group.

"Wait... What?" I ask.

"Oh yeah, you missed it. Apparently I have some psycho goddess as a great-great-I don't know how many greats-grandmother and she just decided to pop us all down here without warning. It wasn't bad enough that she just popped into Alaric and Phoebe's kitchen and was all 'I'm your grandmother' and shit." Rayne seems like she's about to go off on a tangent, so I shoot Drusilla a pointed look and jerk my head towards Rayne.

"We can explain more later. Right now we should make our way to the door so that our mates can see us and don't murder a Goddess," Dru suggests, and we all nod while Rayne continues to mutter under her breath about psycho Goddesses.

"Opal?" I hear Axel calling my name and I climb up on one of the bunks so I can wave.

"Over here." I wave my arms as much as I can without losing the blanket to get his attention. "Axel!" I yell out louder and his eyes snap to mine. He visibly relaxes upon meeting my eyes, and he begins to make his way over to me. The women in his path part like the red sea as he approaches, giving him a straight shot to my side.

"Thank the Gods," he says as he reaches me and lifts me from the bed, holding me in his arms.

"We are not thanking the Goddesses," Rayne adds.

"Rayne," Dru scorns as a beautiful blonde woman walks up with the rest of the men. She is gorgeous, with an otherworldly glow about her as she approaches.

The other women in the bunker begin to get loud and start panicking, their shock wearing off. Phoebe steps up, hopping on the bed that I was just on, putting her fingers in her mouth and letting off a loud whistle.

“Hello everyone! I’m sure you’re all wondering why you’re here. And well... we aren’t entirely sure ourselves. The only thing we really do know is that this is the safest place for you at the moment. If you would please use your bonds or phones—whatever you need—to contact your mates or family, you can let them know that you are currently in the bunker under the Alpha house on pack land. I’m sure that they are all freaking out right now. You can also tell them that they are more than welcome to come join you, although I’m not sure how many more people we can fit down here.”

“Why is this the safest place for us?”

“Are we under attack?”

“I don’t belong here.”

Random people begin firing off questions in rapid succession in a panic, and I search for the female voice that said she doesn’t belong here. I find her without issue—she’s standing off on her own in a corner, looking terrified.

“Like Phoebe said, we don’t have all the details as of yet, and I promise you will know as soon as we have them. What we do know is that there was a magical attack focused on the women of the world, and as such, you were brought here and warded to keep you safe” Alaric pauses and looks to Artemis for confirmation. At her nod, he continues, “It shouldn’t be more than an hour.” He once again looks to Artemis for direction and she nods once more. “And then you will all be able to return to your homes. But, I would ask that any and all leaders remain behind to discuss the escalating situation.”

“What situation?”

“Why do we need to stay here for an hour?”

“What kind of magical attack?”

“How did you get so many of us here at once?”

Alaric once again speaks up. “I promise as soon as we know the answer to those questions, we will let you know. For now, we have young children in here that do not need to know the dangers of the world yet.”

As he says the last part, all the women look around, seeming to notice for the first time that there are children in here, and everyone quiets down.

“We need to go check on that girl who yelled out that she didn’t belong here,” I whisper to Sarah.

“Why?”

“There’s just something about her. She is standing all alone, while most of the others are in groups.” Sarah nods, and I lead her, Sebastyn, and Axel over to the girl.

She’s young, nineteen at the most, with long curly blonde—almost white—hair and bright green eyes. As we approach, her entire body tenses up and I pause, turning to Axel and Sebastyn. “You two should stay here. She’s already scared enough.”

I don’t give them a chance to respond before grabbing Sarah’s hand, and the two of us walk over.

“Hi,” I say, using my most non-threatening voice.

“I don’t belong here. I’m not a member of any pride or pack,” she begins, her voice shaking.

“It’s okay. No one here is going to hurt you.” Sarah steps closer to her. She tries to shrink into the wall and away from us both, but there’s nowhere for her to go.

“What type of supernatural are you?” I question, and she looks confused. “If you’re here with us, then you must be some type.”

She looks around again, and for the first time in my life, I wish I was a shifter with the ability to scent her. As if knowing where my thoughts were headed, Samara charges in and walks right up to her.

“What are you?” Samara questions, sniffing the girl. Surprisingly, instead of being afraid, the girl scents her back and her eyes widen in surprise.

“You’re a feline shifter? I didn’t think there were any prides in this area. I’ve been alone for so long... I wish I would’ve known,” the girl says.

“I am a mountain lion. What are you? I can only tell you’re a big feline,” Samara responds.

“I’m a tiger,” the girl says and we all suck in a breath.

Axel steps up, no longer worried about scaring the girl. “How long have you been in the area?” I have no idea why that would matter, but it seems to mean something to him.

The girl looks at him, fear no longer in her eyes. “Just over eleven years. My family was taken by hunters and when we were being transported...” Tears shine in her eyes as she takes a shaky breath. “My parents created a distraction long enough for me and my younger brother to escape.”

“Where is your brother?” Axel looks around as if searching for the boy.

“I don’t know. We had been on the run for weeks, stopping only to sleep and forage for food. Then one day we heard a noise and took off... One second he was right behind me, and the next he was gone. It’s why I’ve stayed in the area for so long, I was hoping to find him.”

Axel’s face pales at her story and I step up and snuggle into his side. He wraps his arms around me tightly. “I need to find Zeke.”

“He took me to some cabin by the lake,” I tell him, still unsure why this girl’s story is affecting him so much.

“I’ll be back.” He drops a soft kiss on my lips and walks away. I share a confused look with Sarah and shrug. I don’t know any more than she does.

“What’s your name?” Samara asks the girl.

“Meredith.”

“Well Meredith, welcome to the Westwood Pack. You’re not alone anymore. You will never have to be alone again, and if it’s within our power, we will find your family,” Samara says, pulling the young girl into her and wrapping her arms around her. Meredith stiffens momentarily before melting into Samara, and sobs begin to wrack her body.

“I’m going to get Phoebe and Aurora,” Sarah whispers. If there is anything that will put this girl at peace, it’s holding Aurora. She seems to have this ability to calm even the most volatile of people. It’s as if merely being in her presence makes you feel like everything will be okay.

Once Sarah returns with Phoebe, and Aurora in her arms, most of our group—Alaric, Sophia, Skarlyt, Lennox, and Darren—gathers close. I stay back as the girls approach Meredith, gently placing Aurora in her arms.

“Where is Axel?” Alaric questions me quietly.

“He said he needed to go find Zeke. Something about this girl’s story seemed to upset him,” I respond.

Alaric lets out a breath. “I probably shouldn’t be the one to tell you, but I don’t know if either Axel or Zeke will be able to...” That gets my attention and I turn to face him. “Their dad used to travel across Ontario rescuing lone shifters, bringing them back here and setting them up with others of their kind.” I nod, remembering Zeke telling me. “Well, the last time he went out, he was searching for a young girl rumored to be a tiger shifter. He was caught by hunters and didn’t make it home alive. Zeke and

Axel were convinced it was some kind of set up so they never went looking for the girl." He glances over at Meredith with sad eyes. "Honestly, we all thought it must've been a set up. If I know the two of them, they are going to feel responsible for her being out there alone for so long. That by believing it was a set up, they failed this girl. You need to be prepared; they're going to need time to come to terms with this."

"Shit. Zeke did tell me that but I forgot it was a tiger shifter he was looking for. How can they blame themselves since it wasn't their fault? There's no way they could've known."

"That's true. But they won't think like that. You have to understand, when they were younger, their dad was a hero in their eyes—especially Zeke's. They couldn't wait to work with him, going out and rescuing shifters. This is going to be a failure in their eyes."

"I hope you're wrong," I tell him.

"Me too. Their lives are just beginning to look up, now that you came into the picture."

I give him a soft smile thinking about my two mates. *Mates*. I didn't think I would get one mate, let alone two.

I turn my attention back to Meredith, who looks much calmer now with Aurora in her arms, talking amongst the women. "I'm going to go find out when we can leave the bunker," I say to Alaric and turn in search of Rayne and her grandmother—Artemis. How crazy is that?

I make my way over just as Rayne is growling at Artemis, "You need to explain what the fuck is happening right now."

To her credit, Artemis doesn't seem fazed to be on the receiving end of Rayne's ire. That is one person I would *never* want to piss off. She is crazy with a capital C, and I'm so glad that she's on my side.

"Hey guys," I say a few steps away, trying not to startle them.

Rayne whips around on me, her face still filled with anger, but it softens as she takes me in. "Oh hey Opal."

"I was just wondering when we can leave the bunker so I can find some clothes."

