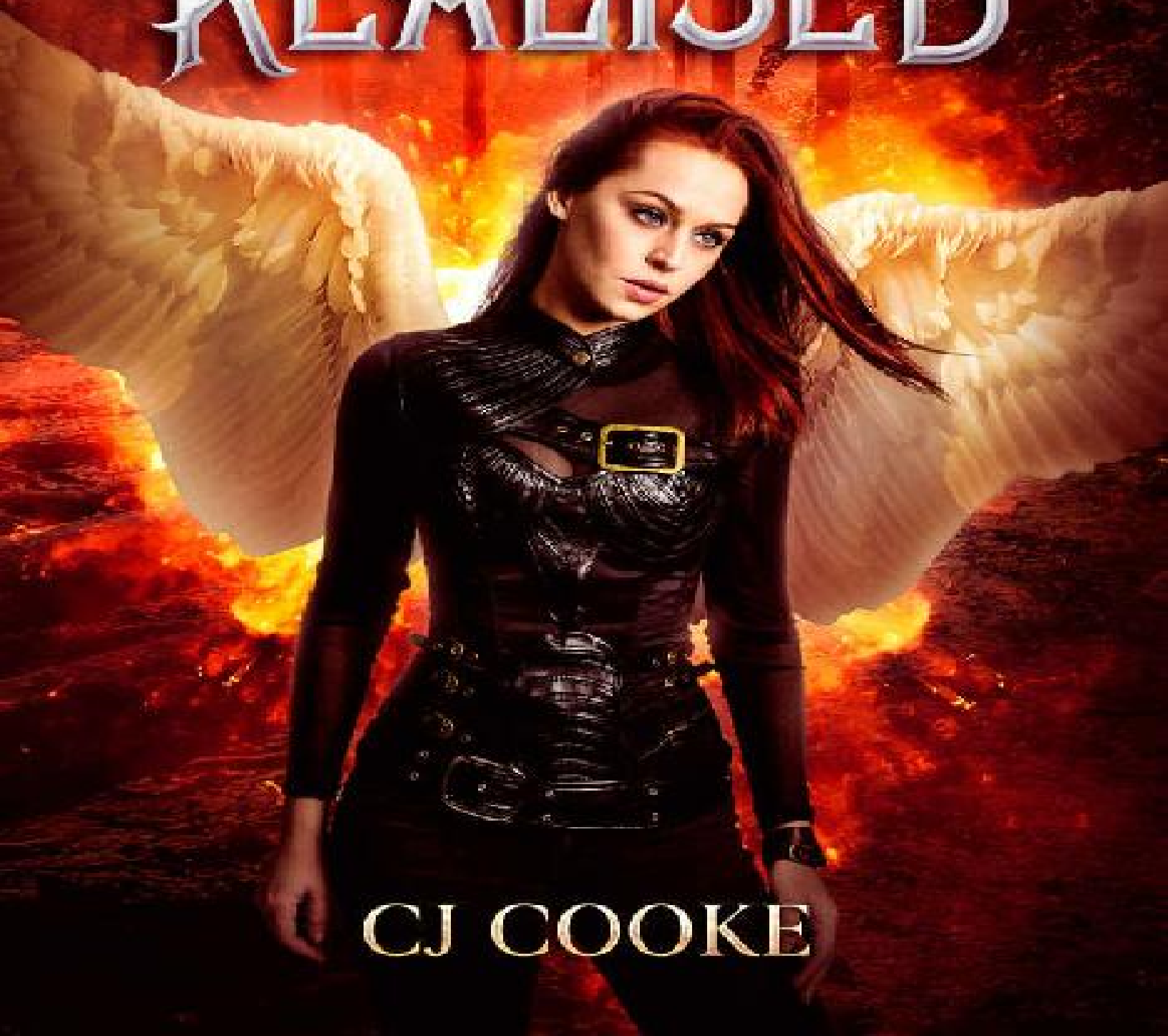


# DESTINY

DESTINY SERIES: BOOK THREE

# REALISED



CJ COOKE

# **Destiny Realised**

By

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## Chapter One

### Caleb

It was the screaming that woke me. As I sat bolt upright in my bed, I assumed that it was the same nightmare which had been terrorising me for the last few nights. But when the screaming continued, I knew. I knew that it was happening again.

At first, I was frozen where I was. Terror flooded my body and chilled sweats broke out on my skin. I can't do this again! I don't think I'll survive this time. Even worse, Aria wasn't here to save us. But with the thought of Aria, came the thought of her Elites. I knew that they would be fighting and I wasn't about to let Aria down by letting them fight alone.

I jumped from my bed and grabbed the sword which Aria had gifted me from under the bed. Before I had even stood back up, Dom was racing into my room.

“The demons, the demons are attacking the pack.” He panted.

He looked about as terrified as I was. You couldn't live through a massacre like we had without it leaving a stain on you in some way.

I gave Dom a nod. “We stay together, no matter what. We survived last time because we didn't let the demons draw us into a fight alone.” I told him.

He just nodded. What else was there to say? We were running towards death and not many people got to cheat it twice.

As we raced out of the cottage, Madame Nines suddenly shouted after us. “Frannie is gone, she isn’t in her bed.”

“Fuck!” Dom shouted, looking around him frantically. “Surely she wouldn’t have gone up to the house?”

Madame Nines looked like she was about to tear up there herself. Last time she had allowed the witches to channel her magic to help them close the portals. Whilst it would be beneficial to have her there again, we didn’t know what we were running into and she didn’t have any combat skills. It was going to be hard enough to stay alive; to stay alive and protect her as well would be impossible.

“Stay here.” I told her, making the decision myself. “We’ll look for her up at the house. Ward the cottage and stay inside.”

I didn’t wait to see if she heard me, or even if she was going to agree with me. For now, the members of the pack were still screaming. If they were screaming then at least they were alive. We at least had a chance to save some of them, maybe.

Dom and I ran through the trees as quickly as we could. We didn’t bother trying to mask our approach. There wasn’t the time and it wouldn’t make any difference anyway. When we broke through the treeline at the clearing where the pack house lay, it was carnage. The area was flooded with demons, there had to be at least forty. The Elites seemed to have formed a line in front of the steps leading up to the house. They were trying to hold the demons back from getting through to the house. Trent and his pack were there with them. They seemed to be holding the line for now, but they were

vastly outnumbered, there was no way that it could last for long. The screaming inside the house seemed to have died down. I just hoped that meant that there were no more demons inside, because the alternative was more than I could take right now. The ground in front of the house was already littered with the bodies of pack members who hadn't made it and there was more than my eyes and mind could process right now.

“We fight our way through to the Elites and then help hold the line.” Dom shouted across to me. There were so many demons between us and them. I didn't think that it was going to be possible, but I tightened my grip on sword and gave him a firm nod anyway. We were going to do this. We didn't have any other choice.

“Stay with me, don't get separated. Concentrate on fighting through, don't try to go for a kill shot unless you get an easy strike. We're just going to try and punch through.” I told him. “Whatever you do, just keep moving and move fast.” It wasn't the best strategy. If we even made it half way to the Elites we were going to end up surrounded. The only way that I could see us getting to them though was to cut our way through as fast as we could. Maybe if we kept moving, we could just force our way through.

Just as we started to make our advance, a miracle came through in the form of a bat shit crazy, knife wielding, kitsune. Frannie was here and whether the crazy was lending to her fearlessness, or she was having a moment of clarity, she started cutting down every demon which got in her path. She was like a tornado, reaping destruction to everything that got in her path. She held a massive knife in each hand and she clearly knew how to use them. Dom and I pulled in close to her and we moved as one, pushing through to the line which the Elites had formed.

The demons only seemed to have one goal, enter the house. They didn't pay that much attention to us fighting our way through. It was odd. Some of them didn't even turn around. They were more organised than they had

been at the academy. The academy massacre had been like a free for all. They swarmed the area and tore into anything in their path. Something was different about the demons this time. They almost held their own line. They surged at the Elites together and then retreated as one. They were like waves, battering against the shore. Trying to push their way through those that stood in their path.

If I was completely honest, Dom and I had barely raised our swords as we moved through the horde. Frannie was at the spearhead of our little group and she hacked away with such efficiency that she was landing kill blows on at least half of the demons which she was moving out of our path.

In no time at all, we fell through the line of the Elites and I looked around us to try and get a read on the situation. I could pick up some whimpers from deep inside the pack house. The whole of the pack had been pulled into the house when we had brought the academy survivors here. It was supposed to be so that the pack could be kept safe. Now it just seemed like they were fish in a barrel. Conveniently placed to save the demons time.

“Where is Marcus and Wyatt? Why aren’t the pack guard here?” Dom shouted to no one in particular.

Trent pulled out of the line and his pack filled his gap. “The pack guard are supposed to be holding the rear entrance. Wyatt went with them. I haven’t seen Marcus.” He told us.

“When did the attack start?” Dom shouted over the noise of the fighting behind us.

“Not long ago. I was out here with my pack training when the first demons broke through. We managed to hold them back and raise the alarm before their full force arrived.” Trent shouted at Dom.

“They didn’t all get here at the same time?” Dom said, tilting his head in confusion. Now did not really seem like the time to be having this conversation.

“No, only four came at first. When we took two of them down and were holding back the other two, the rest of them arrived.” Trent said. He looked exhausted, but there was a frenzy burning in his eyes that would hopefully get us all through this.

“Something is different about them.” I shouted at Dom. “They’re more organised. It’s like they are trying to get into the house for something.”

Dom took a moment to watch the demons. They surged forward again and Trent quickly took his place back in the line. The Elites and Trent’s pack were able to cut a few down before the rest of the horde fell back again.

“Can you hold this line?” Dom shouted at Trent, putting his hand on his shoulder. Trent just gave him a grim nod of his head. “We’re going to check and see what is happening at the rear entrance.” Dom told him, then he turned and ran up the front steps of the pack house.

I wanted to stay with the Elites, I wanted to help them hold the line. But I couldn’t just let Dom go off on his own. We needed to stay together in case there were any demons left inside. We had enough experience at this now that we knew it was nearly impossible to survive a fight with them if you were alone. We had learnt that the hard way when we fought our way out of the academy.

Taking a deep breath to try and calm myself, I took off up the steps after Dom. The house was eerily quiet. I was going to take that as a good sign. I couldn’t take the alternative for now. Dom was already out of sight, but I

took the quickest route that I knew to the back entrance and quickly caught up with him. When we stepped back outside of the house, we were presented with a similar sight as we had at the front. Except, the pack guard was not faring as well as the Elites. The group of demons at the back of the house was slightly smaller than had collected at the front. Several of the pack guard were already lying dead on the ground. Only eight remained, together with Wyatt. They each held a sword but they were clearly not familiar with them. The ones who had already died seemed to have been fighting in shifted form. From experience I doubted they would have lasted long. The demons had pulled back into a hissing, raging crowd and the pack guard stood braced waiting for them to advance again. Wyatt had pulled one of the fallen guard back to the wall of the house. As we stepped through the door his head drooped down and I knew without asking that we had lost another wolf.

Dom walked over to Wyatt and squatted down beside him, placing a hand on his shoulder. "There is no time for grief now." He whispered to him.

Wyatt just nodded resolutely and stood up. His hand gripped his sword tighter and he went to step back into the line. Dom took hold of his shoulder halting him.

"Is this the same as at the front, are they trying to break through to access the house?" Dom asked, just as the wave of demons surged again.

I stepped to the line with the other guards, swinging and slashing. I think I managed to land some heavy blows before the horde fell back again. We hadn't taken any of them out, but a few of them seemed to fall to the back of the group and I was hoping that meant they were at least injured. One of the pack guards staggered on his feet holding his side.

"Are you injured?" I called over to him.



He lifted his hand to check. “It’s not too deep, I can hold on a bit longer.”  
He gritted out.

“Where is Marcus?” I said, turning back to Wyatt. I couldn’t believe that he wasn’t here holding the line with the guard.

Wyatt looked about guiltily. “He’s in the basement, locked in a safe room.”  
He sighed.

I didn’t even have words. The worst thing was that I didn’t even think I was surprised. This was typical Marcus behaviour. “And the rest of the pack? Where are they?”

“The women and children were sent up to the top floor of the house. I sent three guards with them. The men ... he ordered the rest of the men ...” He trailed off, looking around him.

My heart sank as I realised what Wyatt was trying to say. I took in the bodies around us and remembered those that had littered the front of the house as well. The men had been sent out to fight. The pack was done. Even if we survived this attack, we had lost too many.

Wyatt and Dom were looking around trying to decide what to do. “We can’t hold this line indefinitely; we need a plan.” I shouted over to Dom.

He nodded at me and I saw his eyes squint as he considered an idea that I felt I was going to hate. “Maybe we should let one of them through.” He said cautiously.

Wyatt rounded on him, shouting. “Are you crazy?”

“Just hear me out.” Dom said, putting a hand on his shoulder to try and calm him down. Wyatt just shrugged it off and glared down at him. “They are trying to get through to the house for something. If we can find out what that is, maybe we can destroy it, or move it, or something! We can’t just stand here and wait for them to completely break through.” Dom said gesturing at the group of demons which was clearing gearing up ready to advance again.

“They’re trying to get into the house to kill everyone inside.” Wyatt shouted.

“This is different.” Dom explained, cautiously watching the demons in front of us. “At the academy they came with the intention to kill. And they did. Swiftly and efficiently. It was like a frenzied feeding. They didn’t act like this, there was no reason to what they were doing. It was almost instinctual.”

Wyatt turned to look at the demon horde. They hadn’t surged forward again. It was almost like they were waiting to see what we were going to do.

Dom pulled him to one side and lowered his voice. “We will stay with it. When it becomes obvious where it is heading, we will take it down. This could help us stop the siege now, where it is.” He said lowly, keeping an eye on the demons in front of us. There had to be at least twenty of them.

Wyatt was wavering in his decision. One of the demons stepped forward. It was too freaky to not watch. It cautiously took a few lumbering steps closer. They had never shown any signs of understanding us before. It was almost like they were evolving. The demon cocked its head at us and took another step closer to the line, almost in question.

Wyatt took a deep breath. I didn't envy him this decision. If this went wrong, I knew that he would never forgive himself. Shit, I didn't think I would ever forgive myself anyway. He looked Dom in the eye and nodded once. The demon took another step forward almost in response. The guard braced, confused about what was happening.

"Let it through." Wyatt said.

The pack guard looked between themselves, doubting the sense of letting the demon in. If I was honest, I was doubting it too. But Dom was right. We couldn't keep this up. We may as well let one through now on our terms and see if we could at least get some of the pack coming out of this alive. They shifted uneasily on their feet.

"As soon as it's through, close the line and hold it as long as you can." I told them, stepping to the side. I gripped my sword tighter and braced myself to run. If it was coming through, I was going to be two steps behind it and it was going down as soon as we knew what it wanted.

Dom adopted a similar position next to the door to the house.

"On three," Wyatt shouted. The demon shifted back and forth on its feet. This was going to be a race and it clearly thought that it could get the better of us. Except, we had far more to lose and there was no way that we could let it win.

"One." The pack guard shifted uneasily, but seemed resigned to what was about to happen.

"Two." The demon horde took a step back, almost like they were trying to make it easier for us.

“Three!” Wyatt shouted. The line of the pack guard split and a gap was made in the middle. The lone demon at the front shot off at a run, clearing the gap and heading for the door. The pack guard closed the gap in the line, but the horde was already moving forwards to try and punch through as well.

“We can hold them.” One of the guard shouted.

I turned and took off after the demon. I was sticking close to it. Dom was level with me and I could hear Wyatt behind us, keeping pace. It was almost like it knew exactly where it was going. It ran at a fast pace down the corridor and straight up the stairs. For a minute my heart dropped. I thought that it was heading for the children. But, as we reached the landing for the first floor it suddenly veered off the stairs and ran down the corridor. The demon rolled its shoulder as it approached a set of double doors. Lowering one shoulder in front of it and pulling its head down, it started to charge. It clearly intended to smash through the door. The doors that lead to Kyle’s suite.

“Take it down, now.” Wyatt shouted.

I heard Dom whisper an incantation beside me. It wasn’t like him to resort to magic during a fight. He would in exceptional circumstances, but it drained him too quickly. A shot of magic burst out of him and slammed into the demon, before it reached the door. I saw ice quickly forming along the skin of its back, where the magic had hit. It was enough to slow it down as the demon stumbled with the impact. I was only two steps behind it and it was all the opening that I needed. I launched myself at its back and it crumbled to the ground below me. The magic must be seriously sapping its strength. We rolled twice and I pushed the demon off me, before we could come to a stop. Regardless of how much strength it had lost, I did not want to end up beneath it and an easy target. I rolled to my feet as the demon

skidded along the floor on its back, before it slammed into the wall. It tried to stand but as it was pulling itself up on its hands, Wyatt was already there, sword in hand. He shoved the blade through the demon's chest and it screeched out its frustration at us. The drooling mass of fangs in its mouth became stained with its blood, as it coughed and growled at us. Wyatt wrenched his sword free and brought it down a final time, hacking into the demon's neck. It wasn't quite enough to separate its head from its body, but it still sagged dead beneath him.

We all froze as we looked down at the dead demon. There was a part of me that always expected them to jump back up and gut me. But it was definitely down. Dom turned to look at the doors to Kyle's suite and cocked his head to the side in consideration.

"Time to see what was so important." He mumbled and reached for the door.

