

Claire

I wait until Heath and Selah leave, before turning to Tereshan.

"What do you mean, 'invest in a brothel'?" I ask.

He looks up from his desk. "Claire, if those women are there against their will, we have to get them out. Even if some of them are willing, there are other brothels where they could work. My guess is every one of those women will have some story of hardship that Franco exploited to get them to work for him. If we buy the brothel, we shut it down, bring them here to our pack. Then, eventually, we make it into something else. A nightclub maybe, or someplace where the packs can go to blow off steam or relax. I don't know, I just know I have to make amends with those women."

His frustrated energy is back. I'm missing some important part of this conversation. I walk to him and when he doesn't stop to look at me, I take his hand and forcibly turn him until he does.

"Talk to me," I say gently.

He falls into his chair, scrubbing his hands over his

face. "It's not who I am anymore, Claire. I don't want you to think less of me because of who I used to be."

I walk forward until my body is pressing against his knees. "I know exactly who you used to be, Tereshan. That man died on the battlefield not once, but twice. This man in front of me is someone else entirely."

He looks up at me, a plea for understanding.

"I hurt them, Claire. I'm pretty sure one of them was Selah's sister. I hurt them and I thought that because I paid for them that it didn't matter."

I can see the pain in his eyes, the regret for the man he used to be. I crawl into his lap, straddling him, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"You're not that man anymore. You're not that cruel Alpha that doesn't care about his pack or about others. You're a better person than you used to be. If I didn't believe that I wouldn't be here," I tell him, stroking his hair.

His hands come to my hips, his eyes searching mine. "I owe it all to you, you know. You and Magnor, apparently, since he is the one that made a deal with the Moon Goddess."

That makes me sit back. I remember Magnor telling Damara that he knew what she did.

'What did you do, Damara?'

'The Moon Goddess gave me the same choice that she gave Magnor. A chance for you and Tereshan to work together and make things right in this timeline.'

I look at Tereshan. "Damara made the same deal."

Magnor pushes forward. "Yes, you did, my mate," he says to Damara.

"For you, and for them," Damara says, pushing forward.

Magnor strokes his hand down my face. "We will take you to shift soon, my love. I want to run with you through the forest when you're in your true form."

"I would love that," she says.

Tereshan and I give them a moment then I pull Damara back and look at Magnor. I've always loved this wolf with every part of my being.

"Thank you, Magnor, for always staying true to us.

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You are a good mate, you always have been," I say to him.

"I love you and Damara with all of my heart, Claire," he says before I see Tereshan pull him back.

He leans his forehead against mine. "I do too. I keep saying I have so much to make up for in this life, so many ways that I need to make amends. But rejecting you? That's the one thing that I'm not sure I can ever make up for."

"But don't you see? You already are, Tereshan. You didn't have to change. You didn't have to come back in this life and be a better man. I didn't expect you to, that's why I ran. You have made the choice to be better, Tereshan. Not Magnor. Not me. You. Give yourself some credit."

He rubs his nose against mine, his eyes closed. "If I ever do anything, ever again that disappoints you, tell me. I never want to let you down again. Not ever."

I gently scrape my nails over his scalp, through his hair. "You won't. I know you won't."

I feel his body relax. Without opening his eyes, he leans his face forward, and kisses me. His warm lips soft on mine. At first, it's just a peck, but then he

begins to move his lips against mine, his arms wrapping around me, pulling me to him.

I follow his lead, only ever having been kissed the one other time by him. This time it feels different. Before it was needy, desperate. Now it feels loving, like a caress.

I lean against him, opening my mouth for him when his tongue slides across my lips. His tongue, much more gentle this time, explores my mouth, teasing my tongue. I get lost in his scent, his taste, this feeling that he's bringing out in me. My body feels warm, flushed. I press myself against him, wanting more.

Before I'm ready, he pulls back, stroking his hand down my hair. "We should stop, Claire."

"What if I don't want to?" I ask, feeling bold.

He moves his hands to my hips and holds them as he presses up against me. His very large, very long length is hard and makes its presence known.

"I want you, you know that. But I want to make sure you are ready and when the time comes, it won't be here in my office, in a chair. You deserve better than that, Claire."

He lifts a hand to stroke my hair behind my ear. "But when you're ready, we'll need to talk. I want to make sure that you understand all the ramifications of us mating, of me marking you."

"What do you mean?" I ask, curious.

He watches his hand as he continues to stroke my hair before meeting my gaze again. "Do you know what it means to go into heat, Claire?"

I shake my head slowly. Somewhere in the back of my mind, it sounds familiar, but I don't really understand what it means, other than mated couples go away when the female goes into heat.

"When I mark you, it will only be a week at most before you go into heat. When that happens, we'll have to go to one of the small houses we have set aside for that purpose. We can't stay in the packhouse because you'd cause a rut with the pack, especially if you finally accepted my mark and became the official Luna. If another male came close to you, I'd kill them. Your body will need to mate. You won't care about anything else but mating. You won't even care if it's me. Your body will be burning, and you'll need me to relieve that heat, that ache for you. If we don't prepare you ahead of time, meaning we don't have sex several times before you go into

heat, your need for sex will push you beyond what you would normally be okay with. You won't care if you hurt yourself, you won't care if you tear, you'll just need to ease the ache in your body."

I know my heart rate has increased as he's talked. This sounds awful, terrifying.

"Hey, look at me."

When I do, he cups my face in his hands. "I'm telling you this now so we can prepare. It's more than just having me mark you. And with everything going on, we need to be careful, prepare in case the pack is attacked while you're in heat. Because Claire, I won't care about anything but you during that time either. It will just be the two of us. We'll barely eat, we'll barely sleep. The only way I'd fight is if someone tried to get to you. And Claire, they will try to get to you. Your scent will draw them, making it a very dangerous time for both of us."

He holds my gaze. "So, we need to be careful, to think it through once you're ready. And then, we need to make sure that you don't get pregnant. I've already ordered more condoms in case you decide to let me mark you. But I don't want a child until we know that we can keep him or her safe and that we won't leave our child parentless and alone in this

world. We both know what that feels like, and it's not a risk I'm willing to take with our child."

He grits his teeth. "I hope you agree, because I don't want to bring a child into this world until we know for sure that we're going to make it through this year."

Tereshan has said a lot. A lot that I need to think about, and things we need to figure out and be aware of. But there is one thing that he said that is standing out in my mind.

"You want to have a pup with me?" I ask.

"No, Claire. I want to have a pack of pups with you."