"I was just demanding some answers as well," Rayne says, turning back to Artemis. "Well?"

"Soon," is all Artemis says, but she waves her hands and suddenly I look down at myself to find that I'm wearing a pair of harem pants, paired with a flowy tank top and flip flops.

I look back to Artemis. "Uh, thank you?"

"You're welcome," she says to me before turning to Rayne. "At least someone is grateful. Perhaps you could learn some manners from this one."

"I'll show you some manners," Rayne growls, and instantly both Dru and I reach out to restrain her. Not that I'm doing much—there's no way I can match a vampire's strength.

"Fine. If you insist on getting answers now, let's go somewhere quieter," Artemis says, and suddenly there's a translucent bubble around us. "What do you want to know first?"

"Who is attacking us? How are they attacking us? Why should we trust you?" Rayne spits out the questions.

"I can't tell you who is attacking you or how they are attacking. But I can tell you that you can trust me. Why else would I have jeopardized my own safety by coming to your aid?"

"Can't, or won't?" Rayne demands.

"Both I suppose," Artemis replies.

"But why?" I ask softly.

"Because there are beings in this world that even I wouldn't dare cross. I've already placed a target on my back by interfering here."

"Fine. Tell me about my ancestors then," Rayne says, making my eyebrows raise in surprise. There is no way she is giving up that line of questioning that easily. One look at her face and I see it: she's got her plotting face on. She's not giving up on getting the answers, she's biding her time until she can figure out the best way to get the truth.

"Well many years ago, I met and fell in love with a human man. From that love, we had four children, all girls. They were the best of both of us. We tasked them with protecting the supernatural world. Ensuring that those that sought to harm others were punished. They were the first hunters," Artemis begins.

"Like the police?" Drusilla asks.

Artemis nods. "Exactly like that. Over the years, less and less women were born into our family, and with that came the male chauvinism. Somewhere along the line, they began to believe that they were descendants of Ullr rather than me, and with that, their mission also warped. Their souls twisted and turned, morphing them into evil beings who sought to control and destroy all those who were different from them. Not once in the last

thousand years did anyone question what they were doing. Not until you, Rayne.”

“Why didn’t you do anything? Couldn’t you have gone to them and explained their true purpose? Do you know how many supernaturals could’ve lived if you had?” Rayne yells at Artemis who looks down, sadness crossing her features.

“At first, I thought it was just a select few who were corrupt, and I believed—or wanted to believe—that it would fix itself. But as you know, it didn’t. And by the time I was ready to step in, it was too far gone. Even if I would’ve shown myself to them, they would have found a way to imprison me. I couldn’t let that happen.”

Rayne begins to pace before turning to Artemis, her face full of rage. “Do you know what they’ve done to the people they’ve captured? Do you have any idea how many lives you could’ve saved? Dru was held captive for years, tortured, beaten, all because you didn’t step in. You could’ve stopped all of this. Go visit the building located in the clearing north of here and see the destruction you’ve caused. How dare you!” Tears are streaming down her face as she finishes and storms away.

“I’ll go after her,” Dru says, following after Rayne and leaving me alone with Artemis.

“Even Gods and Goddesses make mistakes,” Artemis whispers.

“I know. But you’re supposed to be better than us. And you need to understand, Rayne was the one who found Drusilla imprisoned in that shed. The fact that there was something you could’ve done to prevent that...” I pause, not knowing exactly how to put this. “It’s going to take a while for her to come to terms with it. Your best bet is to give her time.”

Artemis nods at me and I get up, walking away to search for my mates.

Chapter 17

Zeke

I snap awake, jolting myself out of the nightmare I was having. As usual, I'm drenched in sweat, breathing heavily, in a panic. I glance around, seeing the lake in front of me and a blanket beneath me... Suddenly, the events of last night—or tonight I guess, based on the lack of light still in the sky—come back to me. A smile forms on my face thinking of Opal, but as I look around, I don't see her. A quick touch of the blanket tells me she hasn't been here for a while.

“Opal?” I call out, standing up, and I begin to walk around searching for her, using my nose to follow her scent. Her smell fades the further I walk from the blanket, as if she simply vanished into thin air. But that's not possible... Is it? I begin to panic the longer she's away from me. What if the hunters found me again and took her as revenge? What if I rejected her years ago trying to save her, just for her to be taken anyway?

I walk back and forth, from the little path by the cabin and back to the beach, trying to decide whether I stay and wait, hoping that Opal will return, or if I leave to go look for her.

“Zeke?” I hear Axel call out. “Are you here?”

“Is Opal with you?” I respond as he steps through the trees.

“No, but she's safe.”

“Where is she?” I demand, grabbing him by the shirt, unable to control myself.

“Calm down,” Axel says, removing my hands from his shirt. “She’s safe at the pack house.”

“How the fuck did she get to the pack house?”

“That is a long story,” he says.

“It’s a long walk back to Alaric’s so we have time.”

Axel nods and the two of us begin to walk through the trees. “Well, apparently the old Gods are real. Artemis...”

“You mean like Zeus, Hera, Gaia... those Gods?” I ask, my mouth open in shock.

“Yes, exactly. And apparently Rayne is the descendant of Artemis.”

“Wait, who’s Rayne?” I ask.

“Oh yeah, I forgot, there’s a few people you haven’t met. Rayne is a hunter...”

As soon as the word is out of his mouth, I stop dead in my tracks, a large growl ripping out of me.

“She’s the one who led the charge on the facility you were taken to. She’s not like a normal hunter. Besides, she’s mated to Drake.”

“You mean the vampire Drake?” He nods. “How is that possible? Why would the Gods be so cruel after his sister,” I say.

“Well that’s another thing... Remember when Drusilla escaped and she said a hunter helped her?”

“Yeah... You mean Rayne was that hunter?”

He nods again. “Anyway, Artemis showed up in the middle of our meeting, talking about some attack that was going to happen on the women of the world, so she waved her hands and every supernatural woman within one hundred kilometers was teleported to the bunker under Alaric’s house.” Wow. Who knew that the Gods were real. I mean, I knew that they must’ve been real at some point, but I assumed they were more like supernaturals with extreme gifts that died out over time. The fact that they are living beings is a lot to take in. But then add in how powerful they are, able to teleport hundreds—if not thousands—of people with a wave of their hands... Holy shit.

“That’s a lot of power.” He nods in agreement.

“There’s more...”

“What? How is there more than that?” I ask.

“Well, when Artemis teleported every woman within one hundred kilometers, it wasn’t only members of our sleuth, Alaric’s pack, Trixie’s pride, and the covens that were brought into the bunker...”

“What other supernaturals are there? Other than the Fae who already have their own pocket world,” I ask, confused.

“There was a young tiger shifter,” he spits out, and once again I stop dead in my tracks.

“What?”

“Yeah, she’s only about nineteen. She said her family was taken by hunters over eleven years ago, and that her parents helped her and her little brother escape, but then she lost him a couple weeks later. She’s been alone ever since, not wanting to leave the area just in case she found him.”

“You don’t think she’s the one dad was looking for, do you?” I ask, and I’m terrified to know the answer. As much as I want him to say no, I have a gut feeling that’s not the truth. If she is, it’s my fault she’s been all alone all this time.

“I do.” My stomach drops at his words.

“It’s all my fault.”

“It’s our fault. Not just you. We both agreed that it was fake intel,” he says, gripping my shoulders.

“But it was me who said it first. How has she survived on her own all these years?”

“It doesn’t matter who said it was fake first, we all decided, not just me and you, but the other leaders also agreed it was most likely a trap.” He tries to make me feel better, but it’s in vain, and I know that he’s feeling just as badly about it as I am.

“Opal’s going to hate me,” I mutter under my breath. Gods, I just got her back, what am I going to do?

“There is no way she will hate you. She may look at us both differently, but she won’t hate us.”

“You can’t know that,” I say.

“Just watch and see.” We break through the trees once more in front of the pack house.

Opal is standing on the porch with the rest of the women, and a young girl with white hair, when we arrive. As soon as she sees us, she races off the porch and into my arms. Axel gives us a moment before joining in behind Opal, the two of us sandwiching her between us.

"I was worried you would be mad at me and think I ran off on you when you woke up without me," she whispers.

"Never angel," I tell her, placing a soft kiss on her hair.

She tilts her head up and captures my lips with hers. I let my tongue slip out and lick the seam of her lips which part easily, allowing me access. Our kiss quickly turns heated, and soon I can scent her arousal.

"We're not alone," Axel groans, and we quickly part.

"To be continued," I whisper to Opal, sending her a wink. Then suddenly, my heart drops. That is, if she will still want me after.