"Wait!" I said, grabbing his shoulder and pulling him back. "I'll open the door, you stay behind me. We might need your magic." I told him, striding forward and taking hold of the door handles.

Wyatt came up on my right and shoved me a step to the side. We took a handle each. At least this way we could potentially seek some kind of cover, without me being a sitting duck just standing in the middle. He held up three fingers and counted us down. When he dropped the last finger, we both shouldered the doors open and all three of us burst inside. Then we stopped dead in our tracks as we took in the sight in front of us. I felt my brain splutter in shock as I took in the vision.

The furniture in the sitting room had been shoved aside and in the middle of the room just sat two chairs facing away from each other. Della and Professor Pax were both slumped back in chairs, their arms were just hanging down towards the ground. Blood ran down, dripping from their

fingertips onto the ground. From how they slumped back in their seats, I could see that both of their throats were slit. Pax was definitely dead, but Della's head slowly turned to us and a serene smile slipped across her mouth. She struggled to breathe and her life was draining out of her, but she still managed one eerie laugh when she saw us. Between the two chairs a spell wheel had been drawn using the spilt blood that was collecting on the ground. A portal was starting to open in the middle and Octavia knelt on the ground whispering an incantation over it.

“Death magic.” Dom whispered.

We were all so shocked that none of us moved. I wasn't sure what to do. Octavia. It made no sense. Why would she do this?

“You can't stop us.” She told us. Her voice was flat and emotionless. She stopped chanting and looked up at us from where she knelt on the ground. “We are only doing what must be done.”

“The academy ...” Dom spluttered. “Please Octavia, tell me that wasn't you.”

“It was easy,” she shrugged. “You didn't even see the sacrifices in the carnage of the other bodies.” She gave us a soft smile and my stomach rolled. This wasn't the woman I had come to know, who I had worked beside for years.

“Why?” Wyatt breathed.

She looked over at him and cocked her head to the side. It was almost like she was listening to another conversation as her eyes became unfocused and she seemed to zone out for a minute.

“Octavia, why?” Dom shouted at her.

“The realm is out of balance. It must be restored.” She said with a shrug. “The Fae upset the balance after the last war. We have suffered. We have suffered so much. Balance must be restored. She told us, she promised. If we worshipped her, she would show us the way. We spent years on our knees, offering up our bodies and our souls as sacrifice. No one else joined us. No one knew of our suffering. But finally, finally after all of those years, she answered our prayers She showed us the way.” Her eyes were glazed as she preached at us. She had clearly lost her mind.

“At what cost?” Dom screamed. “So many Octavia. So many have died already. How many are you willing to sacrifice just so that your magic will be stronger?”

“She promised.” She said with a frown on her face. “Our goddess will provide. She showed us the way.”

Wyatt couldn't take any more and he sprang forward without saying a word. The anger on his face echoed in his scream of rage. Octavia didn't move, she didn't even look surprised. As he ran her through with his sword, she just looked down at her chest and the sword impaling her to the hilt.

“You'll never stop us.” She quietly, told us before her eyes slid closed and she slumped over.

Frannie scampered into the room, taking us all by surprise. She was dripping in demon blood with her two knives clutched in her hands. She gave a happy little giggle and skipped over to the portal, peering down inside. Suddenly, she swiped a knife forward and cut off one of Octavia's ears. She grabbed it off the floor and shoved it in her mouth. Chewing

carefully and raising an eyebrow in thought, she almost looked like she was trying to savour the flavour. My stomach rolled and Wyatt groaned out in disgust. Frannie spat the chewed ear and her blood tinged saliva into her hand. When she looked down at her hand, she just cackled in glee. Wyatt lost his breakfast over in the corner, while she dropped to her knees and started sketching runes into the spell wheel. Dom and I watched her carefully. She was chattering away to herself, discussing her rune work with herself, laughing and shaking her head. After a few minutes of altering the spell wheel the portal flickered and then shrank closed.

Dom was watching her in shock. Clearly whatever she had done was difficult. He leaned over in interest checking out her spell work. Magic wasn't something that I was familiar with and it all went a bit over my head. Wyatt slowly walked back over to us, clutching his stomach and groaning. When Frannie looked up and saw his face, she just laughed and offered him the chewed ear with a smile.

“Erm, no thanks. I'm good.” Wyatt mumbled, before taking a few worried steps away from her.

Wyatt pulled his sword free from Octavia and then walked over to the window which overlooked the back of the house. “The demons have gone.” He said. “Someone should check the front.” He didn't return to us and I got the impression that he didn't want to be around Frannie. She was harmless really. We had far worse things to worry about than her.

Dom nodded and walked out of the room. He came back a short while later and confirmed that the demons seemed to have left. The pack guard were apparently running the perimeter to check that they weren't lingering nearby.

We all just stood there looking between each other. I didn't know what we were supposed to do next. How were we supposed to come back from this?



“What is all of this?” I asked Dom, peering down at the wheel.

“Portal.” Frannie said sidling up to me and leaning her head onto my shoulder. I tried not to think about how close she was to my ear.

“So, all of this, was just to open another portal? But where to?” I asked confused.

“Aria.” Frannie frowned down at the spell wheel and scuffed one foot against the first line of runes. “Needed strong magic.”

Dom knelt down and started to consider the spell wheel in front of him. “All of this time. How could we have not seen this? Not seen that there was something wrong with her?”

“I was there too.” I told him. “She seemed completely fine, normal even.” I assured him. Dom was going to take this hard. He was going to start placing the blame on himself now, for not stopping this earlier.

“Aria must have them worried.” Wyatt said. He was still stood at the window staring out.

He was right. Perhaps there was hope. If they were willing to do all of this, just to try and stop Aria. That had to mean something. That had to mean that we should have hope.

## Chapter Two

### Aria

“Help them!” I roared, pointing down to my mates, on the ground in front of the legion of kneeling Valkyrie.

Kyle was pale and panting through the pain, but he had a sappy grin on his face. I wasn't sure if it was from the blood loss, or just because we had made it through the portal. As he was swaying about a bit, I decided that it was more likely from the blood loss.

One of the Valkyrie stood and approached me, she waved two others over to tend to Kyle's injuries.

“My name is Geta.” She told me bowing her head. “It is an honour to meet you Phoenix General. My guard will take your friend to the infirmary for treatment.”

“He is my mate.” I gritted out to her. My magic was still riding me hard. The flames on my swords had died down but my wings were still ablaze.

“Then he shall be treated with the honour that such a position deserves.” She said bowing her head to me again. She looked behind her cautiously before quietly asking me. “Are you feeling the blood lust, my General?”

“My magic feels out of control. It has been growing steadily, but since stepping through the portal ... I don't think that I can rein it back in.” I told her honestly. Now was not the time to be coy.

My breathing was increasing and I was starting to panic. I didn't know if I was going to be able to pull it back this time. I took a step back from Geta, my magic was screaming at me to fight and I didn't want to hurt her. When I looked behind her, I saw my mates being led away presumably to the infirmary. That just made my rage spiral higher. How dare they take my mates from me! I gritted my teeth and shook my head. This was crazy, they were only helping Kyle.

“I have seen this before, to a lesser degree. You need to fight to wear your magic down. To wear off the lust.” She said looking behind her and waving another Valkyrie over. “Arta, disburse everyone, but have your battalion stay behind. The General wishes to see a demonstration of their skills.”

The Valkyrie called Arta went back over to the crowd of gathered Valkyrie and sent most of them on their way. I could see that some of them were reluctant to leave. A large crowd remained though. I looked around distressed. My magic wanted blood, I couldn't pull it back into me. The fire that normally burned through me, blazed across my wings. At least it didn't hurt anymore. I gripped my swords tighter, so much so that I was almost losing the feeling in my fingers.

“General, do not worry. It is not uncommon for a Valkyrie to experience blood lust when they have a surge in their magic.” Geta explained.

“How do you normally deal with it?” I asked, trying to breathe through the rage.

“Fight.” Geta grinned at me. “Arta,” she shouted to the group behind me. “Bring forward your battalion.”

The group of Valkyrie who had remained moved across to us. My magic flared at the challenge. These were not idol minded fighters, these were trained warriors. They spent their entire lives preparing for battle. The magic rolled across my skin, welcoming these fighters to us. The flames on my wings surged brighter and I could see the other Valkyrie were mesmerised by the sight.

“General, we have one hundred Valkyrie in a battalion. Arta trains our finest warriors.” She indicated the group in front of her with a sweep of her hand. They all stood taller under her praise. My magic flared and half of them dropped down to one knee again, confusing me. “Your magic welcomes them.” Geta explained quietly to me. Geta seemed older than some of the other Valkyrie here. She had long flowing blonde hair which was left loose around her shoulders. She wore brown leather trousers and a cropped leather vest which looked similar in design to a sports bar. A sword was sheathed at her back but she had no other visible weapons. She was clearly in some position of power.

Geta turned to the warriors in front of us. “Twenty of you will face the Phoenix General to demonstrate your skills.”

The warriors still kneeling on the ground looked confused and a little alarmed at this thought. Hopefully because they were worried about me hurting them and not the other way around. My magic just surged again, rejoicing at the challenge.

Geta led me away from the group and to a nearby sandy area, which looked like a training ring. When we stood alone in the centre, she quietly told me. “Try not to injure them too badly. They will view this as a training exercise. Wear out your blood lust. If any of them get hurt, I will pull them out and

replace them with a fresh fighter. When you move out of the blood lust you should be able to extinguish the fire of your wings. I will call off the training exercise at that point.” She explained to me.

As Geta walked out of the ring and left me alone on the sand, it occurred to me that if she was in a position of power she could just be arranging this to take me out and protect her position. She did seem to genuinely want to help though. I could not go to the infirmary in this condition. My magic was raging. I would not risk my mates by going to them when I felt this out of control. I wanted the violence so much I almost felt like I could already smell the blood on the air.

Twenty Valkyrie stepping onto the sand and the rest just stood on one side settling in, getting ready to fight. They held a variety of swords and long daggers. One of them even held a spear at her side. They all had some variation of fighting leathers. I was so drunk on the magic raging through my system that I felt giddy at what I knew was going to come. I knew that I needed to hold back and make sure that I didn't severely injure any of them, but in the back of my mind, I already knew that once it started there would be no holding back until the blood lust had been burned out of my system.

I took a leery glance at Geta and she just nodded grimly at me. She clearly knew what she was talking about. It troubled me that she had so readily offered up these Valkyrie to satisfy my blood lust though. My magic started to pulse. My rage and need for blood were starting to clash with a developing protective feeling for these women who stood in front of me. In the end though, it was the rage that won out. It had been building for so long, it was so out of control, there would be no reining it back in now. A part of me didn't even want to try.

There was no signal to start, no warning. There was just a battle cry that screamed out of the first three Valkyrie who charged towards me. It seemed

that they had decided to only charge me a few at a time. They would soon learn that was a mistake.

I had no need to pull my swords from my back. I still held them tightly in my hands from when I had fought the demons earlier. All three of the Valkyrie advancing on me held a sword each. Only one of them had dual blades like I did. I couldn't decide if they were excited to show off their skills, or if they thought that I was going to go down easy.

We met in a clash of metal and the barring of teeth. They weren't holding back and I loved them for it. My magic rolled inside me. I felt my wings flare brighter. I had never used them in a fight before, but now that the flames licked my back, they were the perfect tool to keep the attacking Valkyrie away from my blind spot. I swept one wing at a Valkyrie trying to creep behind me. She screamed and fell back as I wing slapped her across one side of her body. I didn't take the time to see if she was alright, but I briefly caught one of her friends pulling her away to the side before the Valkyrie with the spear came to play. The spear was a weapon I had not defended against before. In the end it was easy. I caught one of the others as I entered a spin and sling shot her at the spear holding Valkyrie. She pulled her spear away to save running her comrade through and it was easy then to disarm her and knock her out of the fight with a vicious slice of my blade across her abdomen.

I was lost in the blood lust. I sliced and I hacked and I didn't hold back in any way. A small voice in the back of my mind was warning me not to hurt these people too badly. I couldn't hear it, or rather I ignored it, as I relished in the joy of watching their blood coat the ground. Fighting was like a dance that sang to my magic and filled my heart. I didn't even register the faces of the different fighters as I knocked them down. I was actually starting to enjoy myself. It was far better when they rushed me together rather than trying to take me one at a time. It felt like more of a challenge and my magic was like a kid in a candy store as it sorted through its favourite treats.

There were a few Valkyrie who held their ground, but only for a short period of time. They all inevitably fell. It was when two identical Valkyrie ran into the fray and seemed to move as one, that I felt like I was about to finally get the fight that I needed. They both kept out of the reach of my swords, they darted in like humming birds, striking together or in quick succession. Staying separated, they were making me work to deflect the blows coming from either side. It was the perfect opportunity to try incorporating my wings into my usual fighting style and I already knew the perfect way to do it. They seemed to move at random, but they still seemed to know what the other one was about to do. It was impossible to predict. It didn't matter though. I didn't really care which of them was going to fall first.

The one on my left darted in first and I turned fully to engage her, giving the perception of having lost sight of the other fighter. She took it like I knew that she would. She immediately darted into my side with her sword raised. I feinted a blow to the first and she slashed her sword hard to clash with mine, but I easily pulled it away before it made contact. As she followed through on her swing, I ducked under her sword and dropped low, swivelling on the spot I pulled my wings in tight. As the first fighter's sword sailed past me, I sprang up. With a wing on either side of her body I beat my wings harshly. She was fully enveloped in my flames and she dropped to the floor screaming. Meanwhile I had gained a few feet height from the ground and I dropped down intending to deliver a brutal blow with my sword to the second fighter, who had tried an opportune blow to my side. She had no option but to dive to the ground to avoid the blow. I kicked her sword out of her hand and raised my own. As I towered over her, with my sword raised for a killing blow, I saw the look of terror in her eyes. It made me pause, it made me really look at her. What was I doing? She had raised one arm in front of her as if she was trying to shield herself. I felt my wings cooling as I looked around me for the first time. As I took in my surroundings and actually saw the devastation that I had caused. The injured had mostly been pulled off to the side of the ring. There were only a few on the ground around me. The sand was stained red with the blood of

these people. My people. The people who had knelt to me when they first saw me. And how did I repay that? I cut them down, in the most brutal way possible. Shame flooded me and I felt my magic finally draw back inside me. My wings must have extinguished because I heard Geta call out from the side lines.

“I think that we can call an end to the demonstration here. Take the injured to the infirmary, we will resume training tomorrow. Then tomorrow night we feast!”

A roar of cheers went up around me as the Valkyrie helped their friends up and made their way to where I assumed the infirmary was. They were excitedly chatting amongst themselves and I could even see some of them recreating some of the moves from the fight.

I looked down at my feet and saw that the fallen Valkyrie was still sat down in the sand. She grinned up at me and I reached down with my hand to help her up.

“You were magnificent.” She told me, grinning and bouncing on the spot like a happy child.

I cocked my head to the side in confusion, but before I could say anything Geta came striding over to rescue me.

“Brygin, can you check with the kitchens that they have everything they need for tomorrow?” Geta said dismissing her. She nodded eagerly and ran off in a different direction from everyone else.

I was at a loss for words, still shocked at what I had just done. Geta just slapped me on the back and guided me off the sand fighting ring. “Let’s go



and check in with your mates, then we can find somewhere quiet to talk.”

We walked in silence to a big one storey building which ran the length of the training area. When we entered, the awkwardness of the situation slammed into me. We walked into a large room which held about twenty beds down each side. One side was completely filled and about half of the others were occupied as well. Kyle was sat on a bed in the far corner. Thankfully the beds next to him were not occupied, but I still had to walk down the centre of the room to get to him. I basically just cringed the whole way down. The Valkyrie, however, were in high spirits. There was a strange party type atmosphere going on and I didn't know what to make of it.

When I was about four beds away, Kyle looked up and met my eyes with the biggest grin on his face. He had stripped off his shirt and Liam was busy wrapping a bandage around his chest. I couldn't help but grin back at him. He looked a lot better than when I had last seen him. He wasn't pale and listless. He seemed like himself again. I jogged the last few steps and threw my arms around him. He grunted in pain and I quickly straightened up, my hands floating around him. I didn't know where I could touch him without hurting him and he just laughed and grabbed hold of me, pulling me back against him.

“It's not as bad as it looks, my wolf will have it all healed up in a day or two.” He told me pulling me into his lap.

“What in the world has been going on outside?” Sykes laughed, looking around him at the nearly full infirmary.

I didn't know what to say. What would they think of me when they knew that I had done this? That I had finally lost control. Geta was stood back slightly giving us an illusion of privacy, but I knew that she would be listening in.

“How about we get Kyle wrapped up, then Geta is going to take us somewhere a bit more private to talk. I’ll fill you in there okay?” I told Sykes.

Liam tilted his head to the side and whispered into my mind. “*Is everything okay, kitten?*” He was maybe a bit too observant for his own good, or rather my own good, as I was the one that always seemed to be on the receiving end of it.

I couldn’t hold it back any longer. I needed to see how he was going to take it. I loved them and I knew that they loved me too. Doubting them like this was hurting just about as much as the shame of having done it in the first place.

“*I did it, Liam. I hurt them.*” I whispered back to him.

Liam cast a look around him at the laughing Valkyrie. “*They seem quite happy that you did.*” He told me.

