

Chapter 0292

The weather is still turning fast, but no snow has fallen, just gusty cold wind and frost in the mornings that is taking longer and longer to melt each day.

"Three days! I can't wait." Mina is jumping up and down. She has taken on some of the mannerisms of these college girls, and while it's endearing when she does it, the rest of them just kind of annoy me. I don't understand getting excited about a nail polish color or the sale at a certain store, but I get the excitement of going home for a few days.

Home. That is such a weird thing to think about, because the compound is home to me. The castle is home to me. If I really think about it the Blue Crescent packhouse is home sort of. I don't know if it will feel the same if or when I go back though. I have changed a lot being with the warriors and it hasn't even been a year yet.

I miss Lillian, Wyatt and Nathaniel. They took me in without question and honestly very little information. Everyone else seems to be an open book, but they all understand that I have my reasons for keeping details to myself. They all know the condensed story of how I got the scars on my back, even Mina has asked since they always seem to be on display whenever Luna Anne and Sierra dress me. And they know I was attacked and drugged before coming here. These friends don't see me as weak though, they see me as

a survivor and I have started to believe them. It makes me feel lighter, better, bigger somehow in my tiny five foot tall self.

Just as I finish the thought, the front door to our little rental bursts open with Nickolas covered in snow.

"What the hell?!" Mina shouts.

"Some kind of Nor'easter, I've been sensing snow for days, but I didn't expect anything like this." Nickolas says, shaking out his hair and untying his boots. "The rest of the team is back at camp getting things settled there, ready if the storm moves that far south. I got supplies, but we need to be ready to be stuck for a bit."

"WHAT! NO! We were supposed to go and meet with the Elders this weekend so we could get our brands. Why does it feel like something is always stalling this process?"

"Maybe because you both are too young to be doing this. Maybe because you are now eighteen and your mate is close so the universe is trying to keep you from blocking the pull. Maybe it's the Goddess telling all these f*ckers that think you both are disposable little girls, that you are too important to be throwing out as bait for grown ass wolves to take advantage of if things go wrong." He takes a deep breath and heads through the small sitting room to our open concept kitchen and starts digging in the fridge. 3

He still hasn't given up the idea that we aren't supposed to

be here. I have tried talking to him about it and he just says it's an instinct. He seems to be overly protective of the two of us specifically though, also 'an instinct.' He doesn't act this way with Alyssa and she's only a couple years older than Mina and she hasn't found or searched for her mate either and she was given her brand with the rest of her warrior class without all the fuss. So I don't understand why he's hung up on the two of us.

"I have coolers all set for the stuff in the fridge to go outside if we lose power. There is plenty of dry firewood in the shed outback and more in the yard. The biggest thing is keeping the pipes in the house from freezing and exploding."

He moves to walk back to his room, which is where he spends most of his time. I love that here in the house he doesn't hover at all. He lets us be and do what we want. The minute we leave the house is a whole other story, but he has his reasons I guess.



"But seriously, aside from being able to see other people and train properly and use the hot tub, what about our brands? We need them and you know it. What is the point of all of this if we can't even go out and know that you guys can track us if sh*t hits the fan? Because that's the endgame right? For sh*t to hit the fan and for one or both of us to be kidnapped. No one else has thought of a solution to the lack of being able to track by scent and apparently that is the only type of tracking we know or teach, also something we should be working on." Mina is on fire and

I'm not about to stop her, cause I agree. The dependance on our abilities has made us blind to the fact that they could be taken away.

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This was something I was working with our pups back home since they have only slightly better than human senses before they get their wolf. I figured it was something most packs do, apparently not.

"It's a field skill that we teach later, you two just started and haven't gotten that far in your very messed up and back-asswards training schedule."

"But, it's not us tracking though is it?" I finally speak up. He will not use this as an excuse to delay longer. Mina is right, I want my brand and I want to actually be able to help with this mission. "We aren't allowed more than ten feet from you. We are just the distraction, the bait. So what is stopping those who have been trained to track without scent?" Sarcasm is dripping off of me now. It's really not his fault, he's trying to protect us, but I'm done with the delays and the idea of being stuck here, inside for days while also being delayed put me in an instant bad mood. 1

"Jorge is sending someone here. He agrees with the two of you, and it's time to get this done. We have to let the storm hit and settle, but as soon as she can travel she will meet us here to give you your temporary brand. At least this way we don't have to do the two day long ceremony." He rubs his temples.

"Really! Their ceremony takes two days?" Mina scoffs.

"Yeah, but all of that is just ritual stuff. Basically each Elder welcomes you into the fold. There are meals and speeches and what they call trials, but you sit in a quiet room for 10 hours reflecting on your time in training, coming to terms with giving up access to your mate while you wear the brand, meditating on being a devoted servant to the king, crap like that. Well, it's not crap really, those are things to think through, but in my opinion it should be considered long before you decide to go through with the ceremony." He rolls his eyes. "Then each Elder blesses each warrior individually, which takes forever, then a witch and the Alpha King apply the brand, which hurts, a lot by the way, but the magic has to be powerful for the mark to work the way it does. It lets you communicate over any distance, including the ocean. A spell has been worked in to allow you to shift without tearing through your clothes, we can also minimize our scent to appear more closely to human. And the rest of the warriors can sense where you are, allowing us to track you if something happens. We can Even track you if you're unconscious, which has saved many lives in the past."

Both Mina's and my jaws drop open. "So there is a way to magically get rid of your scent?" Mina screeches. "What are we doing looking for that spell then? Isn't that a waste of time?"

"No, we can minimize it, not get rid of it. All living things are


designed to have a scent. It is for knowing the difference between friends and foes, predator versus prey, poison or something safe. What this group is doing is removing the scent all together. But, not only from themselves, but their victims too. It's like a blanket and it's dangerous because we don't know how far that blanket covers."

"So, this storm just started. How long is it supposed to last? How much longer do we have to wait for our brands?"

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