"Both of you?" She looks between me and Axel. I glance at my brother and give him a nod which he returns.

"Yes angel, both of us." Her cheeks flush a rosy red and her arousal grows, making both Axel and I groan in response.

We walk towards the steps and the woman who banished me from the pack is giving me a death glare. If what Axel explained is true, this is Opal's friend Sarah, and she is the one who I will need to win over.

Before we reach the group, Alaric comes bounding down the steps. "Zeke!" he greets me, pulling me away from Opal and in for a hug.

"It's been a long time," I say.

"Too long! But we have other things to talk about tonight," he says as he pulls back and clasps me on the tops of my arms.

Opal steps up and wraps her arm around my waist as we walk up the stairs. "I'll be inside in a minute." She looks at me in confusion. "I just want to talk to Sarah first," I explain, and she glances from me to Sarah, before nodding.

"Be nice," Opal growls at her friend, who raises her hands in defense. She goes up on her toes and gives me a peck on the cheek, before turning and walking inside.

"I just wanted to let you know that I will do anything in my power to ensure that Opal never gets hurt again," I tell her.

"I appreciate you saying that, but that's not what I want to hear."

"What do you want to hear then?" I question.

"I want to know your reasons for rejecting Opal in the first place. Axel seems to think you were in the right but said it was not his place to tell me."

"Ah. I see," I say, and gesture to the bench along the house for us to sit down. "I was running from the hunters when I found Opal the first time.

I had been running for almost two weeks straight, trying desperately to stay one step ahead of them." I take a deep breath and wonder how many times I'm going to have to repeat this story... maybe I should just call everyone out here to hear it all at once, or record myself. "I tried to run away from Opal before she knew I was there, but my bear wouldn't let me. He was enthralled at first sight and took over. I allowed myself to get lost in her for a brief time before I realized I had to fight my bear for control before he could mark her. I knew the hunters were on my trail and can only imagine what they would have done to her just for being a witch... let alone what they would do to both of us if they knew we were bonded mates... So I took control, rejected her, and ran." I pause and look her in the eyes. I can see that she's still skeptical so I continue. "Not even two hours later, the hunters caught up to me. They didn't kill me like I thought they would though, they kept me in that facility for eleven years. It was hard enough getting through that myself, but if Opal had been taken as well, I wouldn't have survived. You may not like me and you don't have to, but I love your friend and would never intentionally be the cause of any of her pain."

She nods at me in response, looking back out to the forest for a few long moments. So long that I wonder if she's going to respond at all. "You know, I don't exactly know what I was expecting you to say, but that wasn't it... You protected her the only way that you knew how, and as much as I want to hate you for hurting her in the first place, I understand why."

"Thank you," I tell her. Her opinion means a lot to Opal, and so it does to me too.

"You don't have to thank me, just make sure that you do everything in your power to keep her happy and safe."

I close my eyes momentarily and let out a shaky breath. "I am afraid I'm going to lose her after tonight."

"After finding out that you didn't go after Meredith when your dad died?" she asks, and I look at her in shock. "Alaric told Opal after Axel left to find you. She was worried that something upset him."

I nod at her in understanding. "Yeah because of that..."

"Well don't worry, Opal isn't upset with you at all. She doesn't believe you to be in the wrong, and neither do any of us. How were you supposed to know that the information was true? The way Alaric explained it, you and Axel weren't the only people to believe the information to be

false.” Gods I hope everything that she is saying is the truth... It should alleviate the stress, but the pit in my stomach isn’t lessening.

“Thank you for saying that.”

She places her hand on my shoulder. “Don’t let the guilt fester. If you need to apologize to Meredith to let go, then do that. If you don’t, all you will do is twist your insides up, and it will be the ones you love that suffer.”

“That’s easier said than done, but I promise I will do my best,” I tell her.

“Good enough for me. Let’s head inside before Opal and Seb come to see if I’ve killed you yet.” She laughs as she gets up and walks inside.

I follow her inside, glancing around. Some faces I recognize from my past, and some are new, all displaying various emotions: happy, sad, understanding, but the worst is the pity. I don’t want people to feel bad for me because I was held captive, I want them to look at me like the survivor I am. Others that were brought in after me didn’t make it out, not because they are any less than I am, but because they gave up hope.

“It’s not pity, you know,” Drusilla says, walking up to me. If any one knows the struggle with that, it’s her.

“Then what is it?” I whisper back.

“It’s empathy.”

“That’s the same thing,” I argue.

“But it’s not. I thought so too. That everyone was looking at me thinking ‘poor Drusilla’, but in reality, they were more awe-struck that I survived, that I escaped. Just because someone shows you compassion or empathy doesn’t mean they think any less of you.”

I nod as if I understand a word she just said. Pity and empathy are the same things. Just because she can dress it up and make it sound pretty doesn’t change what it is.

I make my way over to Opal and Axel, taking a seat and pulling Opal into my lap. She snuggles in as the rest of the group talks.

“Where is Artemis?” the woman beside Alaric says, and from the look he gives her, I’m assuming she’s his mate.

“Gone, and hopefully she won’t come back,” another woman who is standing close to Drake growls. Guess this is the infamous Rayne. I really need to get Axel to introduce me to everyone... Maybe we should have some sort of meet and greet.

“If what she said is true, and we were under some sort of attack, then we’re in her debt,” Skarlyt argues. Rayne just scoffs, not responding.

“Artemis or no Artemis, we need to be ready for more attacks like today. The sooner we get this island ready the better,” Alaric jumps in. “Everyone go home, get some sleep and we will meet back here first thing in the morning.”

With that, I pick up Opal, carrying her in my arms right out the door and towards the woods. I don’t wait for Axel, I know he’ll catch up. Besides, my anxiety is peaking being around so many people at one time.

“Where are we going?” Opal asks.

“We’re going to the cabin I brought you to earlier. There’s a room inside with a bed big enough for all three of us. I figured you wouldn’t want your first night alone with both of us to be under the same roof as our mother,” I chuckle.

“No, definitely not,” she agrees and tilts her head, beginning to kiss up and down my neck. Time for me to pick up speed—the sooner I can get us there, the longer I can have her to myself without having to share her with my brother.

Chapter 18

Opal

As we're walking, I start placing small kisses up and down Zeke's neck. I know it's wrong to tease him, but at the same time, I can't help it. Since that display earlier, my entire body has been on fire.

"Angel you're killin' me," he groans as he speed walks through the forest. Instead of stopping, I place my mouth on his neck and suck hard, while massaging his skin with my tongue. "I'll stop right here and give you something else to suck on," he threatens, but he doesn't stop or slow down—if anything, he speeds up.

I twist my body, clinging to his shoulders, wrapping my arms around his neck, and placing one leg on either side of his body. With my new position, I use my arms to lower me down and pull me back up, grinding my core over his bulge. This time he does stop, placing his hands firmly under my ass and pulling me back to look into my eyes. "Seriously angel, we can do this right here, or you can wait five minutes until we're inside. Your choice." I contemplate this for a hot second, but ultimately decide to wait until we get inside.

"Ugh. Fine. I'll wait," I pout, causing him to chuckle and begin moving again. I'm all for having some midnight sexcapades in the forest,

but I really don't want anyone to walk up on us, especially if Axel catches up.

As soon as I feel him go up the stairs to the front of the cabin, I place my mouth on his, slipping my tongue through his lips with a moan. I paw at his back, desperately trying to get closer to him.

"Take this off," I demand, pulling away from him.

"So impatient, angel," he says, placing me on the counter. Slowly, he reaches down, grasping the hem of his shirt and lifting it. Each second that he draws out the reveal of his tattooed and sculpted torso is pure torture.

"Zeke," I plead. He raises a brow at me and continues slowly removing his shirt, his full eight pack now on display, making my core throb with need. Goddess this man is sexy.

Not willing to wait any longer, I jump down from the counter and rush towards him. He chuckles and steps back, but finally pulls his shirt over his head.

I place my hands on his firm chest muscles as I reach him, slowly tracing my way down to that well defined 'V' at the bottom, admiring all of the incredible artwork on his skin as I go. My fingers slip into his waistband and his breath hitches. I slide my hands along the band, inching them downwards, only to have him place his hands on mine.

"Not yet angel. I removed my shirt, it's only fair for you to take yours off too." I groan in displeasure. I don't want slow right now, I want hard and fast. No... not want... Need.

I grip the bottom of my shirt and rip it over my head before unclasping my bra and letting it slip off.

"Gods you're so beautiful," he whispers, placing his hands on my waist, moving them upwards until he's palming each breast. He rubs his fingers over my nipples and it's my turn for my breath to hitch as a moan slips out.