“*I lost control.*” I admitted. “*Geta called it a blood lust.*”

Liam slung an arm around me and pulled me into his side while Sykes finishing up Kyle’s bandage. I could see Virion watching us carefully. It was hard having him outside of the loop with the mind speak. I hoped that when we did take the time to solidify our mating bond, he would be joined in to it too. But he wasn’t a shifter, so I suppose there was no guarantee that he would be.

“*Will Virion be able to mind speak with us, once the bond is finalised?*” I whispered into Liam’s mind.

*"I don't know."* He said squinting his eyes at Virion in thought which just made the man shift uneasily. *"I hope so."* He finally added.

"What are you two talking about?" Virion asked suspiciously.

I just grinned at him wickedly. "Nothing." I told him. In essence, we weren't really talking about anything that would upset him, but I was starting to feel like I needed to come out of my funk and what better way than to play with him for a bit.

It didn't take Sykes long to finish up with Kyle and I was relieved to see Kyle just jump off the bed like he hadn't been slumped on the ground losing blood not so long ago. He slung an arm around my shoulders and we followed Geta out of the infirmary. She led us to a cottage not too far away. The camp seemed to be made up of various low lying, long buildings with some cottages scattered around the edges.

"Most of the Valkyrie and our warriors reside in the dormitories." She said waving her hand to the low lying buildings in the distance. "We have a few other camps set up like this one but the bulk of our force resides here. Once the gates to Valhalla were closed, we didn't have the usual incoming souls to house."

Geta strolled inside the cottage without knocking and I had to wonder if this was her home.

"Why were the gates closed?" I asked her. She led us into a sitting room and we all dropped into the various seats scattered around. Geta dropped into an armchair by an open fire with a sigh. It seemed that someone had beat us here, because the fire had been lit and drinks were laid out on the table for us.

“As Valkyrie we have always lived with purpose. It is hard to endure eternity without having a cause to dedicate yourself to. Our task was simple. Train, fight and protect the realms. The gates to Valhalla were closed centuries ago. It was felt that the gods were interfering too much with the other realms. The other magic users thought that the gods were overstepping. They just saw them as more adept magic users. The gods were insulted. They pulled out of the realms as punishment and closed the gates to Asgard. Valhalla is a part of Asgard and as such our gate was closed with it. We have tried to maintain our way of life, but we have grown soft. We no longer have a cause. A reason for being. Most of the Valkyrie train, but their hearts are no longer in it. It wasn't until the first soul in a long time was sent to us, that I saw the fire start to ignite in them again.” Geta looked at me carefully.

I felt sorry for these women. To have been shut away from the world and have lost so much, without even really having a say in it. But then it dawned on me what she was actually saying and I sat forward with a gasp. All of my mates were immediately on guard.

“Britt! Britt is here.” I said looking around me, as if expecting her to just jump out of the shadows any minute.

“Of course,” Geta said with a confused look on her face. “You reaped her soul after she fell in battle, where did you think she was?”

I sat back at that. Where did I think she had gone?

“I suppose I didn't really think about it.” I told her. “I only recently learnt that I was a Valkyrie and I am very new to this world. I grew up thinking I was basically human with just a bit of magic added to the mix.”

Geta nodded in understanding. “There has not been a new Valkyrie born for centuries. Not since the gods sealed our gate. In fact, it has been forbidden for us to bear any children. It is understandable that you would not have the knowledge of your heritage. But to have so much magic, so young. It is unheard of.” She looked at me with what I thought was pride. She had so many answers for me and I didn’t even really know where to start.

“Why did they call me the Phoenix General?” I asked her. Deciding to start with what I hoped to be the easiest questions first.

“There is a legend amongst the Valkyrie, which was passed to us from the Norns themselves. It is said that a Phoenix would rise to Valhalla, she would free us from our chains and lead us in battle to great victory. When you stepped through the portal, cutting down the demons that followed you, only to have your wings ignite in flames.” She shook her head with a smile. “You are the Phoenix that we have been waiting for.”

“I ... I don’t know what to say to that.” I told her. And I didn’t. “Okay, let’s just lay it all out there, I don’t know if I’m the person that you’ve been waiting for. That was legit the first time that ever happened and I don’t know if I can or want to do it again.”

Geta just raised a brow at me. “I understand your reluctance. Is it the blood lust that is making you question yourself?” She asked me. Straight to the point, I liked that.

Kyle jumped into the conversation. “What blood lust?” He asked me.

I looked over at him reclining back on the sofa. Whilst he looked better than he had, he still seemed weakened by his injuries. I was worried to tell him what had happened when they left though. What if they thought less of me?

Liam caught my gaze and he gave me an encouraging smile and a nod. I don't know if I would have been able to say it out loud if he hadn't.

"When you all left for the infirmary ..." I started out. But then I didn't know how to finish it. "My wings ignited because I lost control of my magic." I told them.

"That isn't entirely correct." Geta jumped in and I looked at her hopefully. "Yes, you did lose control of your magic, but I think that it was because it reached a level you had not experienced before. If you train and develop your skills, you should be able to ignite your magic, without it overwhelming you and dragging you into a blood lust again." She told me.

I could feel the tears threatening my eyes at the relief of not having to go through that again. Kyle was still looking at me expectantly, waiting for an explanation.

"I lost control." I told him again. "I couldn't pull back the magic and the rage and I lost it. Geta covered for me, saying that it was a training exercise, a demonstration of their skills. I fought the Valkyrie that were waiting for us at the gate." I finished quietly.

"Wait," Sykes said, furrowing his brow in concentration. "All those Valkyrie that came into the infirmary?"

I nodded grimly at them. "I put them there." I told them.

I waited for them to judge me, to look down on me, to say something, anything. It almost felt excruciating, but then Sykes threw back his head and laughed.

“Hot damn, woman!”

I looked around them noting the impressions on their faces. Surprisingly they looked more amused than anything else.

“The Valkyrie have not had a reason for training, they are perhaps a little out of practice.” Geta said defensively. That only made Sykes burst out laughing. I needed to get this back on track, before we insulted her.

“Do you think that you could help me with my training, Geta? So that I can avoid the blood lust next time.” I shuddered at the thought of losing control again. And then my blood ran cold as I realised, what it my mates had got caught up in the blood lust?

Geta shifted uncomfortably in her seat. “That is not going to be your biggest problem. The gates to Valhalla are still closed. We cannot leave here.”

“No, they’re not. We opened them.” I told her cocking my head in confusion.

“I have no idea how you bypassed the lock, but I can assure you that the gates are still closed.” She explained to us.

“Well how do we open them?” Kyle asked her, grunting slightly as he leant forward.

“The gods would need to open them.” Geta said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

I dropped my head into my hands and pressed my fingers into my eyes out of frustration. I could feel a stress headache starting already. “Okay, so let me get this straight, we made it all of the way here, but we can’t get you out of here to come and help us until we go to Asgard and persuade a god to open the gates for us.” Fuck. My. Life!

“No, not exactly.” Geta said and I suddenly felt a small glimmer of hope shine through. Until she completely crushed it that is. “You’d need Odin to open the gates.” She explained to me.

“Cool.” I sighed. Sitting back in the sofa with my arms flopping down beside me. I mean what else was there to say. Just need to rock up to Odin and ask for a bit of a favour.

Geta gave me a small smile of sympathy. At least she wasn’t trying to sugar coat it. “You have come a long way and fought many battles to get here. I will leave you to sleep and return in the morning. We can discuss training and this great battle you need us for then. Rest now Phoenix General. All will look better in the new light of morning.”

Geta said her goodbyes and bustled out of the cottage, leaving us still sat on the seats around the sitting room. When I looked around at the faces of the others, it was uplifting, in a sick kind of way, to see that they all looked just as grim as I felt.

Kyle was the first to shake himself out of it. “I guess this cottage is for us then.” He said looking around him. He started to struggle to get out of his seat, before Liam pushed him back down and rolled his eyes at him.

“Let me check it out and I’ll direct you to where you need to go.” He laughed, easily climbing to his feet.



Kyle started to grumble something about not being an invalid and I tried very hard to hold in the laughter that desperately wanted to bubble out of me. He was really the worse kind of patient, and he had the nerve to criticise me when I had wanted to peel my dressings off. Shaking my head, I climbed to my feet and stretched high up on my tip toes. I felt my spine crack and my chest popped. Looking down at myself I realised that once again I was covered in demon blood. At least this always happened shortly before finding a shower. If I'd got covered like this in the middle of that trek through the forest, I would have been mortified. It was bad enough that I had already been a bit crusty when we had to hitch a ride up the tree.

Liam came back into the sitting room a few minutes later, "We've got three bedrooms and two bathrooms. There's also a little kitchen that someone has left food in for us." At the mere mention of food my stomach screamed in distress. "And apparently Aria would like to eat right away." He grinned.

"Actually, I think I'm going to shower first if that is okay with you guys. I need to be clean." I tried to surreptitiously smell myself to check if it was as bad as I thought it was. I caught Liam's smile as he noticed my subtle movement, so I quickly shuffled out of the room before anyone could mention it.

The bathrooms were like all of the ones I had experienced since I had come to this realm and I was starting to wonder if there was some kind of plumbing fetish scene over here. The shower was amazing though, so whatever it was that had caused it, I was definitely on board.

When I came back out of the bathroom, I wandered into the kitchen and found Virion plating up some food. It looked like some roasted meats, breads and salads. When I came into the room he glanced over his shoulder and with a grin passed me a big plate of food. I was so grateful that I couldn't form words. Virion picked up his own plate and sat down at the little table in the kitchen which was already set up with a pitcher of water

and two glasses. I looked around the room and saw that the others were missing. Virion must have realised that I was looking for the others.

“They went to bed.” He told me.

“*We’re fine kitten.*” Liam whispered into my mind. “*Kyle needs to sleep to heal quicker and we figured you could use some time alone with Virion.*”

“*And you don’t mind if I do that?*” I asked suspiciously.

“*Don’t worry, I can wait for another night to spend some time with him one on one.*” He laughed.

“*You know what I mean.*” I told him.

“*Honestly kitten. It’s not a problem. Have fun and get some sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.*” He whispered to me.

When I turned back to Virion, he was watching me closely. I couldn’t help but smile, it must be weird when we did that. How did he feel being out of the loop though? We ate our food in silence. Every time that I looked up to see what he was doing, I kept catching him looking at me. It was like we had turned into teenagers on a first date and it was getting a bit ridiculous. After what felt like the fiftieth time of looking at each other, I just burst out laughing and he joined in with me.

“Why is this so weird?” I asked him.

“I have no idea. I’m normally much better at this, I promise you.” He said seriously.

“Maybe we need to just get to know each other a bit better. This isn’t exactly a normal situation.” I suggested.

“Okay, what do you want to know?” He asked sitting back into his chair and relaxing.

What did I want to know? How personal should I get? Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. It was very easy to upset someone if you asked the wrong thing. I was also opening myself up to having to tell him about my own history. That was usually a topic which I shied away from, but when I looked at Virion with his open expression and his easy smile, I realised that my past was just a part of me and it wasn’t something that I felt like I needed to hide or avoid with him.

“How about we start with something easy and you tell me about your family?” I suggested, except Virion visibly cringed at that suggestion. “Or maybe that isn’t an easy subject.” I laughed.

“When are families ever easy?” He shrugged. He took a deep breath like he was getting ready to prepare himself for something. Just as I was about to tell him that he didn’t need to tell me, he started to talk.

Virion told me all about what he could remember of his mother. She had died of her injuries during the first war when he was only a young child. His brother was only a baby. His father had never been the same after the war. Not only did he lose his fated mate, but he bore the responsibility of the loss of all of their people. Virion didn’t describe a childhood where he wanted for anything, but it was clear that it lacked the love and care that he needed as a child who had lost his mother. By the end of his story I felt so sorry for little Virion. He lost his mother and basically his father at the same time.

We had made our way back to the sitting room half way through his story and I had cuddled under his arm. Virion was stroking his fingers through my hair as he spoke. It seemed like once he started that he just needed to get it all out. By the time that he reached the end, we just sat in silence while he slowly stroked his hand through my hair.

“I’m sorry about your mother.” I told him.

Virion tightened his arm around me. “We all have our sad stories.” He told me. “But we shouldn’t let them define our story as a whole. I am more than my past experiences. Yes, they have contributed to the man that I have become today, but I won’t let them rule my life now, or the future that I want to have for myself. For us. For all of us.”

I sat up and turned around so that I could look him in the eye. “I think that’s a really good idea.” I told him. “But, of course, we just need to get through this little part first.”

Virion grinned at me. He had one of those beautiful smiles that just lit up his face. It must have been painful for him to relive his childhood but the fact that he had done that for me, I knew what it took to tell a story like that and it meant a lot.

“Aria,” Virion looked nervously at the ground. “I know that you haven’t known me for long, but if you would let me hold you tonight ...” He shifted uncomfortably next to me.

“Are you asking if you can spend the night with me?” I asked him. I wanted to grin, but I held it in. He was clearly nervous and I didn’t want him to think that I was making fun of him.

“I’m not asking for ... I don’t mean that we should ...” He was wildly gesticulating with a panicked look on his face and it didn’t take me long to take pity on him.

“Come on, let’s go to bed.” I told him, standing up and holding out my hand.

He reached up and took my hand and we made our way to one of the empty bedrooms. I was already showered so I stripped down to my underwear and the vest top that I was wearing and climbed into bed. It may have been a bit much for Virion, because he just stood at the doorway staring at me slightly wide eyed. It wasn’t like I had taken that much off, only my trousers. He slowly walked across to the bed, pulled his shirt over his head as he did. I realised that this was the first time that I had seen him when he wasn’t fully clothed, and it was definitely worth the wait. He was tall and slim, but damn he was well defined. Not as bulky as the other guys but, put it this way, I would definitely lick him all over given the chance.

Virion grinned, totally aware of me shamelessly checking him out. I’d stop, but he was my mate and I didn’t see why I should. He slowly started to unbutton his leather trousers and I almost sat up in bed so that I could watch him more closely. Oh, he knew I was interested and he was giving me a show. It would be rude to stop him! As he slowly pushed his trousers down past his muscled thighs, I got an eyeful of his extremely tight boxer briefs and boy was he packing a lot inside of them. My eyebrows rose as I looked at all he had on display for me and he gave me a deep masculine chuckle before he climbed under the covers. I didn’t even blush, I felt we were past that now. I just gave him a grin and then snuggled down under the covers. Virion’s confidence seemed to falter a little as he laid there, so I scooted over and snuggled up, laying my head on his chest.

“Thank you for letting me do this.” He mumbled.

Well, now I couldn't hold me laugh inside. How could this guy go from stripping off his clothes, to shy and uncertain so quickly? I suppose it must be hard though, being the last one into an already established group. He seemed to be getting on well with the guys though, I hadn't caught any animosity or jealousy between them. In fact, they seemed to be acting like they had known each other for years.

"You don't need to thank me." I told him as I tickled my fingers across his stomach, enjoying the way that his muscles contracted below them. "If you hadn't have asked me, I would have asked you." I tilted my head back so that I could see his face and I was pleased to see that he was smiling again.

"Sleep, Aria. The past few days have been long and crazy and I get the impression that we are only just getting started." He told me, holding me tightly to his chest.

A part of me was disappointed that he wasn't trying to seduce me, but he was right and it had been a long journey just to get to this point. I was more tired than I had realised and my eyes were fluttering closed, even though I wanted to occupy myself with other things, namely the delicious mate that I had beneath me.

"Okay," I mumbled. "But you have to promise to ravish me in the morning."

"I think that's something I would be happy to promise you." He mumbled as he nuzzled his face against the top of my head.

I fell asleep with a smile on my face and Virion holding me tightly against him. It was comforting to fall asleep being able to feel that he was there and

I wasn't alone. I had got so used to not sleeping alone, I don't think I could go back to it now.

## Chapter Three

I woke up to the feeling of Virion's lips softly brushing against the back of my neck and working their way down to my shoulder. His arms were banded tightly around holding me against his chest and I could feel his hard cock pushing against my lower back. Now wasn't this a lovely way to wake up in the morning.

As his teeth gently grazed across the back of my shoulder, my hips writhed, grinding my ass against his hard cock. I felt Virion smile against my skin.

"Oh, are you awake?" He whispered in faux innocence.

I chuckled lightly, but it caught in my throat as his hand started to slowly whisper down my stomach, the other came up around my breast and he pinched my nipple hard between two of his fingers as he roughly cupped my breast. The contrast of soft and hard was something I had already found out that I loved. Virion seemed to know just how to play my body and I couldn't help but wonder if someone had been giving him some pointers. All thoughts fled my mind though as his fingers slipped between my thighs and lightly danced across my already wet pussy. My back arched as he slipped his fingers between my wet folds and dragged it up to lightly brush across my clit. His lips came down, placing soft kisses against my neck as he lazy dragged his finger up and down my slit, never quite using enough pressure, but just teasing the idea of what was to come. It didn't take long for my hips to squirm in frustration, but when they did his teeth sank down into the tender skin at the side of my neck. As soon as the pain caused my breath my hitch, he released his teeth and laved his tongue over the bite soothing it, and starting that delicious wave of pleasure to build. My head dropped back onto his shoulder and a low moan slipped from my lips.



With his hard cock rubbing against my ass, and his hands reaching round to play with my wet pussy and nipples, I was trapped in his arms and there was no where else that I wanted to be. His cock pushed between my legs and I felt him glide against the wetness pooling between my legs.