"You're so responsive. I love that," he says as he moves his head down to take one in his mouth. I arch my back, allowing him better access while trying to move my core closer to him.

"I see you've started without me," Axel says from the door and I freeze in panic. What if he isn't comfortable with this? What if he doesn't want to share me? We talked about me being both their mates, but not about any sexual stuff. Goddess, what if I just fucked up?

“Stop. I can see your mind going over there, but I’m definitely not upset. I’m the exact fucking opposite, actually,” he says as he stalks towards us. Zeke moves around me so that he is now at my back, with Axel coming up to my front. My heart begins hammering in my chest with anticipation, and when Axel dips his head down to capture my lips, I lose all control.

With a moan, I wrap my arms around his neck, kissing him back with a fierceness before lifting myself up and wrapping my legs around his waist. Zeke moves with me, sliding his hands around to fondle my breasts while kissing up and down my neck.

I grind myself on Axel with as much strength as I have, moving up and down faster and faster, chasing my orgasm. “Not yet,” Axel growls out, placing me on the ground and stepping back. Unlike Zeke, he removes his shirt in one smooth motion, not making me wait, and my body vibrates with the need to be closer to him. If it weren’t for Zeke holding me in place, I would be.

“Into the bedroom,” Axel orders and Zeke lifts me up, carrying me and laying me on the bed.

I pop up onto my elbows. “How is this going to work?”

“You’re going to do as we say angel, and trust that we’re going to make sure you feel good. Can you do that?” Zeke says. I bite my lip and nod. Holy shit, this is really happening!

“Good girl,” Axel says, moving towards the bed and slipping off my pants and underwear in one go. He glides his finger along my core. “So wet. Is that all for us?”

Again I nod, words utterly escaping me “Zeke, take off your pants and lay on the bed. I think our angel here needs you underneath her.” Axel lifts me up as Zeke takes his position and lowers me down onto his impressive cock. With each inch, another moan slips out of me as he hits different spots than I’ve ever felt before. Axel kneels before me where I’m straddling his brother backwards, and latches onto my clit.

Zeke begins to move his hips up and down as much as he can while Axel sucks and flicks at my clit with his tongue. The dual sensation quickly brings me to climax with a scream. But Axel doesn’t stop, he continues the assault with his tongue until I’m crying out for him once more.

As he stands, I grip the waistband of his jeans, quickly unbuttoning them and pulling his giant cock free. I lick my suddenly dry lips, before eagerly pulling him into my mouth.

“I thought we said you were going to do as we say?” Axel groans out.

I pull away for a second. “Oh I’m sorry, did you want me to stop?” I say with snark, my brain finally allowing me some coherent thoughts. Zeke grips my hips and thrusts up into me hard, making me moan. With my mouth open, Axel takes that opportunity to slip his cock back into it, and both of my sexy mates begin pounding in and out of me.

I place my hands on Axel’s hips, slowing his motions, allowing myself a moment to savor the taste of him. I pop him out of my mouth and lick him from base to tip along the deep vein on the bottom, before lavishing the head with extra attention.

My core begins to flutter with my impending release, and I pull my mouth off of Axel’s cock with a throaty scream. Axel’s hand slides down my body, circling my clit and extending my orgasm until I feel Zeke pulse inside me with his own.

I’m lifted into Axel’s arms and without warning, he slips inside me. I brace my hands on his shoulders, using my upper body strength to raise and lower myself onto him. With this new position, his cock drags along my G-spot with each thrust. I worry for a split second that Zeke will be left out, but then I feel his hand on my ass, moving toward my puckered hole.

“One day soon angel. You’ll take us both at the same time,” Zeke whispers in my ear as his finger slowly circles my hole before pushing in slightly.

I gasp out in shock with the new invasion, but Zeke goes no further, only sliding his finger in and out slowly in time with Axel’s thrusts.

I lift my head and capture Axel’s mouth with mine. He swallows down my screams as my orgasm hits, with a moan of his own. Zeke’s finger slips from my ass and his strong hands grip my hips, holding me in place as Axel pounds in and out of me like a man on a mission.

My core clenches Axel’s cock tighter, milking him of his own release, and the three of us collapse on the bed, drenched in sweat.

“Was that alright angel?” Zeke asks.

“That was...” I’m once again at a loss for words.

“Incredible,” Axel provides and I nod, my eyes already drifting closed.

I feel the bed dip momentarily, and then feel something wet being wiped over my core. I open my eyes a crack and see Zeke cleaning up the

evidence of our love making. The next dip in the bed is Zeke climbing in behind me as I snuggle into Axel, pressing my face into his chest.

I don't know what the goddess was thinking when she gave me two mates, but if every time is going to be like that... I owe her big time.



The next morning I wake and reach out for my two mates, coming up empty on either side.

"Zeke? Axel?" I call out, and the door opens seconds later to Axel.

"We were going to let you sleep," he says, coming over and giving me a kiss. I grip his head and pull him on top of me, deepening the kiss.

"Angel," Zeke says from the doorway, and I remove my mouth from Axel's to look over at him. My body is absolutely buzzing with need. He must see the look on my face because he groans. "I'm going to finish making breakfast, you need to help her with that Axe." Reluctantly tearing his gaze away, he spins around, shutting the door behind him.

"Woke up feeling needy did we?" Axel jokes, but he slides down my body and swipes his tongue up my core.

"Yes!" I cry out my answer. As he flicks my clit over and over, my only thought is 'Goddess this man knows how to eat pussy'... And he's all mine.

When two of his large fingers slip inside me, my orgasm overtakes my body and my legs begin to shake. As soon as the tremors start to slow, I'm flipped over and Axel is pressing the head of his cock inside me. "Gods you feel so good. So fucking perfect."

He thrusts in and out of me hard and fast, bringing us both to climax within minutes. "I don't think I'm ever going to get enough of this," I whisper as he slips from me.

"Me neither Angel," he says as he places a soft kiss on my head. "But we have other things to do today."

"Do we have to?" I question as I turn to face him.

He chuckles. "Unfortunately."

With a groan and a nod, I get up and walk over to the bathroom. "I'm going to hop in the shower."

"Okay love. I'll go help Zeke with breakfast," he says as he heads back out the door.

I hop in the shower, my core still throbbing with need, and I move my hands slowly down my body. I don't understand how I just came with Axel, but can still be so horny. As I slowly circle my clit, increasing the speed and pressure, desperate to find my release, the shower curtain moves and a very naked Zeke steps in.

“Need some help angel?” he asks and he moves his hand to replace my own. Within seconds, I can feel my release building and I place my foot on the side of the tub, lining myself up with his cock. Without prompting, Zeke's cock slams into me, triggering my orgasm. He removes his hand and backs me up to the wall, smashing his mouth on mine while thrusting in and out of me.

I slow him down and circle my hips, putting pressure on my clit with his body, and soon we are both moaning out our releases once more.

My body finally feeling sated, we both wash up in the now cold water and get dressed for the day. I hope we get through it quickly so I can have some more of that later.

Chapter 19

Axel

I walk into the kitchen where Zeke is trying and failing to concentrate on breakfast. “Opal’s going for a shower... She might need some help washing her back.”

He looks at me with wide eyes before turning and running to the bedroom. I let out a small chuckle and shake my head as I begin to salvage the breakfast. Luckily only the bacon was cooking, and I prefer mine extra-crispy.

By the time they're done with their love making—I mean shower—I have a big spread laid out on the counter.

“This looks delicious,” Opal says as she walks into the kitchen and gives me a soft kiss.

“Hey! I started it,” Zeke pouts, but we both shoot him a look. “What? I did!”

“You burnt the bacon,” I say, pointing over to the extra-crispy bacon.

“You like it like that!” he argues and Opal laughs at us.

“I don’t,” she says, and we both turn to her with horror on our faces.

“How do you like your bacon then?” Zeke asks.

“I like my bacon soft and chewy,” she responds, digging through the bowl of bacon and pulling out the softest pieces—not that she’ll find many.

“What?” Zeke shrieks, placing his hand on his chest in his own dramatic way.

She slaps at his shoulder playfully before loading up the rest of her plate and sitting down. Zeke and I both wait to begin loading our plates until after she’s started eating—wanting to ensure that she gets enough—before we sit down, each of us to one side of her.

“This really is delicious, Axel. Thank you,” she says between mouthfuls and gives me a soft smile.

“Anything for you angel,” I say, placing a kiss on her head.

A ringing sound comes from my jacket hanging by the door, and I rush over to answer it.

“Hello?”

“Hey Axel, it’s Alaric. Have you watched or listened to the news today?”

“Uh... no. I don’t usually pay attention to the news.”

“Well I think you should,” he says, and I turn to Zeke and Opal.

“Can one of you turn on the news?” Opal quickly pulls out her phone, opening the browser to google news.

She sucks in a breath, her eyes going wide as she reads the headline, and I walk over to stand behind her, reading it for myself.

Breaking news - global pandemic reported as pregnant women across the globe suffer miscarriages.

“Miscarriages?” I growl into the phone. What the fuck is this? How can this be a pandemic?

“Apparently all of the pregnant women on earth lost their babies last night...” Alaric says, sadness lacing his voice.

“And Phoebe?” I ask, knowing she is pregnant.

“She’s fine. As are the other pregnant women in our pack. You might want to reach out to the sleuth as well to check on your own.”

“I’m going to do that right now. We’ll be over at your place in a bit,” I say, just before hanging up with him.

“Did Phoebe?” Opal asks, her lip quivering.

I rub my hands up and down her arms. “No. All the women in the pack are fine.”

“That must’ve been the attack Artemis was protecting us from.”

“It makes sense. I’m going to text mom to get in touch with the pregnant women in the sleuth anyway, just to make sure.” I rifle off a quick text telling my mom about the news, as well as our belief that Artemis protected us, asking her to touch base with the pregnant members. She quickly agrees, and I place my phone back in my pocket.

“I wanted to have more time with just the three of us this morning, but after this...” I begin.

“We need to get moving. We don’t know if this is going to be the only attack, so the sooner we are on the island, the better,” Opal finishes, jumping up and beginning to clear away the dishes.

Between the three of us, it doesn’t take long to clean up the mess from breakfast, each of us seeming to anticipate each other’s movements. Our fun mood from before is long gone though, as we all silently go through the motions of getting ready to leave.

“Do you think it will be done in time?” Opal asks, fear ringing out in her voice as we step out onto the porch.

“I don’t know angel. But we’re going to try,” Zeke responds, pulling her into a hug as I lock up.

Giving myself a mental shake, I walk up behind her and sandwich her between the two of us. We might not have much time available right now, but we can spare a few minutes to comfort our mate. I share a look with Zeke over her head.

We need to figure out how to keep her safe, he says through the bond.

I nod. *We will,* I respond. Even knowing that I can’t promise she won’t come to any harm, I can promise that we will do everything we can... Including building this island in record time.

After a few minutes, Zeke steps back, placing his hand under Opal’s chin and raising her eyes to meet his. “We really need to go angel.”

Again, she nods, stepping out of my embrace, and the three of us begin our trek to Alaric’s. What was supposed to be an exciting day of building this island has turned somber. Hunters are now the least of our worries. If we have the wrath of a God or Goddess upon us, there is nowhere on earth we will be able to hide. I’m not even sure if the island will be able to keep us safe.

“Opal!” Samara calls out as we breach the tree line, and Opal takes off running to embrace her friend.

“Are you okay? The baby?” Opal asks, placing her hand on her stomach.

“The baby is fine. Seems whatever Artemis did the other night kept all of us safe. But the other women of the world...”

“I know,” Opal responds.

“You must be Zeke,” Samara says, stepping back from Opal and sticking her hand out to my twin.

“I am.”

“I’m Samara, it’s nice to meet you. And it’s good to see you again Axel.”

“You too Samara,” I pipe in. “The girls missed you at breakfast the other day.”

“Yeah...” she begins sheepishly. “The mornings aren’t good for me, I’ve been really sick. The nights aren’t great either. Actually, if I’m honest, it’s all day. Trevan says it has something to do with the combination of our magic being volatile.”

I nod, pretending to understand but I don’t... not really. I haven’t been around anyone pregnant other than shifters with shifter mates, so I don’t know how that works. But I suppose it’s something I should look into. If Opal is to carry our cubs, we will need to figure out how our separate magics will merge.

“Come on, let’s head inside. Everyone is waiting,” Samara says, leading the three of us in.

The moods inside aren’t much better than our own, with worried looks plastered on everyone’s faces.

Alaric walks over, greeting both Zeke and I with a handshake and Opal with a small hug, before stepping back. “Last night after you left, Phoebe pointed out that some introductions are in order.” I look at him in confusion, but he gestures toward Zeke and I catch his meaning. Zeke hasn’t been around for the last eleven years, so there are quite a few people he hasn’t met yet.

“Everyone, this is Zeke, Axel’s twin brother and Opal’s second mate.” He gestures to Zeke, then turns back to the group. “Zeke, this is Rayne, Drake’s mate; Sophia, Darren’s mate; Lennox, Skarlyt’s mate; Andres, Drusilla’s mate, and Phoebe, my mate. You’ve met Sarah and

Samara, and I believe you know the rest." Zeke nods and waves at everyone who returns the gesture.

"Good, now that is out of the way, so let's get to business. Who is doing what today?" Alaric steps up to a whiteboard he hung up on the wall and takes the lid off a marker, ready to write.

"Witches?" he asks Skarlyt.

"All the earth witches are coming with us to begin construction on the island, the rest will be gathering supplies, food, medicine, and whatever else we will need until we can get the island to be self-sustainable."

Alaric nods, writing it down on the board. "Lions?" he asks Trixie.

"We are going to be going to all the lumber yards within two hours, getting as much construction material as we can. The rest will be packing up our homes, ready to move."

Once again Alaric nods, writing it down before turning to Drake. "Vampires?"

"They'll be sleeping for most of the day, but we have scheduled mass blood shipments over the next two evenings and we have a large group of volunteers for construction."

Alaric then looks at me. "And the bears?"

"I briefly spoke with my crews last night and they are gathering all the necessary tools to begin construction as soon as we're able. The rest will be gathering food and supplies. I had a few volunteers gather some livestock as well, and they'll house them at their ranches until the island is ready," I supply.

Nodding, Alaric turns and writes that down too. "The pack is preparing to storm the laboratories. Each able bodied shifter is gathering weapons." We all look at him in shock but he continues. "I know we don't usually use weapons, but with our timeline so short, we have no choice. We need to get this done quickly. With this new threat—"

He's cut off by Sophia crying out, "No!"

Phoebe rushes to her side. "What is it?"

"It's Blaze... She was pregnant..." Sophia sinks down in a chair as tears flow from her eyes, and Darren is instantly there, hovering over her in protector mode.

"Fuck," Skarlyt says, but quickly moves to Sophia's side holding a vial up to her face, catching her tears.

“I need you to take me there...” Darren visibly tenses at Sophia’s words as she pleads with Skarlyt. “Please.”

“I can take you both. But you’ll have to stay until nightfall so I can help with the island,” Sebastyn chimes in.

Sophia looks at him with a soft smile and a nod of thanks, before he teleports both Darren and Sophia away.

“Who’s Blaze?” Zeke asks, and everyone turns to him.

“She’s a phoenix from the Amazon who we befriended,” Phoebe supplies.

“Wait... Phoenixes are real? I thought they were extinct,” Zeke says, and everyone chuckles. “What am I missing?”

“I’m a Phoenix, and so is my twin Sophia,” Phoebe says with a smirk.

“What? No way!” Zeke exclaims, and suddenly the whole group lets out a laugh, raising the mood in the room.

I clasp him on the back. “I forget there’s a whole lot you don’t know.”

“Okay. Let’s get to work. The ones with the hardest job by far are the witches, so let’s help them with whatever we can,” Alaric says, and we break apart.

“Are you two coming with us?” Skarlyt asks, and I look at Zeke. One of us should stay behind to handle the sleuth.

Surprisingly, it’s Zeke who speaks up. “I’m going to stay and help the sleuth prepare. Axel should go with you to ensure the foundation is strong.”

“Are you sure?” I ask.

He nods. “Yes. It’s time I step up and help you with the sleuth.”

“Thank you,” I tell him. For the first time in eleven years, the burden isn’t entirely on me, and I don’t need to feel as if I need to be in two places at once. Because with Zeke and I being a team, we can be.

“Be good angel,” he says, stepping up and giving Opal a brief kiss.

“Always,” she responds, earning a snort from the rest of the women. Seems there are some things we still have to learn about our mate...

“Ready?” Skarlyt turns to us after giving Lennox a quick kiss as well, and we nod. She clasps our hands and teleports us onto a boat in the middle of the ocean. The wind is strong, and it blows sprays of water on our

faces, making Opal shiver. I wrap my arms around her and look out to the water, seeing dozens of boats floating in a circle, quickly filling with witches.

“Okay everyone. We’re going to start right here,” Skarlyt yells out and raises her palms. I look out towards the water and watch in awe as a small patch of dirt forms. As each witch raises her hands, the patch of dirt grows. Not only is it spreading, but I can see that it’s getting thicker under the water as well.