“You feel so good.” He murmured against my neck as he sucked hard on the place where my neck met my shoulder.

He alternated between bites and kisses all over my neck and shoulder and the sensation was driving me to distraction. The heat pooled in my stomach and I knew that I wouldn't need much to push me over the edge, but he kept that teasing light touch against my clit, not quite giving me what I needed.

“Virion.” I panted. “I need ... I want ... please!” I whined.

“I know what you need baby. But you can't have it just yet. Just enjoy yourself.” He whispered, before he flipped me over onto my back.

He settled himself between my legs and I felt his cock glide over my pussy one time before he pulled away and started trailing kisses down my body. I should have been embarrassed at the whine that came out of me as he denied me the penetration I was desperate for, but I was too far gone.

He ran his tongue along the underside of one my breasts before he pinched the nipple hard between his fingers.

“Don't worry, I've got you baby.” He murmured as he trailed his mouth further down my body.

His mouth slowly latched onto the soft skin on the inside of my thigh and he sucked before biting down again. At the same time, he slipped a finger inside of me and gently started to pump it in and out of me. My head tilted back and my body arched at the contact, I was so close, so close that I just needed a little more. I felt like I was almost ready to beg him for it, if he didn't give in to me soon.

Virion's finger withdrew and I felt him move, his hot breath hovering just over my clit. Just as his mouth descended onto my clit, he slipped his finger, wet from my own juices, into my ass and pumped it into me as he sucked my clit into his mouth.

The orgasm exploded out of me with such force that I felt for a second like I'd lost the ability to breath until I screamed out my release. Bliss pounded across my body in wave after wave and just as I thought it was about to slow to a stop, Virion slammed his rock hard cock inside me, pushing me straight into a second orgasm.

"Oh fuck! Your pussy is so tight baby." He groaned as he slowly dragged his cock out of me and then slammed it back into me again.

I hooked one of my legs over his hip and he slid deeper inside me on the next thrust, groaning I ground down against him making my sensitive clit rub against the base of his cock. I could feel the walls of my pussy fluttering around him and I knew that I was going to come again soon. I didn't think I'd had so many, so close together before.

Virion's slow pace started to stutter and it was like his control snapped as he started to slam inside me over and over again. It was perfect and it was exactly what I needed. I was at a point where I couldn't even form words if I wanted to, and from the look on his face and the way that he was gritting his teeth, I could tell that he was in exactly the same place.

I could feel the saliva running in my mouth and the urge to bite him and claim him slammed into me hard. I pulled him down against me and he wrapped his arms around me as he continued to pound inside me. I couldn't hold back the need anymore and I surge forward and clamped my teeth into his shoulder at the same time that his teeth latched onto my chest at the top of my right breast. It was all I needed to push me over the edge and fall into the bliss of a third orgasm as I heard Virion groan with his own release.

I gently release my teeth from his shoulder and licked across the wound as he did the same to my breast. He kept his arms wrapped around me and pulled me tighter against him as we both lazed in the afterglow.

“You claimed me.” Virion whispered after we had been cuddling for a while.

I looked up at him in panic, thinking that I had done the wrong thing, but all I could see was pure happiness on his face and his eyes glazed with tears.

“Is that okay?” I asked him tentatively. I really needed to start asking permission before I went around claiming people.

“More than okay.” He replied pulling me tight against him and nuzzling his face into my hair. “My mate.” He sighed.

“*Are you in the connection?*” I whispered out to the group.

Virion's head snapped up and he looked me in the eye. “*That feels a bit weird.*” He whispered back.

“*Welcome to the club man.*” Sykes' voice laughed into our heads.

We cuddled like that for a while before reality started to kick me in the ass and remind me that we had stuff to do.

“Urgh, we need to get up.” I finally admitted.

Virion’s chest, which was currently my pillow vibrated underneath me with his laughter. “It does my male ego a lot of good to hear that you are so upset about that idea.”

I chuckled along with him, but then pulled myself up to sitting in bed. He sat up along with me and started to pepper kisses along my shoulder.

“Maybe just one more time?” He suggested and I practically dived on top of him.

After we managed to drag ourselves out of bed, Virion and I showered and joined the others in the kitchen, where thankfully Liam had already set about making some breakfast for us. Kyle pulled me against him, but before I would let him have a cuddle, I pulled up his shirt to check out his injuries. The bandage was off, but there were still pink scabby marks across his stomach.

“We aren’t all blessed with amazing Valkyrie healing powers.” Kyle laughed when I pouted at him.

“How does it feel though?” I asked him, resisting the urge to poke at him.

He squinted one eye at me and I could tell that he was going to try and downplay it, so I dug my fingers into his side. “Hey, I’m injured here.” He laughed.

“Exactly! So, don’t try and lie about it.” I accused him.

“I would never!” He laughed. See, he couldn’t even keep a straight face when he tried to lie to me.

“Seriously though, how does it feel?” I asked running my hand gently over his stomach. This was a weird new feeling for me. Having someone this close to me that I was worried about.

“It’s sore but it’s okay. I’m just going to have to take it easy today. Should be right as rain tomorrow.” He told me.

I scowled up at him, giving him my stink eye, trying to figure out if he was telling me the truth. Clearly the stink eye wasn’t working though because he just kissed me on the end of my nose and laughed. At least he had admitted that he would be taking it easy today.

“What’s up bitches!” A voice shouted from the other room.

Kyle immediately let me go as I sprinted out of the room and threw myself at her. She clearly hadn’t realised how much I would have missed her because she just collapsed underneath me and we ended up on the floor laughing loudly.

“Anyone would think you missed me.” Britt laughed pulling me into a bear hug while we were still laying on the ground.

“You died! Of course, I missed you. And you totally bled all over me by the way.” I said rolling off her with a laugh.

Sykes helped us both off the floor and then Britt hugged all the guys. I always forget that she had grown up with them and they probably missed her just as much as I did. When Virion stepping into the room, she raised an eyebrow and stepped in front of me, bracing herself.

“Awww, you do still love me.” I laughed, pulling her back away from her guard position.

“Well you basically saved me from an eternity of boredom and got me into the most exclusive club. I totally kick ass here by the way. Wait until you meet the others. I can’t wait for them to meet you.” She said, bouncing up and down in excitement. “Who’s the new man candy though?” She said tipping her head to Virion.

“Erm, well ...” This felt a bit weird explaining this.

“He’s the new boy toy.” Sykes laughed.

Virion blushed, but at least he laughed as well. Britt turned to me with a massive grin on her face. I could see it coming and just didn’t want to get into it in front of the guys, so opted for a quick change of subject.

“We also like to call him Virion. But let’s eat something, I’m starving.”

Britt grabbed my arm and we walked into the kitchen where Liam finished up the food and loading up plates.

“You eating?” He asked Britt over his shoulder.

“Nah, I grabbed something in the mess hall before I came over. You should drop in there as well, save yourselves from cooking and get to know some people.” Britt said snagging a slice of bacon from a plate in complete contradiction to her earlier statement. She just raised an eyebrow in challenge at me and then shoved it into her mouth whole.

Liam placed the biggest plate of food in front of me, which I set about shovelling into my face in the worst possible fashion, but I was ravenous.

“Still struggling to keep up with the calorie burn?” Britt asked, her mouth hanging slightly open in shock.

“I cannot cope with this for much longer. I feel like I could eat half a cow most of the time. It can’t be healthy.” I moaned. Once I was finished, I felt like licking the plate. There was no filling my stomach at the moment.

Virion frowned. “I have not been around someone coming into their magic for a long time, but once it peaks, I believe you should see your appetite level out as well.”

“God, I hope so. I could eat you right now.” I blushed when I realised what I had said and Britt threw back her head and started to cackle loudly.

*“I would let you eat me anytime.”* Virion whispered into my mind and I blushed a little more.

Britt was at a stage where she was heaving for breath and tears were running down her cheeks. It really hadn’t been that funny and even the guys were giving her strange looks. When she finally had herself under control, I had a suspicion that the tears were maybe not all from her laughter and I started to get concerned.

“I’ve really missed you guys.” She said soberly. “Don’t get me wrong, this place is awesome. But most of them have been here for centuries and it’s just hard to relate to a lot of them. They think I’m a bit weird.” Her shoulders slumped and she just had a general ‘someone just kicked my puppy’ look going about her.

*“I think we should go and do the dishes and leave you to do some girl talk.”* Kyle whispered into everyone’s mind.

*“Wait! What? I suck at girl talk. Let me do the dishes and you guys do it.”* I panicked back.

Sykes grinned at me. *“We don’t have the necessary parts for girl talk.”* He whispered back. All of the guys were already getting to their feet and leaving the room.

*“It’s not like I talk out my vagina!”* I shouted into their minds.

The guys just all laughed and left us to it. Britt looked up at me with these big puppy dog eyes and I just sighed in resignation. I felt like I needed to warm up or stretch or something. I could do this. Girl talk. How hard could it be?

“How are you feeling?” I attempted and then scrunched up my face in disgust. Even I knew that wasn’t right.

Britt just laughed when she saw my face. “You look like you just licked a turd.” She observed. I mean, wow, it wasn’t that bad!



“Harsh, but I can take criticism.” I pointed out. “Okay, let’s try this again. I can do this.” I cracked my neck from side to side and shuffled in my seat to get comfortable.

“Okay, lay it on me.” Britt said seriously, turning in her seat so that she was facing me.

“Are you okay?” I pushed out and then sighed. “I suck at this, I’m sorry.”

Britt threw back her head and laughed. “Actually, this is making me weirdly happy. It’s nice to know that you suck at something. It’s making me feel loads better about myself.”

“Well, that just seems mean.” I muttered. “Seriously though, are you okay?”

Britt sighed and slumped into her chair. “I think so.” She said cocking her head to the side as if she was truly considering how to answer the question. “It was hard at first. Everyone looked at me like some kind of miracle when I got here and it just made me feel more like I was this freak that just popped up out of nowhere. Everyone wanted to know my story, how I got here, what was going on in the realms, like I even really knew ... I’m rambling. Give me a minute.” She huffed out a breath and I couldn’t help but smile at her.

“I’ve missed you.” I told her honestly. “How about you have a think about what you want to say and I’ll fill you in on what happened after you selfishly died on us.”

Britt nodded quietly and I thought about all of the crap that had happened up until now.

“I feel like I need to be asking if you’re okay.” She observed.

I just shook my head. “I never asked for this.” I told her, looking her in the eye. “I don’t even know if I can do this.”

Britt reached across and grabbed my hand, giving it a squeeze. “Fate really hates you.” She said seriously, before breaking into a smile. “But at least she gave you four hot mates. And that latest one by the way, woof! I mean, girl, the amount of man candy you have now is just unfair.” She started to fan herself and if it had been anyone else, I would have been pissed about them thinking that way about my mates. But this was Britt. She always could make me smile.

“Okay, the story up to now. We only got thirty six out of the academy. We had a break when the first wave of demons pulled back. Everyone retreated and ran and I stayed and held back the second wave. We tried to get them all to the pack, but everyone was so tired and we knew that they wouldn’t make it. Madame Nines managed to get a message to her sister and we held up in a cave waiting for reinforcements. They came, we rested. We eventually got a portal opened and everyone back to the pack. Met Kyle’s Dad. Hated him immediately. Had a few skirmishes with random demons wandering around. Was told that I needed to come here. Then we had your funeral. You know, you were there. Isaac tried to ambush us on the way back, Kyle killed him. Trent’s pack joined with us. Kyle has like some weird strong Alpha thing going on. Marcus went mental when he found out. We ran before he could get Wyatt to kill us. He came after us anyway, so I kicked his ass. Then Virion found us wandering around the forest trying to find the portal here. He basically took us prisoner and then we went to the Fae realm. Then he told me he was my mate. Then we ran out of there because there’s like loads of men and I was about to be mobbed or something. Ooooh then we rode these giants squirrels up the world tree which was fun, but then we got attacked by this massive swarm of flying demons at the gate to Valhalla. But we opened and made it through here.” I cocked my head to one side then nodded to myself, that about covered it all.

When I looked at Britt she had this weird expression on her face, like she was chewing on her own laughter. “You’ve been busy. I love the cliff notes version and we can talk about giant squirrels later. Tell me more about this realm full of men that look like man candy and don’t have enough women.” She propped her elbow on the back of the sofa, like she was waiting for me to enlighten her.

“Please, as if your realm wasn’t like that already.” I scoffed. “Now, tell me about what happened when you got here.”

“Argh, blurgh fine!” She said rolling her eyes. “They were a bit shocked because no one knew you were out there. Then they all started getting excited because the Phoenix was out there. You’re like a rock star here you know. But they’ve all been locked in here for hundreds of years. Don’t get me wrong they are all really nice and I’ve made friends but ... I don’t know. It’s not the same. It’s like trying to make your mum your best friend. They just don’t quite get it.”

“Okay, I can see where you’re coming from. Maybe it’s just one of those things that you need to get used to. Like the fact that you’re not going to get Netflix here. It’s a completely different world. Also, you are still kind of dead. Maybe this is just a chance to start again.” I reasoned. “Basically, what I’m trying to say is that at the end of the day, your life hadn’t been too easy. Marcus gave you to Issacs’ pack to be their mate. Even though you didn’t want to be. This could be your way of starting over again, getting away from all that madness.”

Britt nodded thoughtfully. “I never thought that I would get away from them, you know. I know that you scared them off, but I didn’t think that it was going to last. Who would have thought it would take dying to finally be free?” She chuckled sadly. It was grossly unfair. Britt should have been able

to have any life that she wanted to. She shouldn't have had to get away from anything. She should have been free to live however she wanted to be.

“So, tell me about everyone here. What do you think of them?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Basically, you have two classes of people here: The Valkyrie and; The Warriors. The Warriors are people like me that were reaped from the battle field and came here. It's not like back home where being different makes you lesser, everyone is pretty much treated the same. I haven't met any Gods yet so I don't know what that's all about. When I first got here everyone was excited, but kind of sad. I don't know, I think that they were tired of being locked in here. The past week since I got here everyone got crazy excited. The training yards were cleaned up and equipment was fixed. It was like everyone found a reason to live again.” She said.

“Argh, why did you have to put it like that?” I sighed.

“Oh right, sorry, no pressure or anything. You just need to save these people as well as everyone else.” She laughed. But then her face turned serious again. “They need to get out of here, Aria. Someone has to get the gate unlocked.”

“I know. When we went into the Fae realm ... there's basically none of them left. We can't rely on them to save everyone again. We need to bring an army back with us. We need to bring this army back with us. You do realise that to do that, we have to go find Odin and get him to unlock the gate right?” I told her.

“By we, I'm assuming you mean, you and the guys. I'm pretty sure I'm as locked in here as everyone else is.” She pointed out.

“There’s something else.” I admitted. “I need to train Kyle. When I took out Wyatt, I sort of had a strange conversation with him. Kyle is going to have to challenge Marcus.” I dropped my voice low as I told her and checked that none of the guys were within hearing range. I actually had no idea what their hearing range was, but I really hoped that they hadn’t overheard us. None of them came storming in, or started screaming in my head. I was going to take that as a good sign.

Britt looked shocked, but then said, “I suppose that was inevitable.”

“There’s more.” I admitted with a wince.

“The revelations just keep coming.” She muttered with a smile.

“Marcus has been blackmailing Wyatt so that he does what he wants. He has his mate.” I told her quietly. I really hoped that the guys weren’t listening in. I had promised Wyatt that I wouldn’t tell Kyle, but I realised now that was wrong. I needed to talk to them all about this, but I would prefer that we did it properly rather than them overhearing me discussing it with someone else.

Britt’s mouth dropped open in shock and she spluttered, before finally getting out. “I suppose that explains why he would support him. But that’s low, even for Marcus. That’s like supervillain type shit. Kyle doesn’t know?” She asked.

I shook my head. “Wyatt asked me not to tell him, but I think that I need to.”

“You think?” She sassed back at me.

“How do I tell him something like that?” I asked her. I was genuinely upset about having to do this. Fucking Wyatt and fuck Marcus, the evil dick!

“I can see you ranting in your head.” Britt told me. I could see her struggling to hold in a smile. “You’ll find a way.” She said, managing to reign that smile in because it really was not an appropriate time.

Liam stuck his head through the doorway with a sheepish expression on his face. “We need to get going, it looks like Geta is heading over this way.”

Britt popped up off the sofa and started doing a weird shuffle on the spot. “What on Earth are you doing?” Liam asked her, watching her shuffle about.

“Geta’s coming!” She said flapping her hands in the air.

“Oh my god! Are you crushing on Geta?” I laughed.

“What? No! She’s just amazing.” Britt swooned. She like, for real, swooned.

“So, it’s more like a fan girl type situation.” Liam pointed out.

Britt scowled at us both, but didn’t get to say anything because just as she opened her mouth, there was a knocking at the door. Liam jogged over and opened it up, greeting Geta and letting her into the house.

“Good Morning.” She said as she entered the room. When she saw Britt, she nodded her head at her, just saying “Britt.” I thought Britt was going to pass out, she was so excited.

Liam started talking to Geta and leading her into the kitchen where the guys still were. Britt came up beside me and excitedly whispered, “She knows my name!” I thought she was going to squeal for a second, but she managed to reign her crazy back in. We were going to have so much fun making fun of her for this later.