“This is amazing,” I whisper—more to myself than anyone else—but I’m shushed all the same.

As the earthen circle grows in size, the boats get pushed back, and soon I’m staring at a large island... It’s not quite as big as we need it to be, but it’s a start.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Artemis calls out, shocking everyone on our boat.

Skarlyt turns to her. “We’re making an island. What does it look like?”

“Why are you doing that when you have much bigger things to worry about? You know... like how we’re going to appease a very pissed off deity,” Artemis challenges.

Skarlyt places her hands on her hips with a scowl on her face. “In order to focus on that, we need to be safe. We need this island so we can begin planning for the future.”

“And what were you planning on doing once you had a hunk of dirt floating in the middle of the ocean?”

“We have been looking for a spell to teleport each faction’s town here, but if we can’t find one then we will build,” Skarlyt answers.

“Well then...” Artemis glances at the drawings of the island Skarlyt taped to the wall of the boat. “Here, let me help you.” She waves her hand. In front of my eyes, I watch as an island materializes before us, exactly how I designed it—complete with our homes, and forest as far as the eye can see.

“Seriously?” Skarlyt balks at her.

“What? You said you needed it done and it’s done,” Artemis says, looking at both Opal and I as if Skarlyt is crazy.

“Yes but...” Skarlyt begins.

“I think what Skar is trying to say is thank you,” Opal chimes in.

“That's not—” Opal throws her hand over Skarlyt's mouth quickly to stop her from continuing.

“Is everyone here?” I ask, and Artemis turns to me excitedly.

“Yes! Come, come. Let me show you.” Another wave of her hands, and the three of us are standing on the roof of a large tower, overlooking absolutely everything. It's beautiful. The entire island, apart from a few small areas, is surrounded by large cliffs. The forested areas are vast, with rivers snaking through each, and at the start of the main river is a large waterfall. It's gorgeous. The more I look around, the more I see... I spot Alaric's home surrounded by the other pack homes, the witches' village, Trixie's pride, my sleuth, and even the large triage structure the witches built for the rescued supernaturals.

“Wow,” we say at the same time.

“Fabulous, isn't it? Some of my best work. Everything is done: plumbing, electricity, fresh water, crops, livestock, everything you need to survive here. And now the piece de resistance.” Once again Artemis waves her hands and we land at the bottom of the tower we're in, standing in front of what can only be described as a temple of some sort.

As the three of us walk inside, I realize that is exactly what this is... It's a temple of worship for... you guessed it, Artemis. She leads us to a door at the back of the temple. “Walk through that door,” she says as she steps back from us.

The three of us look at each other in question, but step forward anyway, opening the door and walking through. As I look around, I recognize where I am: I'm back in Parry Sound. “How the fuck?” I question as I look around.

“This is a portal to the island.” We look at her in shock once again.

“How is this any safer? The hunters could figure this out and just walk through onto the island, only we would have nowhere to go.”

Artemis clucks her tongue at her. “I'm not stupid. The portal is linked with intent. If the person stepping through means the inhabitants of the island no harm, they will be allowed to proceed... If there is the slightest desire of harm, they will simply open the door and walk into a cabin.”

“How are we supposed to know if it works?” I ask. It seems almost too good to be true. But if it does work... this could be a game changer.

“Of course it works,” she tsks at me. “Go find someone who intends to harm you and tell them to walk through if you don't believe me.” With that, she blinks away, leaving us standing there with our mouths hanging open.

“What the fuck was that?” Skarlyt is the first to recover.

“I don't know,” Opal responds. “Let's head back to the island and find everyone else. I think we need help figuring this one out.”

“Good idea,” I say, wrapping my arm around her shoulder and guiding us back through the door. We walk into the temple and I get a good look around this time. It's exactly how Greek temples for the gods look in pictures, only brand new.

We find most of our friends standing at the large doorway of the temple with their mouths hanging open. Time to tell them the crazy events of the last couple hours. Hopefully, they believe us, although they kind of have to since the evidence is under our feet.

Chapter 20

Zeke

I could tell that Axel was surprised by my offer to handle the Alpha duties for the sleuth... Hell, I surprised myself. I have been mulling it over for the last few days, but wasn't sure if it was something I would actually do. When the time came though, where I knew one of us would have to stay and take care of everyone after the fall out from last night, I didn't think... I just reacted.

But now, as I'm walking up to the house, seeing the shifters gathered on the lawn, I'm not sure I made the right decision. Most nod their head at me in greeting, but others turn to whisper to the person next to them, no doubt wondering why it's me walking up rather than my brother. There was a time when no one would have been able to tell the difference between us... But where I've lost a lot of muscle mass, Axel has gained it, making it easy to determine which of us is which.

I walk up the steps and take a deep breath before turning to face the crowd. "I know you're probably confused as to why I'm here rather than Axel..." I see a lot of nodding heads so I continue. "Axel is currently helping the witches create a safe haven for us. An island where we are free to be ourselves. Where we no longer have to live in fear of the hunters or humans finding out about us."

"What about our lives here? Our jobs? Friends?" one person calls out, and I take another deep breath.

"I understand why you would be concerned about leaving here, but we need to think about the sleuth as a whole. The increased attack from the hunters, as well as other forces..." I pause wondering how much I should tell them.

"Are we under attack again? Is that why all the women were mysteriously teleported to the Alpha house on pack land? Why so many women in the world lost their unborn children?" another voice rings out.

I nod. "Yes we are." Whispers and panic begin to rise, so I hold up my hand again. "We don't have all the information ourselves. But I will tell you what we know so far. I don't know how much you were told about the actions of the rest of the supernaturals in our area lately, but you should know that our allies raided a facility not far from here last week. During that raid I was rescued—along with a lot of other supes—from a Laboratory a couple hours north of here. A place where the hunters would take us to experiment on, and torture us to find our weaknesses." Gasps ring out from the crowd. "During that raid, it was found that there are five other facilities just like that across Canada. Collectively, the other faction leaders are planning to raid them and rescue the supernaturals there as well, but before we can do that, we need a safe place for us. A place where hunters from other parts of the world can't reach us.

"I understand we're asking a lot of you... to leave your homes, your lives. But I promise you it's the only way for now.

"As for the events of last night... There was an attack on the world, not just supernaturals or humans, but every species on the earth. It seems some of the old Gods and Goddesses are walking amongst us once more, and aren't pleased. The attack last night was by a particularly powerful deity. We aren't sure what he or she wants, or how to fix it, but we can only assume this will not be the last attack."

"Are you saying we are going to lose our babies too?" a heavily pregnant woman cries out.

"No. We've been reassured that every woman in the bunker last night was safe from the attack..." All of a sudden, the ground trembles, throwing me to the side. When I stand up, regaining my balance, I notice a few things. The weather that was once sunny with the sun directly above us has turned grey, and the once calm wind is now whipping through the trees.

The last thing is the smell; where I could scent home, the forest of Parry Sound that I've grown accustomed to, I now smell salty sea air.

"What's happening?"

"Why do I smell the ocean?"

"Where are we?"

The questions all fire out at the same time making it hard to distinguish them, but I know one thing: we're no longer in Ontario.

"Please calm down," I call out and the crowd quiets. "The witches were trying to find a way to teleport the entire community when I left them this morning. Perhaps they found a way. For now, please go home and make notes of who is here and who is not so we can ensure that everyone is accounted for, while I go find out what has happened."

Luckily, everyone turns to do as I asked without complaint, and I let out a sigh. That went better than I thought it would.

"What's going on Zeke?" My mom asks, fear plastered on her face.

I meet her eyes, trying to hide the fear shining back at her in my own. "I honestly don't know."

She nods and heads inside, probably heading straight for the kitchen. It's what she does when she's scared or stressed... She cooks. Which works for me because I need to gain some weight back.

Axel? I reach out through our bond and get nothing but static.

I walk inside the house and pick up the landline phone, dialing his number quickly. But as I bring the phone to my ear there's nothing, no dial tone, no ringing, nothing.

I begin to pace and try reaching out to Axel again.

What's going on?

Zeke? Axel says back through our bond.

Thank the Gods. What happened? Where are you? I let some of the panic slip through our bond and feel him send reassurances back to me.

Artemis created the island for us. Is everyone in the sleuth here?

I just tasked them all with making a list of who is accounted for, and who isn't, to keep them busy and stop them from panicking. But looking around, it seems that we are all here, houses and everything. What about Opal, is she still with you? I feel the pride he has for me flow through our bond and I puff out my chest a little under the compliment.

Good thinking. Yes, she's here, we're both back on the island and will head to you now.

Okay I'll go tell mom. She's stress cooking, I say, and I get a chuckle back before he cuts off the connection. I look around at the buildings and homes that surround the pack house. Everything is the same as it was, even the trees look exactly the same. So, Artemis teleported our entire village here, is there anything that goddess can't do? And why won't she use it to help in the real fight?

"Hey mom?" I call out as I head into the kitchen. I find her elbow deep in dough, making her famous biscuits.

"Did you find out anything?" she asks, stopping her pounding of the dough to look at me. I nod and tell her what Axel just told me. She visibly relaxes at my words, showing just how afraid she was.

"So now what?" she asks and I scrub a hand down my face.

"I'm not sure. But I have to assume Axel will know more when he gets here." She nods and I walk over to her, taking the dough and kneading it for her. I'm transported back to my childhood. To a safe place. Any time that I would get angry at the other kids or stressed about anything, my mom would grab me by the hand and pull me into the kitchen. I can hear her words running through my head: "It's natural for you to get angry or scared Zeke. Every person on the planet feels those emotions. But we need to learn when to act on them and when to tamp them down." My argument was always, "If it's so normal to feel this way, why can't I just punch them in the face?" She would laugh at me before saying, "Because then you'd always be grounded. Instead, we punch the dough. It doesn't talk back and can take it." She would always emphasize that point by pounding her fist into the dough over and over, leaving me wondering whose face she was picturing.

Silently, the two of us beat the dough. I punch the dough, picturing the hunters' faces at first, throwing every ounce of pain they caused me into it. Then it morphs into my own face, and I punch it harder for hurting Opal... for hurting my mom... for hurting Axel. By the time I'm done giving my dough its beating, I'm breathing heavily, and sweat is lacing my brow.

"I'd hate to be whoever you just pictured there," my mom chuckles.

"It was more than one someone..." I begin, and then I turn to her. "You know mom, I always wondered, who did you picture when you punched the dough like that?"

She sighs heavily, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. "For a long time, it was a few of the other women in the sleuth that made plays for your father when they thought I wasn't looking... Now... it's a mixture of unfaced hunters, but mostly..." tears begin to pool in her eyes as she looks at me. "I see your father and I punch him as hard as I can for leaving me. For leaving us." I reach out and wrap my arms around her. "I know it wasn't his fault. It's just hard not to blame a small part of him for leaving. He could've skipped that mission. He SHOULD have skipped that mission. There was no tiger... just hunters." She sobs into my chest.

"Mom... I have to tell you something." She steps back and looks at me, confusion plain on her face. "About the tiger shifter... turns out she was real. She was transported to the bunker last night with the rest of the women. She was taken by hunters along with her family just over eleven years ago. She and her younger brother escaped when their parents made a distraction, but her younger brother disappeared two weeks later... She's been alone, wandering the area since then, searching for him."

"What?" she exclaims. "You mean..." I nod. "That poor girl. Out there alone all this time."

I wrap my arms around her once more, both of us allowing a moment of weakness. A moment to feel the guilt weighing on our shoulders from thinking it was a trap, for leaving that poor girl out there on her own for over a decade, and for not searching for her.

"We'll make it right. We're going to help her find her brother," I decree as I step back. My mom nods her head in agreement and together we make quick work of the biscuits. Just as the oven bell dings, Axel and Opal walk through the door.

Chapter 21

Opal

“Zeke reached out through our bond. We should probably head over to the sleuth,” Axel says with his arms around me as we watch our friends walk in and out of the portal.

“This is so freaking cool,” Phoebe announces.

“It would be cooler if a certain Goddess would come explain what the fuck she was thinking,” Rayne yells at the sky, as if that will summon Artemis for her.

I chuckle a little as we approach the group. “We’re going to head to the sleuth to get a head count to make sure no one was left behind,” Axel says.

“Good idea. We should probably do the same,” Alaric agrees.

“We can meet here tonight to plan our next moves,” Axel suggests, and everyone nods.

We turn to walk away but Rayne calls me back. “I almost forgot, Eric wanted me to give you this.” She hands me a satellite phone which immediately begins ringing.

“Thanks” I say to her as I press the answer button.

“Hey Eric.”

“I’m glad you’re safe.”

“Of course, I’m safe. Why wouldn’t I be?” I question with a chuckle.

“Oh, I don’t know, an all powerful Goddess just waved her hands and created an island out of nothing, and then teleported several structures millions of miles away... Is it so far-fetched that you could’ve been left behind, or that the particles didn’t go back together quite right when you landed? You do have all your fingers and toes, right?” he tries to scold me.

I wiggle my toes and look down at my fingers to make sure before I answer. “Yes, I have all my fingers and toes. But I’m assuming you have another reason for calling...”

He scoffs. “Other than wanting to know my big sister is alive with all her extremities?”

“Eric,” I warn. There’s always something more with him.

“Okay fine. I hate that I wasn’t there to see it. How cool was it? Explain it from the beginning. Don’t leave anything out.” The geekiness of my brother astounds me, and I bark out a laugh. But I tell him anyway. I start from the moment Artemis showed up until now. To say he’s in awe would be an understatement. I think Artemis just got her first mega fan.

“I can’t wait to meet her,” he says, and I groan.

“Unless she plans on helping us with the hunters or this mysterious enemy, she should stay away. Rayne is beyond pissed. If I were you, I’d make myself scarce when she gets back to the lab,” I tell him.

“Oh, believe me I already am. I locked myself away in the control room after the first time I walked in on her and Drake using the chains hanging from the ceiling...” I can hear him shudder through the phone.

“Okay then... Thanks for that visual.”

“Hey, at least you didn’t see it firsthand.”

“True. But Axel and I are heading to the sleuth to get a head count and make sure no one was left behind,” I tell him, ready to be done with this conversation. It’s one thing to get all the details from Rayne about her sexcapades, but it’s another thing entirely to hear about them from my little brother.

“Oh, good idea. I’ll also do a satellite scan of Parry Sound to see if there was anything left behind.”

“Thanks Eric, that would be great. Let us know if you find anything.”

“Will do,” he says and then hangs up. No ‘I love you big sis,’ not even a goodbye.

“Well, that was rude,” I say, staring at the phone.

“What was rude?” Axel asks.

“He hung up without saying goodbye,” I say, looking up at him.

He lets off a chuckle. “Most men aren’t very good at phone etiquette. What did he want?”

“Oh, you know, to hear all about how Artemis created the island and to gush about how amazing she is.”

He just nods. “Sounds about right.”

“What do you mean by that?” I say, narrowing my eyes at him.

He raises his hand in defense. “Just that your brother strikes me as the type of guy who would find all of this interesting.”

I think about it for a moment. “Are you calling my brother a geek?”

He gets a panicked look on his face which tells me that is exactly what he was doing. I let him sweat it for several seconds before smiling at him. “Don’t worry. He totally is a geek. He’s such a big geek that even though he is a witch and has magic, he still wishes he could go to a school like Hogwarts.” Axel relaxes at my words, bringing my hand up and placing a kiss on my knuckles.

We begin to walk through the dense forest. I’m not even sure whose territory we are in right now—everything is so different, yet the same... The trees are just how they would be at home: Black Spruces, Poplar Trees, Maple Trees, and Pine trees. Yet, my inner compass is completely off with no landmarks standing out to tell me where I am.

“Do you know where we’re going?” I ask Axel.

“Of course I do. The sleuth is this way,” he says, pointing in the direction we’re walking.

“How do you know that?”

He taps his finger on his nose. Of course. Shifter senses.

“So what happens now?” I ask, trying to eat up the silence of our walk.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we had planned for this island to take up a lot of time. Now that it’s done...”

He nods his head, understanding my question now. “Well, I suppose we’ll settle into our new home for the next few days until we’re ready to go after the hunters.”

“How will that work? Our new home... Will I take turns sleeping in each of your beds? Or will I have my own room where you take turns

coming in to sleep with me?" I begin to rifle off questions and he chuckles. "What? They're reasonable questions to ask."

He raises my hand to his lips once more, placing a soft kiss on it. "I'm not laughing at you angel. I promise. We will share a room, the three of us. We will have to do some renovations, maybe extend it so that our room can be far away from my mother's... That is, if you're okay with her living with us." He pales a bit with his question as if I would say no to that.

"Of course I don't have a problem with her living with us. She's amazing. But I do agree that we should make her bedroom as far away from ours as possible... Otherwise there will be some interesting topics being discussed over breakfast," I chuckle.

He relaxes and laughs along with me. "Yes, I suppose there would be."