The guys were clustered around the table leaning their heads together talking quietly. Liam coughed quietly and they all looked up, Sykes gave us one of his blinding smiles and I just squinted at them suspiciously. They were up to something. And they were leaving me out. Rude!

“I thought that I would show you around the training grounds this morning.” Geta said to me. “I won’t lie. The other Valkyrie are excited that you’re here and they’ve been training for some time already.”

“Well, let’s see what you’ve got going on.” Sykes said standing up.

*“Don’t think we aren’t talking about this later.”* I whispered into all of their minds. Virion at least had the decency to look bad, but the others just smiled. *“Because I have something that I need to talk with you as well.”* I admitted. Now it was my turn to look bad. At least now, I was committed and I couldn’t chicken out of it. Unless they forgot, then I was totally chickening out of this shit.

We all followed Geta out of the cottage. I was surprised when we got outside that we hadn’t realised what was going on. As soon as we stepped outside it was like we hit a wall of sound. The sand area where I had put the hurt on a load of Valkyrie was completely packed. It was like that scene in Wonder Woman where the Amazons were training and kicking ass, except these bad ass bitches had wings. Francesca was right, everyone had varying colours of brown wings, there were a couple of dark greys but none were

white like mine. When we got to the edge of the training ring, my attention was completely on what was in front of me and Geta was just an afterthought. It was probably rude, but this was just my thing. I loved this shit.

It seemed like there were only Valkyrie training in this area. Most of them were training with swords. There was a section of the far side which had bows and were firing arrows at targets, but they were on the far side from me and I decided to go over there later. Directly in front of me, most of the training involved swords, but there were some that were also going hand to hand. They were good. They were clearly a bit out of practice, but I wasn't going to say that to anyone's face. If someone shoved me in this place and locked the door for a couple of hundred years, I'd probably get a bit bored of training eventually too. The Blood Moon, when we were expecting the demons to stage their final attack, was just over four weeks away. If they put the work in between now and then, they would be more than ready.

After I had been stood there watching for a few minutes, they started to realise that I was there. The change was noticeable. The fighting became more aggressive and the noise increased along with it. I had to admit, when they were really trying to show off, they did get a bit better.

It took me a while, but I realised that Geta was still standing next to me. "They're very impressive." I told her.

She didn't say anything back to me and I turned my head to look at her and make sure I hadn't said the wrong thing. She had that proud mama look on her face and I turned back to watch the training in front of us. She should be proud. What they had here was impressive. It was a community of women, working and training together. And they kicked ass. In fact, they were the last hope for the magic realm.



“The Warriors are training in the ring behind the mess hall, if you would like to inspect them as well.” Geta told me, walking away already. I guess that means that we were going anyway.

“Inspect? That sounds very formal.” I told her.

Geta looked back over her shoulder at me. “They are your army, Phoenix General. You need to inspect them to see if they are up to your required standard.”

Well now I kind of felt bad for thinking that they needed a bit more training. Actually, no. It wasn't that they needed more training. They were just a bit rusty. They were miles ahead of anything I'd seen the shifters doing.

As we walked through the Valkyrie village, I fell back away from Geta until I was walking with Virion. “How do they hold up against the Fae army?” I asked him.

He thought about it for a moment. “There are so few of us left that we don't really have an army anymore. I wasn't old enough to remember the army before the Galvinae Wars. If you want to know how they hold up against our current warriors ... they are perhaps better.” He admitted.

I smiled. I don't know why. Maybe because these were my people and it was nice to know. Britt dropped back to join us. She linked arms with me as we walked over to the next training yard.

“Are you doing this just to make yourself look cool?” I asked her, looking down at the way her arm was threaded through mine.

“You know it!” She sing songed back to me and I threw my head back and laughed. There was something about being around Britt that just lightened your mood. Even Virion was smiling and he hadn’t even had the chance to get to know her yet.

When we reached the training yard, we were met by pretty much the same sight as before, except this time no one had wings and they were mainly men with a few women. They trained with a mixture of weapons. I could see swords, axes, spears and a couple of bows. Some held shields but most were without. These were the warriors who had been reaped from battlefields having been judged as the best warriors from their clans by the Valkyrie. They trained hard. I suppose they probably felt like they had something to prove. As I stood and watched the warriors train a small glimmer of hope started inside me. This was a massive army, which was trained to the point where they could actually fight. Maybe we could actually do this. Of course, we had the small problem of getting them there, but I was happy to just deal with that later because there was only so much that a girl could do at any one time. Right!

Britt, was bouncing up and down on the spot as she watched. She was the one who had instigated the training coup and gate crashed my morning run, what felt like an age ago. In fact, there would probably not have been any Elites if it hadn’t been for her. I looked down at the little energetic brunette next to me and I realised that she was the reason we had made it as far as we had. She was the reason we had got anyone out of the academy at all. I hadn’t realised that before.

While I was having my introspective moment, a big burly mama-jama of a warrior came strolling up to us. Because I was too busy staring dreamily at my friend, I didn’t notice until he had been stood for an awkward amount of time waiting for me to catch on. By the time that I looked up, not only was he stood there staring at me, but also Geta and my mates. Britt, like me, was still in a world of her own, enjoying watching the training going on in front of us.

“Oh, sorry ... hi.” I awkwardly said. Stellar first impression there. He would definitely want to follow me into battle now. I could almost face palm myself right now.

He cocked his head to the side and didn't say anything. I didn't really need him to, it was fairly obvious what he would think of me now.

We stood in awkward silence, staring at each other for a few minutes. After the first minute a smile came across my face. We were on, I was not losing this stare down! Two minutes later I saw Geta shift towards us out of the corner of my eye but Britt, best wing woman ever, intercepted her. Mama-jama was doing well at four minutes in, his scowl was very impressive. Poor dude, I was having too much fun to stop this any time soon.

*“Is there a reason why you are doing this?”* Virion whispered into my mind.

*“Dominance.”* Kyle whispered, Virion must have projected to the whole group. *“She cannot back down first.”*

By six minutes mama-jama was starting to shift uneasily. The training behind him was starting to quieten down. They had probably started to notice what was happening and were stopping to watch. I wasn't about to lose just to check what was going on behind him though.

Seven minutes, my magic was itching at the surface wanting to smack this pretender down. He was straight up challenging me now. I could feel my wings fluttering beneath the surface of my skin. A point was going to have to be made.

Eight minutes and mama-jama cracked and took a step back, dropping his head in respect. Pfft respect, he was about to learn that.

“Ooooooh dude, this is going to be so much fun.” Britt whispered giddily next to me.

Mama-jama’s eyes flicked to Britt and my magic took offence to that. It surged in anger and my wings burst from my back and I felt the change flicker over me. The warriors on the training sand had the sense to take a step back. Mama-jama’s scowl returned and I strode out on the sand, pulling my swords from my back. The warriors cleared space for me, not sure what was happening. Someone was about to get a smack down, that’s what was about to happen.

I turned back to my group and pointed a sword at mama-jama. “Choose your weapon.” I told him.

Geta had the same proud look on her face that she had before, so I was guessing that I was doing the right thing. My mates were stood in a line with various scowls and grim looks on their faces. Britt on the other hand, was still bouncing up and down on the spot and clapping her hands together in excitement. She was like a kid at the county fair and I was trying not to smile and laugh because I was having a bad ass moment and that would just ruin it.

Mama-jama picked up an enormous double edged battle axe. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes at him. This guy was clearly trying to over compensate for a personal deficiency. I flicked my eyes across to Britt to see that she had started to just piss herself laughing. Even a couple of the guys had a smile flickering on their faces. This dude was stupid. I sheathed my swords at my back. This was going to be easier than I thought, may as well make a spectacle out of it as well. When I pulled one of my throwing knives into my hand, I heard the ripple of laughter flow through the crowd of

spectators. Mama-jama was pissed now. His frown had deepened to the degree that I'm pretty sure you could get a hand inside those forehead wrinkles. I dropped into a defensive stance, pulling my fists in front of me. My left hand holding the knife.

Mama-jama actually roared and then charged at me. I couldn't help but roll my eyes that time. Fucking drama queen! He spun the axe around like it weighed nothing and brought it over his head, swinging it down and trying to sever one of my wings. Idiot! It was easy to dart under his left arm and run my blade along the inside of his elbow. The trick was to cut deep enough to sever the tendon, but to try not to nick the brachial artery. To the crowd it would have looked like I had missed but when mama-jama turned around with a scowl on his face I knew that my blow had hit home and he had just lost the ability to move his wrist. I grinned across at him. It would be interesting to see if he would admit his weakness to the crowd. He just gritted his teeth and growled at me and I threw my head back and laughed.

He charged again, this time going for an upward sweep with the axe. He was really stupid. I spun to the side, easily missing the axe and when the knife darted out to him as I passed this time, I sliced deeply from his armpit up across his left shoulder. There was no missing the artery this time but I think I had just nicked it rather than completely severed it. His shoulder ligaments though were completely severed and his left arm just hung limply at his side. The massive axe was just held in his right hand now.

Give him his due, he didn't even look worried. He started doing some fancy cross body axe swirling which I was certain was supposed to intimidate me. I just laughed and darted in slipping my knife across his right elbow easily and moving out of the way whilst he continued to show off. He fumbled the axe and dropped it. It would be hard to swing such a massive weapon when you couldn't move the wrist of your only functioning arm. He wasn't backing down though; he dropped down into a defensive stance and brought his right hand up in a semi clenched fist. I cocked my head to the side and considered my next move. Etiquette should probably be that I throw my

knife to the side and go hand to hand with him. It's not like I wouldn't be able to take him. I just didn't want to draw it out. I held my knife up and looked at it thoughtfully, while he just stood there and waiting. No point drawing out the inevitable, I thought and I threw the knife so that it imbedded into his shoulder and his right arm dropped limp at his side.

Mama-jama just sighed in defeat and stood back up. Everyone around the ring was cheering and clapping and I walked over to him and gave him a slap on the back.

“You want me to pull that out for you, big guy?” I asked him with a grin.

“Nah, I'm keeping it as a souvenir.” He laughed and then he dipped his head to me in respect and strode off towards the infirmary.

## Chapter Four

### Caleb

Marcus was due to emerge from his safe room in a few hours. Apparently, it had a timed lock on it. Fucking coward had hidden in there before he even made arrangements for the women and children. His last order had been to send the men out, we had seen how that ended when we ran onto the battlefield.

Once the guard had run the perimeter last night and confirmed that the area was clear of demons, the Elites had all but collapsed on the spot in exhaustion. We decided to leave the women and children where they were on the top floor of the house, so that we could deal with the dead before the children came down. A few of the women came down to the kitchen and made food for everyone, then we made a rota for those who had any fighting skills to keep watch and collapsed for the night and slept. Everything else was left for today.

There was a small part of me that hoped it would be better in the morning. That part of me was wrong. We needed a plan to deal with the dead, including the witches. Unfortunately, Marcus was going to be the one making those plans and I had a feeling that we weren't going to like his solution.

We were in the kitchen sitting around the table, eating breakfast. Dom hadn't said much of anything all morning. I think he was stewing on the Octavia situation. Wyatt could barely sit still. Something was eating at him, but he wasn't going to talk about it.

“What time does the time lock disengage?” I asked no one in particular.

Wyatt glanced at his watch. “Twenty minutes.” He said. Wyatt downed what was left of his coffee and then climbed off his stool, walking out of the kitchen.

I looked over at Dom. “We joining him?” I asked. I knew I had a few things that I wanted to say to Marcus.

Dom just got off his stool and followed Wyatt out. I was worried about him, but I didn’t know what I could do. He was taking this hard. Maybe we both should be.

I caught up to Dom and Wyatt down in the basement of the house. Wyatt was pacing angrily in front of the safe room door. I had never been down here before. I didn’t even know that there was a safe room down here.

“Have we always had a safe room?” I asked.

“Yes, my father put it in when I was a child. It was supposed to be a safe for pack assets, but Marcus had the time lock put on about ten years ago.” Wyatt said while pacing back and forth.

Wyatt was clearly agitated. I looked over at Dom and even he was looking at him suspiciously now. Something was going on. Dom did that wide eyed look at me that said ‘do something about this’. I shook my head and squinted at him in a ‘no you do it’ look. If Wyatt turned around now, we were going to look pretty ridiculous. Dom huffed out an annoyed breath at me and I just smiled.



“Wyatt, can you just stand still?” Dom snapped. Not quite the tactic I would have taken.

“What’s going on?” I asked him when he finally stopped pacing, I resisted glaring at Dom.

Wyatt opened his mouth to say something and then snapped it closed. Dom suddenly darted forward and grabbed him by the shoulders. He pulled Wyatt closer and was peering into his eyes like a crazy person. Then he grabbed his head with both hands and started angling it around, like he was trying to get a better look at something. I had no idea what was going on, or why Wyatt was letting Dom manhandle him like that. But, I had been in this world for long enough to know when to keep my mouth shut and just wait it out.

Dom eventually stepped back and his hands dropped to his sides, as he squinted across at Wyatt. “You’ve been cursed.” He eventually said.

Wyatt’s face lit up in what I was assuming was hope and he nodded his head. I waited for him to explain, but he didn’t say anything.

I turned to Dom instead. “What’s going on?” I felt like I was the only one left in the dark.

“He’s been cursed.” Dom told me.

“Yeah, I got that part. Cursed how?” I snarked. I hated in when Dom got all magey.

“So that he can’t talk about something.” Dom told me, like he thought I was stupid.

Wyatt started to nod. Then he checked his watch and told us. “Ten minutes.”

Dom started to pace up and down then. He had one hand gripping his chin in thought. I walked over to the nearest wall and sat on the floor, leaning against the wall. I had a feeling that we had a lot to work through in the next ten minutes, so I was going to get comfortable.

Dom stopped and looked at Wyatt who was just looking at him expectantly. “Marcus is involved.” He said. Wyatt nodded.

“Do you know how to break the curse?” Dom asked him.

Wyatt’s shoulders dropped and he shook his head.

Dom looked down at me. “Any ideas?”

I just looked shook my head as well. “I have no idea how to break a curse!”

“No, I mean any ideas what he would be trying to stop him talking about.” Dom said in exasperation.

I looked at Wyatt and thought about it. “No.” I sighed. Wyatt looked so disappointed. “Okay, lets reason this though.” I suggested.

Wyatt walked over to stand in front of me and Dom who had already slumped to the floor next to me.

“Marcus had someone put a curse on you so that you couldn’t speak about something.” I said.

Wyatt nodded and checked his watch.

“Something that he did?” Dom suggested.

Wyatt just nodded again.

I sighed in defeat. “That could be anything, Marcus is a dick.” Then I realised where I was and glanced at the safe room door. “Can he hear us out here?” I asked Wyatt.

“No. The safe room is completely sealed.” Wyatt told us.

I looked across at Dom. “Any suggestions? It must be pretty bad to go to these lengths.”

Dom looked around the basement as if there would be some clue around us. “Is he involved in the demon attacks?” Dom asked Wyatt.

“I don’t know.” He sighed.

“So, it’s not that then.” Dom clarified.

“Is it something that he has done to the pack?” I suggested.

Wyatt shook his head.

“Something that he did to you?” Dom suggested.

Wyatt nodded and Dom and I both sat forward in anticipation. We were getting closer.

“Something to stop you challenging him?” I suggested next.

Wyatt nodded again, more eagerly this time. But then I sighed and slumped back. “It could be anything.”

“Not really.” Dom reasoned. “If he is blackmailing you into not challenging him then he either has something of yours, or he knows something that you don’t want anyone else to know.”

Wyatt started furiously nodding and pointing at Dom then holding one finger in the air. “So, it’s the first thing. He has something of yours.” I confirmed and Wyatt sighed in relief and nodded. “It must be something that you care about a great deal in order to let him do the things that he has done.”

Wyatt sank to his knees in front of me and I could have sworn that he had tears in his eyes. Just as I was about to lean forward and comfort him, a loud beep came from behind us and Wyatt leapt to his feet and rushed to the safe room door which was starting to open. As the door started to open, he barged inside. I could hear Marcus laughing, but he clearly didn’t know that we were here.

“I see you managed to survive then. Shame.” He snarked. Then the laugh that came out of him just gave me the chills. “She’s not here. She hasn’t been here for years.”

I looked at Dom and he rose his eyebrows in surprise. We both jumped to our feet and rushed into the safe room. Marcus was stood over Wyatt cackling like some maniacal super villain. Wyatt was on his knees on the floor in the corner of the room. There were shackles attached to the wall which were laying empty on the ground. Wyatt was holding one of the shackles and weeping, which made Marcus laugh even louder.

“What the fuck is going on in here?” Dom shouted, as we both stood there and took in the scene in front of us. “What have you done Marcus?”

Marcus whipped around to face us with a snarl. He half shifted as he turned, his claws lengthening from his hands. I braced for a fight, but Dom was clearly ahead of me and magic shot out of him, hitting Marcus square in the chest. I hadn't even heard him whisper the incantation which made me suspect that he had started it before we even got into the room. As soon as the magic hit Marcus he went down. He hit the floor hard and I saw Dom smile at the noise of Marcus' head hitting the concrete floor. Wyatt just sat on the ground, tears rolling down his face as he watched us in shock.

“What do we do now?” I said in shock, staring down at Marcus' unmoving body. He was still breathing, which was good, I suppose. But he was going to be so pissed when he woke up.

“I suggest that we tie him up.” Dom said sternly looking around him.