"But really, you two are okay with the three of us sleeping in the same bed? I didn't get a chance to ask either of you last night if being together—the three of us—bothered either of you."

He stops us and turns me to face him, raising my chin with his hand. "Let me alleviate your stress about that right now. Zeke and I have had our entire lives to discuss what our life would be like when we found our mate. We always assumed we would share a bed with her unless she wanted something different. When it comes to sharing you, there is no jealousy. All we see when you're with the other is another person making you laugh, or bringing you pleasure. We also know that there will be times where you will want to be alone with each of us, and that's okay too.

"I know that this is new to you, and you'll need to figure out how to navigate the relationship with two mates... But you don't need to worry about Zeke and I. We've been preparing for you our entire lives and share very well," he says with a wink, sending sparks to my core.

"Really?" I ask and he nods, bringing his lips down to meet mine.

"Really. Now let's get home so Zeke can tell you the same thing," he says, and we begin walking again.

As we finally reach an opening in the trees, I glance around. Every single building looks exactly how it was back home, right down to the small bushes planted outside the pack house.

"Do you think there's a large crater or something back in Parry Sound where these houses used to be?" I ask.

Axel stops for a second, his brows pinching together in concentration. "I don't know... But that's a good question. If there is, we need to go back and fix it."

I nod, and we continue up the steps into the pack house. My new home.

"Something smells amazing," I call out as we walk straight back into the kitchen.

"I hope you like biscuits," Alexa says, bringing me a tray of warm buttered biscuits.

I snatch one and quickly throw it in my mouth, moaning loudly as it melts in my mouth. "Oh-my-gods," I say, covering my mouth with my hand to hide the food inside.

"Good?" Zeke asks as he walks over and places a kiss on the side of my head. I just nod and grab another one off the plate, making everyone chuckle.

"So?" Alexa says, looking at Axel.

"What?" he questions.

She rolls her eyes at him. "What do we do now?"

"Now, we eat these biscuits," he says, grabbing one for himself.

She slaps him on the shoulder. "You know what I mean."

He swallows down his biscuit and nods. "Opal and I were just talking about that. I think for now we settle into our new normal and prepare as much as we can for the upcoming raids on the hunters' laboratories."

"And the tiger shifter?" Alexa asks.

Axel's eyes shoot to her, then to Zeke in panic. "I had to tell her. She told me she envisions dad's face when she's making the dough," Zeke says, raising his hands.

"Really?" Axel asks, turning to face his mom.

She nods sullenly. "I blamed him for leaving us. I believed that it was fake intel, same as you."

Axel gets up from his spot, walking over to his mom and wrapping his arms around her. "It's okay. We didn't know," he reassures her.

She pushes back out of his arms. "But because of that, she was out there alone for years. How can we fix that?"

Axel looks at Zeke and then to me. All three of them feel responsible for Meredith being out there alone, even though it was not their

fault.

“You’ll be there for her if she needs it. You apologize if you feel you have to, and you move forward. It is not your fault. Neither of you are to blame. You went there to search for your father, right?” I ask, looking at Zeke and Axel, who both nod. “And did you find Meredith? No. You didn’t. She was hiding. Chances are even if you knew she was there, you wouldn’t have found her. Right now, she’s good. She’s with Samara doing her feline bonding thing. I’ve talked to Samara already and she knows to bring her here to talk with you when she’s ready.”

They each nod as the phone rings.

“Hello?”

“Hey Opal, it’s Alaric. Is Axel there?”

“One sec,” I say, handing the phone over to Axel and he walks out of the room.

“Are you two okay now?” I ask Alexa and Zeke.

“Yes. What you said makes a lot of sense, although I still feel responsible for that girl being out there for so long. Hopefully we can find her brother,” she says just as Axel comes back in.

“We already did. That was Alaric. Turns out Meredith’s brother was in the group that they rescued, along with her mother.”

“And her father?” I ask. Axel shakes his head. “Well at least most of the family is together and can begin to heal together.” Everyone nods.

“I’ll be right back. I’m just going to go check in with the sleuth to see if we’re missing anyone,” Axel says, turning and walking out with a little more pep in his step than earlier. I guess he needed that, for Meredith to have something good come out of this.

Zeke and I begin to clean up the kitchen while Axel has gone to check in with the sleuth, and Alexa excuses herself to move her room to the basement, saying she needs more privacy now that we are all going to be living here. I snort out a laugh—more like she doesn’t want to hear her sons having sexy time with their mate, but who am I to complain?

While she’s gone, I question Zeke about the sharing thing that Axel and I talked about on the way here, and he assures me everything Axel told me is true. That neither of them feel any jealousy toward one another. In fact, he says if anything he finds it a turn on when he sees me with his twin. It seems even thinking about it turns him on because next thing I know, I’m propped up on the counter and Zeke is kissing the ever-living fuck out of

me. His tongue snakes into my mouth, demanding attention, as his hands grip my hips and pull me closer to him so I can feel just how much it turns him on.

A low growl snaps me out of my lust and we turn toward Axel in the doorway. Now that I've talked with Zeke, I know what I'm seeing isn't anger, it's desire, and I beckon him closer.

"The sleuth?" I ask quickly, needing to get it out of the way.

"Accounted for," he grinds out.

"Goo—" I don't even get to finish the word as his mouth descends on mine.

I think I'm going to like getting used to my new normal if this is what it's going to be.

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Epilogue

Brianne

The door to my room opens and I'm greeted by Richard, my puppet master. The man who pulls all my strings. The reason I'm in a room with a bed and my daily torture has stopped. Even now, the thought of all the things he's made me do over the years makes me sick to my stomach. The only reason I'm not a crumpled mess on the floor thinking about how many of my own kind I've slaughtered in his name, is that it was them or me... I remember the faces of each one I've cut down for him, the way their eyes widen when they realize I'm about to strike them down, the look of betrayal that settles in their eyes as I go in for the kill...

A shudder runs through me at the thought, and I turn to look at him. "I have a new mission for you Brianne," I give a slight nod, showing him I'm listening. I know better now than to say it out loud. He believes I should be seen and not heard, like I'm the weaker species, and I don't mean a vampire... I mean a woman.

"It seems one of the hunters from the Orillia faction has gone rogue and the facility there has been sending out some concerning reports. We told them that we would be there in four days to check in on the situation but we're sending you in now." He gets an evil glint in his eyes as he tells me. "You are to track down the rogue hunter and report back on the

situation at the facility..." Excitement blooms in my chest at the knowledge that I'll be so close to home. Maybe I can see my family, maybe they'll be able to help me finally escape. I try to hide the excitement I'm feeling, but I must not have hidden it well enough and I stiffen as a metal prod presses into the side of my neck.

"Now now," Richard says. "No getting any ideas. Remember I can end you with the touch of a button." My shoulders slump in defeat, just like every other time he reminds me of the collar I'm wearing around my neck like a dog. I'm not even sure what's in it, all I know is that they injected me with different substances over and over, day after day, for the first few years I was here, until they found something that sets my blood on fire and makes me feel like I'm burning from the inside.

"Who is the hunter?" I ask.

Richard chuckles, the evil glint blooming in his eyes once more. "Oh you're going to love this. Her name is Rayne. Apparently, she's been consorting with someone you used to know..." My brows furrow in confusion as to who it could be. "I believe you call her Dru." At his mention of Drusilla, I suck in a breath.

"That can't be. She was taken when I was." Surely he's wrong, Dru would've found me if she escaped...

He shakes his head at me. "It seems the incompetence of the Orillia faction runs deep, and she was able to escape years ago. She ran back to her coven to hide and cower like the vermin she is."

The knowledge that Drusilla has been free for years and hasn't found me yet sends a pang of hurt through my chest. But I tamp it down. At least one of us is safe.

"Now what is your mission?" Richard asks.

I look at him in the eyes as I recite my mission. "Go to Orillia and hunt down the rogue hunter and report back to you on the situation at the facility."

"Good Dog," he says as he leads me out the door, ready to send me on my mission.

At least this is just a recon mission... Although, if that hunter was to get the drop on me and put me out of my misery, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.

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Author's Note

Thank you for reading the seventh book in the Westwood Pack series. I know you're used to having the story all wrapped up in each book, but there's just too much that's going to happen next for it not to have it's own book.

I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it and please don't forget to leave a review.

Each review left helps new authors like me get our books out there so thank you to all who have left reviews thus far.

Do you remember Brianne from book 5? Drusilla's best friend who was taken at the same time as her? Well... she's been busy and not all of it is good... find out in Book 8.

Each book in the Westwood Pack series is going to be a stand-alone book, but I recommend reading in order so you can get to know the characters in each book.

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