“Wait, no! What have you done?! He ... “ The words seemed to get stuck in Wyatt's throat and he just gesticulated at the nightmare corner of the safe room where the shackles were attached to the wall. He groaned in frustration.

Dom grabbed hold of Wyatt by the shoulders and shook him slightly. “Wyatt! She is already gone. He has already done something to her.” He

pointed out.

“Who is ‘her’?” I shouted. Dom and Wyatt both ignored me as they grabbed Marcus’ body and hauled him into a nearby chair.

I went over to the corner and squatted down. The shackles were made of iron and there was hardly any give in them. I doubt that you would be able to stand on your feet if these were attached to your wrists. There was no lingering scent of anyone in the corner, but if whoever had been held here had been gone for a couple of years, it was unlikely that it would be lingering around. Who had he been keeping in here? I looked around me as if I was going to find the answer. I couldn’t think of any females who had gone missing from the pack, ever. That was something that would have been noticed. We only had eight females in the pack. Britt had died, taking us down to seven. We also had two female children but it couldn’t have been a child. I didn’t think. What was Marcus thinking? A shifter female was a rare and precious thing. Why would he lock one down here?

When I turned back around, Marcus was tied to the chair. Part of me wondered why we didn’t just put him in the shackles and give him a taste of his own medicine. He was starting to come to and he let out a low groan as he rocked his head to the side. Dom grabbed him by the hair and wrenched his head back. As Marcus’ eyes fluttered open a deep growl rumbled through his chest. He struggled against his bindings, before he finally relented and glared up at Dom who was still wrenching his head back by his hair.

“You dare to restrain me? As soon as I am free from this, I will gut you all.” He screamed, spittle flying from his mouth.

“Who was the girl Marcus?” Dom asked him in a low voice.

“She was just some slut. She got what she deserved.” He spat. Wyatt lost it and launched himself at Marcus. The chair fell to the side and Wyatt punched Marcus in the face, screaming his rage at him. Dom managed to grab hold of him and haul him off Marcus, but we left him lying on the ground, tied to the tipped over chair.

“Who was the girl Marcus?” Dom screamed at him. I think that he was starting to lose it. I couldn’t blame it. It seemed like every time we thought we were weathering what was coming, something else even shitter showed up.

Marcus just threw his head back and started to laugh hysterically. He didn’t answer the question.

“Don’t you even want to know what happened to the pack in the attack?” I asked him. I already knew the answer. He didn’t give a shit about the pack anymore. The only thing he cared about was himself. He proved that when he sent Wyatt out to murder his own son.

Marcus didn’t even answer me. He just stared at me with a big shit eating grin on his face.

“Nearly all of the men are dead. Only twelve of the pack guard survived.” I screamed.

Marcus just shrugged. “We have six of age females. Now that the surplus of men are gone it will be easier for the pack.”

I reeled back like he had slapped me. “You sent them to their deaths so there would be less men to share the females? What if they aren’t their mates? What if they don’t want to mate with anyone here?”

Marcus just scoffed. “They will mate with who I tell them to.”

I didn’t even see him move, but before anyone could do anything about it, Dom pulled back his foot and kicked Marcus square in the face. His nose exploded in blood and his head snapped back. He slumped to the ground unconscious and we left him there, tied to the chair, in a rapidly growing pool of his own blood.

Wyatt had slumped down to the ground in the corner, next to the shackles. He was holding his head in his hands and weeping again. I heard a shuffle over by the door and spun around in panic. We couldn’t have anyone walk in on this, not until we knew what we were going to do. Frannie’s head popped around the door. We had lost sight of her after everything went down with Octavia. She was always just popping up at random moments. She looked around the room with wide eyes. When she took it all in, she giggled like a school girl, but then she sobered and shuffled across to Wyatt. She sank down to her knees beside him and pulled him against her. At first he jerked back, we had after all watched her chewing on a human ear only yesterday, but she whispered soothing words to him and he soon sagged against her and wept. Sometimes it was harder to see Frannie during her lucid moments. Madame Nines’ theory was that it was power of premonition that had chipped away at her sanity. But when you saw her during one of those rare lucid moments, it drove home just how much she had lost to be able to tell us about what could possibly be coming. I don’t know how Madame Nines coped seeing her sister like this. Maybe that was why she moved to the academy in the end.

Frannie soothed her hand over Wyatt’s hair and he sat back and looked at her. “You are not crazy.” She told him. “Sane, sane, sane.” She told him, tapping him on the head to drive each word home.



Wyatt cocked his head to the side, not quite understanding what she was trying to say. “She must still live.” Frannie said seriously, nodding her head.

Wyatt swiped under his eyes and nodded solemnly and that was when I finally understood. When I finally understood what Marcus had done. “He took your mate.” I said in shock.

He looked over at me and just nodded. The curse must still be in place, even though it was pointless now. I looked over at Dom. I had no idea what to do and this seemed more like his sort of thing. Dom stared down at the unconscious Marcus.

“Put him in the chains. We should call a meeting with what is left of the pack and let them know what he has done. Then you need to decide as a pack what needs to be done.” Dom told Wyatt. Wyatt slowly climbed to his feet with Frannie fussing around him. “Frannie, your sister is worried about you, I think you should return home and make sure that she is okay.”

Frannie rolled her eyes, but then she skipped out of the safe room, hopefully heading for home. All that was left was for us to do was to tell the pack that, not only their Alpha, but also their Prime Alpha, had betrayed them and then we still needed to deal with the dead from yesterday.

## Chapter Five

### Aria

After my fight with mama-jama, I seemed to have won the respect of the warriors. Britt assured me that I didn't need it, but it was always good to make your own way in the world. Britt had left to go and celebrate with some of the other warriors and she had told me that she would meet up with me later tonight at the feast. We had gone back to our cottage with Geta to discuss what was happening in the magic realm.

"Do you get any news about what is happening in the other realms?" Kyle asked her first. It was a good question, at least we would know how far back we needed to go.

"No, once the doors the sealed, all contact with the other realms stopped." Geta sighed. It must have been really hard for them being shut in here. I mean, they didn't even have Netflix!

"Okay, so this is going to be a long story." Kyle said. "We need to start nearly a hundred years ago. Demons invaded the magic realm."

Geta suddenly sat up straight. "What? That is unacceptable, Hel is supposed to keep the demons to the underworld. Odin would not have allowed this." She said, clearly upset but for reasons completely separate to our own.

"I'm sorry, I'm going to need you fill in some blanks for me." I told her. "Who is Hel?"

“Hel is the goddess who rules over Helheim, the underworld. She is the only goddess who was allowed outside of Asgard before the gates were sealed.” Geta told us. She sat back in her chair and steepled her fingers in front of her face. “She was always a trouble maker. Always wanting more than her due. But what can you expect from a family like hers?” Okay there was clearly more to the backstory here, but personally I didn’t want to go anywhere near it.

“Okay, well if you think that’s bad, it’s about to get a whole hell of a lot worse.” I told her. I cuddled up next to Sykes who was sat on the sofa beside me and curled my feet up under me. Might as well get comfy because this was going to be one hell of a long story.

Kyle looked at me and I gave him the nod to continue. “Okay, well the demons came into our realm. It is believed that they were trying to find a way through to the human realm, but I doubt anyone really knows for sure. The magic realm was in chaos. People were dying, but none of the races could get along for long enough to be able to fight together. That was until the Fae stepped up.” Kyle gave a nod of respect to Virion who just sat quietly with a stony expression on his face. My heart broke for him. This was essentially the story about how he had lost his mother, although I didn’t think that Kyle was aware of that. He saw me looking at him and he gave me a soft smile.

*“Don’t worry about me.”* He whispered into my mind. *“All of this is past history. It is what is happening now, that we need to worry about.”*

*“I can feel your sorrow.”* I whispered to him.

He nodded. *“It is a part of me. It always will be. But that doesn’t mean that I cannot find happiness in my life as well.”* He was stronger than I think I

gave him credit for.

“The Fae made a deal with the angel race and they fought back the demon army. It all came to a head in the last battle. It was expected that they would be able to push the demons back through the portals to the underworld. But something went wrong. We don’t know what happened, but the angels turned their backs on the Fae. They never came. It was a massacre. The demons outnumbered the Fae greatly and none of the races came to their aid. But they pushed through and against all of the odds they forced the demons back through the portals. They were nearly wiped out in the process, but they were victorious. After that the Fae pulled out of the magic realm. They were given access to somewhere else to live by one of the gods.” Kyle looked grim by the end of the story. It was after all a story which ended in the near destruction of an entire race. It was also a period of time which the other races should be ashamed of. I still did not understand why they would not have stood up and fought for themselves.

“But this was many years ago?” Geta asked.

“Yes,” Kyle told her. “But they have come back. The demons have started to push through into the magic realm again. We don’t know how they are getting through. Our headmaster believed that someone on our side was assisting them, but we don’t know why. There is no army strong enough in the magic realm to stand against them. The Fae have never recovered from the initial battle. No one has ever seen an angel again. When Aria was sent into our world, one of our seers believed that she would be able to swing the tide of the war and find a way to defeat the demons.”

“Hel would not be able to open a portal to transport the demons, it would indeed take someone opening a portal on this side to do that. She does have the ability to create portals for travel but only for herself. Still, there is nothing that goes on in Helheim that she is not aware of. If demons are escaping into your realm, she must know.” Geta said in thought.

We all looked around sheepishly. The next part just felt weirdly awkward. How exactly did you tell someone that you expected them to ride into a battle to fight an army of demons for you?

“Anyway, you need an army to push back these demons again?” Geta said cautiously.

“Yes. We need your help. There are others who have stayed behind to try and rally fighters in the realm, but we have no contact with them. We don’t know if there will be anyone to fight beside you. We know that the Fae cannot assist. They are on the brink of extinction and we cannot ask it of them again.” I told her.

Geta turned to me with a vicious grin on her face. “It will do you no good to just push these demons back. They will just look for another way to return again. No, you need to wipe them out and make an example out of them to those who would stand against you. This will be a glorious battle and we will ride beside you.” She nodded resolutely with her broad grin and an excited gleam in her eye. I was questioning whether she might be a bit psychotic, but I suppose an army of psychopaths might be just what we needed. “How long do we have?” She asked.

“Until the Blood Moon, just over four weeks.”

“That is not much time.” Geta said thoughtfully. “You have much to do before then.” That was an understatement if I ever heard one.

“We will stay here for two more days, then we will start out to find Odin. We need to do some of our own training. We haven’t had much opportunity to fight as a team and I would like to spend a few days making sure that we can work well together.” I told her. It was the only excuse that I could come

up with on the spot. In reality I wanted to work more with Kyle, it could be the only opportunity that we had to do any more training before we went back to the pack and I had yet to break it to him that he was going to have to challenge and face his father. The guilt was eating me alive and I was not looking forward to the conversation which we were going to need to have.

Geta nodded at me thoughtfully, but I could see that the guys were looking between themselves in question. "*We will talk about it later.*" I whispered in my mind to all of them.

We spent some more time with Geta going through the numbers of the Valkyrie and the Warriors. She went through their training regime with me, but I told her that I was more than happy with them continuing as they were. They obviously knew what they were doing and they had spent centuries perfecting it. I was a child compared to them. In fact, I'm pretty sure that they could show me a thing or two. After an hour or so, Geta left us so that she could help to prepare for the feast tonight. I'm not sure what she thought we were going to do.

When I looked up, I realised that the guys had sat back down and were looking at me expectantly.

"Oh, we're going to do this now then?" I asked.

Kyle gave me one of those looks that said 'are you being serious right now', and Sykes just laughed and pulled me against him again.

"I made Wyatt a promise that I wouldn't tell you, but I don't think that this is something that I should be keeping from you. I think you need to know." I looked at Kyle. This was for him after all. I could feel his hurt coming through our connection. "Don't think badly of him Kyle, you will understand when I explain."

Kyle nodded at me but he stayed quiet.

“We were right, that your father held something over him to stop him from challenging Marcus for the position of Alpha. He has his mate, Kyle. Marcus has had someone place some spell or something on him so that he can’t speak about it. And he can’t make a move against your father, or he will kill his mate.” I told him quickly.

Kyle looked shocked. “All these years?” He muttered.

“He begged me to kill him, Kyle. He said that he would rather die than have to kill you.” I told him.

“But that would have driven his mate mad.” Liam said.

“I think he’s given up hope of ever getting her back. I don’t know, maybe he thought that it was better than whatever is happening to her right now.” I shrugged. There was no way that I could know his reasons. If it was me, there would be nothing that would keep me from my mates, but I didn’t know Wyatt’s circumstances and maybe this was a don’t judge what you don’t understand kind of situation.

Kyle was just sat very still with a stony expression on his face. I suppose it’s still hard being presented with the evidence that your Dad is a terrible person, even if you did grow up knowing that he was a dick.

“That’s not everything.” I hesitantly said. Kyle’s head snapped up to look at me and I almost winced. “Wyatt wants you to challenge your father when you get back. I told him I would train you.” I added with a wince.

“We already knew that he would need to do that.” Sykes said giving me a squeeze. “Marcus sent Wyatt out to kill us because Kyle’s grown too strong. He won’t just let us walk back into the pack.” He added.

I hadn’t thought of that. Weirdly, it made me feel better. All this time I thought that I had volunteered Kyle to challenge his Dad. It was still all kinds of fucked up that he was going to have to do it. But at least I wasn’t going to be forcing him into it.

“That’s why you told Geta that we are staying for two days. You want more time training with me.” Kyle said, weirdly with a smile.

“I’m not sure why that makes you so happy.” I said suspiciously.

“It’s just nice to have someone worry about me. I don’t think that you need to worry about it though. There is a reason why my Dad always sends Wyatt out to deal with his problems. He’s got complacent and he’s untrained.” Kyle told me.

We all sat around just looking at each other for a moment. This was not as big a deal as I had thought it was going to be.

“So, everything is okay?” I asked looking around the four of them. Somehow this seemed like one of those situations where the other shoe was about to drop. They were all just sat back relaxed. Not one of them looked even remotely annoyed.

“Why wouldn’t everything be okay?” Kyle laughed. “We’ve just got to persuade some gods to open the gates, defeat an army of demons and kill my father.”



Okay, I'm not sure if he's being serious or not. I glanced across at Liam and he was just sat on the sofa with his head leaned back and his eyes closed. Sykes was flicking through a book that he had found on the shelves in the sitting room. When I caught Virion's eye, he just gave me a shrug. I wasn't all that sure what to do.

*"Is Kyle seriously okay with this?"* I whispered into Liam and Sykes' minds, making sure to include Virion.

*"He's fine kitten."* Liam said, before standing and stretching up tall. His shirt rode up and I was gifted with the sight of his toned stomach. He looked down at me with a grin. "Come and have a nap with me kitten." He purred. Now that was an idea that I could get on board with.

I hopped up to my feet so fast that I nearly dislodged Sykes from the sofa beside me. He laughed and grabbed my hand, climbing to feet as well.

"I think I'm going to join you for that nap." He said pulling me along by the hand.

I looked over my shoulder to make sure that Virion and Kyle weren't feeling left out. I just found them both talking and Virion offering to train with him outside. They both seemed happy and Kyle was quick to take him up on his offer. I was glad that the guys were bonding so well and that there weren't any tensions from Virion joining the group. Sykes tugged on my arm and pulled me out of the room. I turned back around only to find him rolling his eyes at me.

"You can trust them to play nice together. You need to stop worrying about everything all of the time." He told me as he pulled me into the bedroom which the guys had stayed in that night.

Liam was already lying on the bed. He'd stripped down to just his boxers and was lounging across the top of the covers. Sometimes I could see that big cat inside Liam from his mannerisms and the way that he moved. Sometimes he seemed to prowl about and for some reason it was incredibly sexy when he did. He smiled over at me standing there staring at him like at dumbass. When Sykes stripped down and joined him on the bed it was like someone had laid out a man buffet just for me. I mean, how did they make guys so hot around here? I was one lucky little stray to have been tossed into this world and have these men falling all over themselves to be with me. I knew that we are mates and it was meant to be, but I still feel like one lucky bitch more often than not. I must have been taking too long admiring the sight before me because Sykes pulled the pillow from behind his head and whipped it at me. I caught it before it could hit me square in the face and hurled it straight back at him. His reflexes weren't quite as quick as mine and it hit him in the face making him fall back on the bed with an 'oomph'. I strolled over to the bed, pulling my clothes off as I went. Once I was stood at the bottom of the bed, I was just wearing my underwear. I crawled up the bed and settled down in between Liam and Sykes. Liam leant up on one elbow and looked down at me, pushing my hair behind one ear with his free hand.

“There was another reason why I asked you to join me, Aria. There's something that we wanted to talk to you about.” Liam told me. Sykes' head snapped up and my stomach just about dropped at the same time. That couldn't be a good sign.

Liam cleared his throat and shuffled uneasily in his seat. “We love you very much Aria.” He started. I blinked my eyes quickly and willed myself not to cry. This seemed to be one of those ‘it's not you, it's us' kind of conversations.

“But Sykes and I ... well,” he looked at Sykes as if to ask for his help, but he just frantically shook his head and refused to speak. “Well, we love each other as well.” Liam finished with a cringe.

“Oh, okay” I whispered. “I understand.” I shuffled on the bed, suddenly feeling awkward for having stripped off most of my clothes and climbing in here. I tried to slide off the bottom of the bed. I was willing myself not to cry. This was the problem with finally opening up your heart. It was so easily crushed. I was kicking myself for not just staying alone. I was stupid to have fallen for the whole mate story. But then, I just bit them both, I didn’t talk it through with them, I just did it. Of course, this wasn’t going to be forever. People like me don’t get forever. I took a deep breath to try to stop the tears but as I did, I felt the rip in my chest as my heart broke. It actually hurt, it was like I could feel it physically rip apart. I quickly shut the connection down between the three of us, not wanted to make this situation any worse. I could feel my magic rolling around in my chest and quickly realised that it was the cause of the increasing burn I was feeling. It had always been linked with my emotions before, but this seemed different.

I only made it about half way down the bed before Sykes grabbed me and hauled me back against his chest. He buried his head in my neck and whispered. “Please don’t go. Don’t leave. Let us explain.”

“You don’t need to explain, I get it. You guys have been together for a long time. I’m sorry, I should have asked. I should have talked to you before I forced the mating mark on you. It’s okay really.” I couldn’t hold the tears back by the end of it and they started to fall down my cheeks. Sykes couldn’t see me crying, but he wouldn’t have been able to feel my sorrow with the connection closed. Liam was still facing me though and he looked absolutely devastated. I suppose he hadn’t realised I was going to make a fool of myself and cry like an idiot. The pain in my chest was spreading. It felt like knives were stabbing into me and being dragged across my body slicing me open. It didn’t feel right, it didn’t feel like my magic. My breath was coming in sharp pants as the pain surged over me. I wanted to tell Liam that something wasn’t right but the sudden pain had stolen my breath away and I couldn’t get the words to come.

Kyle suddenly came bursting through the door with Virion. “What’s happening?” He asked. He bent over at the waist, panting and rubbing at his chest. He took in the sight in front of him, of the three of us laid on the bed. Sykes holding on to me while I was a crying mess. Virion had dropped down to one knee beside Kyle and was clutching at his chest as well.

Liam sat up and looked over at the both. “What’s wrong?” He asked them.

Kyle looked from me to Liam and back again. “It’s Aria. It’s coming from Aria.” He panted frowning, probably because he couldn’t understand why Liam was questioning it.

Liam frowned down at me and I turned my face away from him. I felt almost ashamed. I couldn’t believe that now Kyle and Virion were going to be spectators to this. It was so humiliating. They were only trying to tell me that they wanted to be with each other and I had turned it into this massive thing. It wasn’t their fault that I was acting like this. Turned my head made the pain surge up into my neck, almost like it was offended that I was trying to move. Something really wasn’t right and it suddenly didn’t feel like it was my broken heart.

Liam gently took my face in his hands and angled it towards him. “Why can’t I feel it?” He asked me. I just shook my head. I was barely keeping it together right now. The pain had taken my ability to talk, even if I wanted to, but I didn’t want to make any more of a fool of myself.

Liam looked across at Kyle and Virion who were trying to but failing to stand back up and were still clutching at their chests like something was physically hurting them. I hated that it was my magic that was doing this to them and I needed to try and help. There had to be something that I could do. I tried to shut down my other connections, but it was like it was stronger now that it was only going to the two of them. It was as if what should have been going to Liam and Sykes was just being diverted to them, making it

even stronger. I managed to get a hold on the connection I had with Virion and I clamped it down, but now that I knew what it could do to Kyle, I held as much as I could inside so it wouldn't hurt him more.

As soon as the connection severed with Virion, he sighed in relief, but then his eyes widened in panic. "No, Aria. Don't." He reached out to me and stumbled forward. He pulled me out of Sykes' arms and off the bed, huddling against me on the floor, pulling me into his lap. "You don't need to take it away from me." He whispered.

"What is happening?" Kyle gritted out between his teeth. He was still in pain and it was breaking my heart that I was the cause of it. He dropped down to the floor, clutching his chest, his teeth clenching tight as he tried to pant through the pain. My own pain was flaring hot and bright in my chest. It almost felt like it was mocking me. Like it was punishing me for holding the connections closed.

I tried to grip the connection that I had with Kyle, but it was too strong and it hurt too much. I couldn't pull it back from him.

"She is pulling back on the connection." Virion told Kyle. I snuggled into his chest seeking any kind of comfort that I could find. This was different to any other times that my magic had spiralled out of control. It felt like it was shredding my insides. I was pretty sure my brain was about to start boiling.

"I don't understand." Kyle grunted, coming to kneel beside us. He pulled me away from Virion and cradled me in his lap as he sat on the floor with his back against the bed. He held onto me a little too tightly but the change in my source of pain was a welcome distraction until my magic flared again, bitch slapping me back into paying attention to it. I gritted my teeth and tried my best not to scream.

“The pain,” Virion explained. “It’s coming from Aria. The reason why they can’t feel it, why I can’t feel it now, is because she has pulled the connection away from us.”

Sykes and Liam both dropped off the bed next to us. We were now all huddled together on the floor. It would probably look pretty ridiculous if someone walked in on us now.

“Aria,” Liam whispered. “I need to know how you feel. I need to understand what is happening?”

“What caused this?” Kyle asked him.

I wanted to speak with them, to tell them that it was alright but the amount of pain that I was holding away from them now was excruciating and I felt like my chest was simultaneously about to burst and was being crushed at the same time. It hurt to get what little breathe I could into my lungs. The tears just silently rolled down my cheeks. At this point, I was afraid to open the connection back up to anyone because I didn’t know how I was going to stop the pain from flooding out of me. My magic was starting to spiral inside me, reacting to my pain and distress. This whole situation was just spiralling out of control now.

“I ... we were just talking.” Liam stammered.

I wanted to scream ‘No’ at him, I couldn’t bare the thought that they would be blaming themselves for this. But the words wouldn’t come and all I could do was scrunch my eyes closed and keen against the feeling as my entire being was shredded from the inside out.

I pushed out of Kyle's arms with the last reserves of strength that I had and crawled out of his lap. He tried to pull me back to him, but I shook my head and pushed his hands away from me. I could see the hurt on his face, but I was about to lose control of my magic, there was only way that I could think of to try and release some and get some form of relief but I didn't want it to hurt him. I managed to crawl a few feet away from them before my wings burst out of my back and I collapsed to the ground with a grunt. It hurt so much and I was frantic to save them from the burden. I had no idea what was happening. I managed to pull some of the connection back inside me from Kyle.

"It's not as strong." He said rubbing against his chest.

"She's pulling on your connection." Virion told him.

I tried to get up on my hands and knees, but I couldn't push myself up. The guys tried to come over to help me, but I held out my hands to stop them, frantically shaking my head. The pain of my magic was starting to build again and I already knew that there would be no stopping it. I felt like a star on the verge of collapse.

Kyle's head snapped towards him. "What does that mean?" He asked.

"I'm not sure, I haven't known anyone with a true mating bond. She is holding her feelings back from the bond, closing us out of the loop. I believe that she is trying to save us from the pain she is feeling." Virion said looking at me. I nodded slowly at him to let him know that he was right. It was the most that I could do. It was starting to hurt so much that my vision was going spotty if I wasn't so terrified of what would happen, I would be rushing towards unconsciousness as fast as I could.

I laid on the floor, my wings sagged on the ground around me. I could feel the slight flame running across their surface before it absorbed back into my body and ran through my veins again. The pain was excruciating but I didn't know how to stop it.

“Tell me exactly what happened.” Kyle said turning on Liam. “What started this? We need to know how to stop it before it does any permanent damage to Aria or the bond.”

Liam was looking at me, panic all over his face. It wasn't until Kyle took him by the shoulders and shook him that his eyes snapped away from me and to Kyle's face.

“I ... I only told her that we loved her, but that we also loved each other.” He whispered, his eyes flicking back to me.

Virion gasped, “You are breaking the mating with her?” He asked. His putting words to what I had originally thought made me feel stupid. Oh course that wasn't what was happening this was Liam and Sykes and we had something beautiful between us. I was ashamed that I could even have thought that originally and now they were going to blame themselves because I was pretty sure that I wasn't going to be able to survive whatever was happening and if I had somehow unintentionally triggered it with my own stupidity, I don't know how I could ever forgive myself for putting them through that.

The pain flared even higher and my magic reacted in kind as the flames surged from my back leaping into the air before being sucked back into my body. My back arched as it felt like the pain doubled inside me and I writhed on the ground. There was no holding back now. The tears streamed down my face. This didn't feel like my magic or the bond it felt like something else. I just didn't know what.



“No!” Sykes said in panic throwing himself at me. He pulled me into his arms and held me against his chest. I tried to push him away from me, I needed to protect him from the flames, but he only held on tighter to me, refusing to let me go. I held onto my magic as hard as I could. The only relief that I got from the pain was when the flames surged outside of my body, but I couldn’t let that happen when Sykes was holding onto me. My back bowed again as the pain raked against my nerves. Even if I did survive this, I knew that I would be forever changed. No one could make it through pain like this without some kind of consequences.

Liam’s face was suddenly in front of me as he cupped my face in his hands. “Aria, you have to listen to me. We don’t want to break the bond, we don’t want to leave you. We only wanted to know if you would be okay if we were together as well. If you don’t want that then, I promise you, I will never be with Sykes like that ever again. I can’t lose you kitten. I can’t. Please, please stay with us.” Tears streamed down his face as he looked into my eyes.

The tears were already flowing down my own face. I desperately wanted to tell him that I understood and that it wasn’t the bond that was the problem, it wasn’t their fault, but when I opened my mouth to try and speak, all I could do was scream.

Liam turned to Virion and pleaded. “How do we stop it? What do we need to do?”

“I don’t know.” He whispered. When I turned my head to look at him, I saw the tears streaming down his own face. It must be hard for him to watch this. We hadn’t had long enough together. There would never be enough time.

“You need to open up the connections again Aria.” I heard Kyle say. I couldn’t see him. The black around my vision was creeping in and it was getting harder to move. I needed to let the flames surge out of me to find some relief, but I couldn’t risk Sykes while he still held me. It was like I could feel myself slowly drifting away from the world. But with the blackness came a numbing sense of relief. The pain was so strong, it hurt so much. I wanted to just drift into the nothing to make it all stop.

“Please baby. I know you’re scared that it’s going to hurt us, but you have to trust us. You have to trust your mates. We are here to help you with the burden, Aria. Fate would not have gifted you to us if we weren’t strong enough. You have to open the connections again, I think it will stop the bonds from breaking.” Kyle pleaded with me.

I could hear his sorrow in his voice. I could hear his desperation. But the darkness was calling to me. It was showing me a way to release the pain without hurting them and by the time that I realised that leaving them would hurt them just as much, it was too late. I didn’t know the way back and I didn’t have the energy left in me to fight it anymore. The darkness wrapped me up in its cooling embrace and I just fell.

## Chapter Six

“You are a hard woman to track down.” I heard a voice say from somewhere in the darkness.

“Who’s there?” I called. “Where the fuck am I?” I said a little more forcefully.

“You need to open your mind child, open your mind and you will be able to see.” The voice told me. I could hear the laughter in its voice and it pissed me off that they were laughing at me.

Just as I was about to snap at them for being such a dick it was like the blackness lightened a bit and I could see the figure of a man stood in front of me. He had to be eight foot tall and he was loaded with muscle. He had shoulder length auburn hair and a long auburn beard which had been braided into a single plait. His golden eyes seemed to glitter in amusement to match the half smile that he had on his face. He wore brown leather clothes and a cape made of some kind of fur. I wasn’t stupid enough to not realise that a god stood before me.

“Ah, good. I thought it would take you longer than that.” He smiled at me. It was a kind smile and I didn’t feel in any kind of danger from him.

“Am I dead?” I asked him. I looked around me. Everything was still black, it was like we were just standing in nothing. I really hoped that this wasn’t where I was going to go when I died.

“No, this is the ether.” He told me, throwing his arms wide and turning in a circle. “It exists in the in between.” He told me, confusing me more.

“Why am I here?” I asked him suspiciously. I didn’t sense a danger vibe from him but that didn’t mean I was going to trust him. I took a half step back with my left foot so that I could drop into a defensive position more easily if I needed to.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” He told me. “I have been trying to overload your magic since you arrived, so that I could pull you into the ether and speak with you.”

“That doesn’t exactly fill me with trust.” I snarked at him. “Do you know how much that fucking hurt? I nearly set one of my mates on fire!”

He threw back his head and bellowed out a laugh. I was pretty sure if we were inside a building, the walls would have bowed from it. As it was, I felt my ears pop from the sudden pressure change. When he stopped laughing, we both looked at each, taking in the details.

“You’re a god.” I told him.

“I am.” He nodded. “You’re a Valkyrie.” He said back to me, like we were suddenly playing some kind of game that I didn’t know the rules to.

“Yeah, I know. Tell me something I don’t know.” I snarked back. It seemed pissy was my go to mood right now. It might have been because I went from a weeping, painfilled mess to this. Plus, I’m pretty sure that most of that was his fault. What must poor Liam and Sykes be feeling now? They must be blaming themselves, but really it was this guy’s fault.

“You’re my daughter.” He told me flatly.

At first, my mouth fell open in surprise. But then rather than words, laughter just bubbled out of me. Now it was my turn to just stand here and laugh. I’m not quite sure why I was laughing, I think the last ten minutes had probably just broken my mind a little.

“I’m not sure that it’s quite that funny.” He said looking a bit annoyed. “Most people would be flattered to find out that I was there father.”

I stopped laughing, making one of those weird ‘heeee’ noises that I hated when other people did it. I had just been sucked inside the ether by a god. It might not be a good idea to piss off the only person who could get me out of here.

“Why did you bring me here?” I asked him.

“You shouldn’t be here.” He started.

“You brought me here.” I snapped defensively.

“No,” he waved a hand at me. “Here as in inside Asgard.” He took a step towards me and I squinted my eyes at him in suspicion. He held up his hands like he was trying to calm down a wild animal and slowly closed the distance between us. One of my hands dropped down to my knives sheathed at my thigh, but I made no move to pull it free. It was more like a safety blanket. Knowing it was there always made me feel better.

“It is not safe for you in Asgard.” He told me. “You were conceived against Odin’s decree and he has punished your mother for it ever since. I have not been able to reach her to free her.” He looked sad as he told me this.

I raised my free hand and placed it gently on his shoulder as his head fell to his chest. “I have failed her. I promised that I would keep you safe. I smuggled you into the human world, believing that you would be safe there. I was stupid and arrogant. I thought that I would be able to rescue your mother and that we would come and find you together. But I was never able to reach her. And look at you now. You’re a full grown woman. Time moves quicker here, but I had no idea of the amount of years that I had lost with you.”

He looked up and his eyes met mine. It was in that moment that I knew that he was telling me the truth. He was my father, and he was truly sorry for not having been with me through my childhood. It was fairly obvious really. He had the same hair as me. The gold of his eyes were no doubt what caused the flecks in mine. I hesitantly put my arms around him and hugged him. This was a new thing to me, but it felt right in the moment. Especially when he brought his arms up and held me too.

“I have to go to Odin and get him to open the gate to Valhalla.” I told him as I pulled away from our slightly awkward hug. “I need the Valkyrie army to fight with me in the magic realm.”

He nodded quietly for a moment. “I have seen what is happening and you are right that you need them. But Odin will not open the gate for you. Just standing in front of him is a danger that you cannot afford.”

“But I am the Phoenix General and the army is mine to lead.” I told him sternly. I needed to embrace my heritage and now was the time to start. These were my people, I had felt it from the start. I didn’t know what my place would be with them in the future. But there had been a prophecy about this. That had to mean something.

He smiled broadly at me. "I am so proud of you." He said shaking his head. "I know that I can't stop you and I can equally tell that you will do what you wish no matter what I say. When you go to Odin you cannot give him reason to believe that you are my daughter. If he realises, he will punish you the same way that he did your mother. He is very dangerous Aria, he is not fully in his right mind."

"I don't even know who you are." I told him.

"It's better that way for now. Do what you must and I will see if I can find another way in the meantime. When the time comes, I will find you again." He said grimly.

"Can you do it in a less painful and terrifying way next time please?" I snarked.

He laughed at me again. "I will try. Now when you return to your body, you will need to reopen those connections child, otherwise the backlash of your magic returning with you could sever those mating bonds of yours. You were brave to try and protect them like that." He said patting me on my shoulder. "But they need to be strong, share this with them. They need the push to spark the magic within themselves."

"How exactly am I going to ..." but I didn't have time to finish my sentence as he shoved me backwards and I felt the sensation of quickly falling.

## Chapter Seven

### Kyle

As I held Aria's lifeless body in my arms it was like the whole world suddenly stood still. I didn't know what to do. One minute she had been writhing in pain and I was begging her to open the connections again. Then she just stopped. All four of us were just staring at her, as I clung to her in my arms. It couldn't end this way, it couldn't end because of some stupid misunderstanding.

Virion held onto one of Aria's hands and had it cradled against his face. His eyes were closed, but the tears still poured down his cheeks. Liam was knelt on the ground away from us. It was like he didn't dare touch her, but he couldn't pull his eyes away from her. Sykes was just rocking on the spot, his hands covering his face. I knew without having to see that they hid the same tears we were all crying.

My wolf was surprisingly calm and I knew that was not what was supposed to be happening. In fact, he was supposed to be so overcome by grief that he would rip my sanity away from me.

"My wolf is calm." I muttered to no one in particular. No one responded and I think that they had fallen too far into their own grief to be able to react. I reached across and grabbed hold of one of Sykes' wrists and pulled his hand away from his face so he would look at me. "My wolf is calm." I told him again.



Sykes screwed his face up in confusion and then he confirmed. “Mine is as well.”

We both looked down at Aria. I pushed my fingers against her pulse point and waited. It was so still that for a moment I thought that I must have lost touch with my own wolf, but then I felt it. One faint beat and then nothing. The guys must have realised what was happening as I suddenly sat up straighter and concentrated waiting for that next beat. It was so far apart that I was worried I had imagined it, but it came again faintly a minute or so later.

“Her heart still beats.” I sighed. “It’s faint and far apart, but it’s definitely there.”

Liam and Sykes both sagged in relief, but Virion didn’t drop her hand. He stared at her face as if he could will her awake.

“Can any of you still feel her?” Virion whispered.

I had still had a partial connection to her when she had collapsed back and stopped breathing and I had felt her presence fall away from my mind. I hadn’t realised how I had grown so used to feeling her there until it was gone. I closed my eyes and searched my mind, but there was nothing there now. Not a trace of her. It would have torn my heart out had my wolf not been quietly lounging in the back of mind. He was completely relaxed. He didn’t even sense that his mate was in any kind of trouble. It was almost as if he was rolling his eyes at me for even considering it.

“No, she’s completely gone.” I heard Sykes whisper at the same time that Liam said, “This is all my fault.”

I reached out for him and took his hand. It would usually be Sykes that did this, but I didn't want to give Liam the opportunity to push him away. He would. I knew him well enough to know that. He was going to blame himself and push Sykes away thinking that was the cause to all of this.

“You don't know that.” I told him. “We've all felt Aria's magic spiral out of control before. We don't know what could have caused it. But usually, her magic only flares when there is danger or she's getting ready for a fight.”

We all knelt there on the floor staring down at our beautiful unconscious mate. She was the best thing that had happened to us. I know that she felt like she had dragged us into this fight with her, but if we were being honest the war would have started with or without her. If anything she had saved us. If she hadn't been training us, we never would have made it out of the academy. She was the only hope that we had. She was the only hope that the entire realm had, they just didn't know it. But it was more than that, she was the part that completed us. She was everything to us. She was also evidence that what we had originally thought, that fated mates stayed within species, was wrong. If the knowledge of our little mixed pack of mates spread, maybe we would see more support growing between each of the races. Maybe this was what could unite us.

As I ran through the possibilities in my mind, I must have stopped truly looking at Aria, because I heard Sykes gasp from beside me. “Her eyes moved.” He said, leaning forward to look more closely at her. “I'm sure her eyes moved.”

I pressed my fingers against her pulse point again, her pulse was still weak, but I think it was faster than before. I watched Aria's face more closely and then I saw it too. Her eyes moved behind her closed lids and we all sighed in relief. When she groaned a little and her eyes fluttered open, I thought my heart was about to stop. I almost didn't dare to breath.

Aria looked around us all before quietly saying. “You are all going to so hate me.”

Then there was nothing, but white hot pain. It didn't just come from Aria, it was inside me as well. I felt the magic burn as it ran through my veins. All of us collapsed backwards to the ground. I pulled Aria to me and held her tightly against my chest. I didn't dare let her go. I could hear the other guys writhing on the ground. If they were feeling what I was, it was nearly impossible to breath let alone make any noise. Is this what Aria felt, every time her magic overloaded her? As blackness crept in around the edges of my vision, my heart dropped for her. Had she been suffered this all this time? Unconsciousness swept in and I gladly let it take me, but I didn't release my hold on my beautiful mate.

## Chapter Eight

### Caleb

The pack was gathered outside of the pack house waiting for us to speak. The Elites and Trent's old pack were stood behind us, silently offering us their support. It had taken a long time for us to take the bodies of our fallen down to the basement, but we wanted to clear the bodies before the children saw them. There were so many that we had to lay them out along the floors of the whole basement. Not just our make shift morgue. We made sure to avoid the safe room, no one wanted to lie any of our fallen anywhere near Marcus, let alone the corner where he had been holding some poor woman prisoner for years. We wouldn't sully their memories like that. Overall, we had forty-six bodies that we were going to need to send on to their next life. Part of me wished that Aria was here. I had always wondered if there actually was another life to go to, but after seeing her pull Britt's spirit out of that pyre, it would have been nice to guarantee that for those who had lost their lives here. I knew that there would be talk of waiting for her to get back, but that could be weeks away and we didn't have anywhere to store the bodies. The Blood Moon was in three weeks. Hopefully they would make it back by then.

The pack was shifting restlessly around, everyone was still in shock, but they had noticed that Marcus was missing. When Wyatt dragged him out of the front door, gagged and still in chains, throwing him at their feet, it was chaos. Several of the pack guard and even some of the women shifted and started to growl. The others just stood confused behind them. No one advanced on us, which I was going to take as a good sign for now. Either that or they weren't ready to challenge the Elites behind us. I never thought that Aria's little training group was going to be as successful as it was. It

was widely accepted now that they were the better fighting force among us. They truly were our Elites.

I stood firm next to Dom, with my arms crossed and my feet spread wide. I would not risk him here for a misunderstanding. Wyatt was still under the effects of the curse so it was down to Dom to explain what was happening to the pack. He took a step forward and I mirrored his movements, staying close by his side. I saw his eyes flick across to me. I was probably annoying him with over protectiveness but at this point, I didn't care.

“I am sure that this is a great shock to you, but I ask that you hear us out before you make any decisions. It has come to our attention that Marcus has committed crimes against the pack. We have subdued him for now and we have brought him before you so that you can decide, as a pack, what needs to be done.” Dom explained.

“That might be how you mages do it, but this is not the pack way.” One of the guard shouted, shifting back into his human form. “If you have a problem with the Alpha then you challenge him. Only the strongest is fit to run the pack.”

“You need to hear this.” I told him calmly. “Once everything has been explained, if you stand by that, we will let him go.” I hoped that they made the right choice because otherwise when we let Marcus go, he was going to have them rip us apart.

The guard looked down at Marcus and I could see the reluctance cross his face, but then he looked me in the eye and nodded once. All of the other shifted wolves changed back into their human form and waited.

“Marcus is charged with committing crimes against the pack. He has had a curse placed on Wyatt to prevent him from speaking out and as a means to

ensure his compliance, had his fated mate locked in chains in the basement.” Gasps rang out around the pack and every head turned to Marcus. His eyes were stony and hate glared out of them. He wasn’t even trying to pretend that he was innocent. “He has admitted that he sent the untrained male members of the pack out to fight the demons so that they would be killed. It was his plan to lower the number of males in the pack so that he could force the females to mate with those remaining.”

I’m man enough to admit that if the vicious growls that tore out of the women had been aimed at me, I would have probably shit my pants. Marcus didn’t even look like he cared, if anything he still seemed to regard the women as beneath him. The pack guard shifted uneasily and I kept my eye on them. Some of them may be swayed by the idea that they could be given a mate out of all of this.

The guard who had spoken out before, spoke again. “He is the Prime Alpha because he is the strongest amongst us. There has not been an Alpha in decades that could match him. I agree that what he has done is wrong, but without a strong Prime how will we survive as not just a pack, but also as a species?”

“There is another who is stronger.” Wyatt said stepping forward. “Kyle has forged a bond with his mate which is stronger than any which has been seen in decades. He can mind speak with his pack. They all can. He forced Isaac to shift back into a human.”

“It’s true.” Trent said coming to stand beside him. “I witnessed it with my own eyes.” He looked across at Dom who just nodded at him. “I pledged my pack to him and stepped down as Alpha.”

“If he is so strong then why didn’t he challenge Marcus and take the pack the proper way.” The guard asked, he was getting agitated and we needed to keep him on side. “Where is he?”

“Kyle has taken his pack on an important mission. The demons are coming for us again, they are going to invade our realm. We have it on good authority that the battle will take place on the Blood Moon. They have gone to seek aid. Our seer has said that Aria can raise an army that will lead us to victory.” Dom told them sternly. The guard at least seemed to think about this and I saw his gaze flick to the patch of bloody grass that we hadn’t been able to clean away.

“Marcus knew of the threat and chose to keep it all from you. He chose to do nothing. Even when there were demons roaming the area, he did nothing. Aria was the one who killed them. When Marcus learnt on Kyle’s strength, he ordered me to kill him and his pack.” Wyatt looked down at Marcus in disgust. “I met with Aria in the forest, we fought and she spared my life, even though she knew what I was there to do.” He looked away in shame. “There are things that he has made me do, despicable things. I deserve to be chained and on my knees before you, just as much as he does.” All this time I had wondered why Wyatt would do the terrible things that Marcus told him to and now I knew. He was just trying to save his mate. But I knew the man that Wyatt was and I didn’t think that he would ever be able to forgive himself.

The pack shifted uneasily. In the end it was Margie who spoke. “This is a shameful time in our history and one that we should not easily forget. If we survive as a people, we must be able to show the generations that come after us that we did the right thing. Marcus has brought shame on the pack and he does not deserve the position of honour which was granted to him. But Elias is right. This must be dealt with the pack way, Marcus must be challenged so that one who is worthy can take his place. We should hold him until Kyle returns and he must make the challenge.”

The pack all murmured their agreement. Heads were nodding, but more than one was asking what we were going to do now.

In the end it was Dom who suggested a solution. “As the long standing beta and second in charge, it should be to Wyatt to lead the pack until Kyle can return and issue the challenge.”

No one disagreed, but there were still some murmurs between the pack guard. Now would be the perfect time to seize control of the pack, but we had bigger problems to deal with her. I heard a sword being drawn behind me and I turned in panic thinking that the situation was about to escalate. Echo strode forward with her sword clasped in her hand. No one moved to stop her, but I could see the blood lust shine in a few of the pack guards’ eyes. She stopped in front of Wyatt then she dropped to one knee and held her sword out in front of her. With her head lowered to the ground she spoke. “I will pledge my sword to you and join you in this fight.”

All of the other Elites, Trent and his old pack followed suit. Down on one knee in front of him, they offered Wyatt their swords and pledged themselves to him. He turned to look at Dom and I with wide eyes. Dom offered him a nod and smile. I had nothing. I didn’t know what to do. This was so far beyond my previous job description of combat teacher.

“It would be my honour to fight beside you.” Wyatt told them. He looked up and surveyed the remnants of the pack before him. “The fight is coming, whether we want it or not. It is time for us to stand strong as a people. We need to call in the satellite packs and unite as one. We need to call out to all of the people who call themselves shifter, no matter their animal, no matter their sex. The old prejudices need to die here. Before you is a group who you all acknowledge as our Elites. Most of them are not wolves and most of them are women. We have three weeks to prepare and then we fight for our very existence.”

The pack roared in agreement. Wyatt would have been a good Alpha.



“Chain him back up in the basement.” He told me. Dom and I gladly scooped Marcus up off the ground and escorted him down to the basement, to secure him back in his chains. He didn’t struggle, he didn’t even attempt to speak to us. He just proudly walked himself there. I wouldn’t put it past him to have some plan up his sleeve. We needed to make sure that we kept a very close eye on him.

Once Marcus was secure and the door to the safe room was closed and locked, we went to meet with everyone in the library. The time lock on the door meant that it wouldn’t open for another twelve hours so we could rest safe that Marcus was at least contained until then.

When we arrived in the library we found Wyatt, Echo and Elias inside sat on the sofas. I noticed the empty desk and was glad that Wyatt hadn’t chosen to sit there. Madame Nines and Frannie came n shortly after us.

“We need a plan.” Wyatt told us. “I want the Elites to start training everyone, as many as possible, but we also need to get the word out to the satellite packs and other shifter packs.” He looked around us for suggestions.

Madame Nines was sat in one of the chairs with her hands crossed in her lap, Frannie was dancing around the room, stopping to look at different things as she went.

“I suppose we could send some fire messages out, but I think that we really need to send them in person if they are going to take us seriously.” Madame Nines sighed.

“We don’t have time to send people out.” Wyatt said, leaning back in his seat with a frown. He clasped his chin in one hand as he thought. “We need to start training straight away. We also need to find enough weapons to arm

everyone. We have seen the devastation of meeting these demons in battle with just our animals.”

“Already coming, already coming.” Frannie sang as she twirled in front of the window and then stepped over to the bookcase and started routing through the books.

We all turned to watch her in confusion and then glanced at Madame Nines. She was the best Frannie interpreter after all. She sighed and then stood up, walked over the fireplace and lit a fire. Frannie giggled in glee when she saw it and bounced on the spot clapping her hands. Madame Nines patting the chair in front of the fire and Frannie slipped into it with a sigh, turning to stare into the flames. I had seen her do this so many times. I didn’t realise that it was Madame Nines’ way of calming her.

“What have you done Frannie?” She asked her, perching on the arm of the chair.

“Called the soldiers, come, come, come.” She sang.

Wyatt stood from his chair and walked over to kneel in front of Frannie. “When did you do this?” He asked her. “How do you know they will come?”

Her eyes flicked between Wyatt and the fire, like she couldn’t quite tear her attention from the flames. “When, when, when.” She muttered. “Time is strange ... flies, loops, repeats.” She said shaking her head.

Madame Nines put her hand on Wyatt’s shoulder and shook her head. “She can’t answer that question, she doesn’t experience time like you do. She sees it all at once, all the possibilities and all the changes. She experiences

every version, it's hard for her to know where she is in time and what version is even real.”

“Then how do we know that she did put out a call, that anyone will even come or when they will even get here.” Wyatt said in frustration.

Frannie did that god-awful thing where she thrust one hand in the flames and started to rummage around in it like it was an oversized handbag. Those of us who had seen it before weren't shocked anymore, maybe just a little grossed out. But poor Wyatt, Echo and Elias all cried out in alarm. Madame Nines managed to stop Wyatt from interfering and Echo and Elias were rooted to their seats in horror. Frannie huffed out a sigh of annoyance and rolled her eyes as she kept rooting around. Then she sat up and smiled pulling a folder out of the fire. She held it out to Wyatt who just looked between the folder and the fire. When he looked at Frannie's face she just pursed her lips and nodded seriously at him.

Wyatt took the folder from her and then quickly passed it from hand to hand, sucking in a breath and muttering “hot, hot, hot” much to Frannie's amusement.

Once he managed to get a grip of it, Frannie had lost interest and was back to staring at the fire. She had pulled her feet up into the chair and wrapped her arms around her legs, resting her chin on her knees. Madame Nines came back over to the sofas to sit with us, so Wyatt joined her. He flicked through the folder, reading the pages as he went.

“These are letters that go back weeks.” He said as he read through them. “They're all addressed to me.” He added raising his voice and flicking through.

Dom just laughed and even Madame Nines smiled. Frannie was such a conundrum, but I was damn glad she was on our side.

Wyatt passed the folder across to Dom and sat back in his chair. “So, it seems that a number of weeks ago, I asked all of the major shifter packs and the satellite packs to join with us in the fight. It looks like not only have most of them agree, but they are due to get here tomorrow.” Frannie just snickered by the fire and it was hard not to smile with her.

“We still have the problem of weapons.” I pointed.

“Apparently, I’ve sorted that out as well.” Wyatt said, at least he was smiling and seeing the humour in this. “The Felidae Pack in the South sits on our largest ore mine. They were commissioned some months ago to produce an order of weapons for us. They acknowledged receipt of our payment two weeks ago.” He looked over at Madame Nines in question and she just shrugged.

However Frannie had pulled this off, it was nothing short of a miracle. In fact, if you think about it, she had carefully weaved everything together, even sending Aria off to find us some more help.

“We will need to prepare for the other Packs arriving.” Wyatt said frowning in thought. “Echo, can you and the other Elites gather the women and see if we can prepare the cabins to house the other packs. Dom, Caleb and I will see what we can do about preparing any spare rooms in the pack house. Elias, I need you to send some of the pack guard out to hunt and see if we can get some game in. Madame Nines, could you see where we stand on the food situation. We are probably going to need some kind of temporary accommodation like tents and such if you have it in you.” He told her.

She cocked her head to one side in thought. “I think I can arrange something, but it may take a while for me to accumulate the energy to pull more than a couple at a time.”

“Whatever you can manage will be a great help.” Wyatt told her. “Let’s all meet back here at 8pm this evening. We’re going to need to draft some kind of training routine and a guard rota as well. I don’t want any more surprise demon attacks.”

Everyone got up and went about their allocated jobs and for the first time, we may have had a little bit of hope that we were going to make it through all of this.

## Chapter Nine

### Aria

My body felt like my muscles were on fire and I groaned and tried to roll on my side as I started to come too. I found myself rooted to the spot, but before I could panic, I realised that it was because a pair of arms were wrapped around my chest. I heard a groan come from behind me, but I couldn't tell which of the guys was holding onto me and my eyes were still a bit blurry.

“Aria.” I heard Liam groan.

I reached out my hands and felt two hands take them. The arms wrapped around me squeezed me tight and Kyle whispered in my ear. “I thought we lost you.”

I snuggled back against him and waited for my vision to start to clear. The blurry images in front of me holding my hands turned out to be Sykes and Virion. When I lifted my head and peered behind Kyle, I saw Liam lying on his back, rubbing his hands across his face.

“How are you guys feeling?” I croaked.

“I feel like someone set fire to my insides.” Sykes groaned.

“Is this what your magic feels like all the time?” Kyle asked me, squeezing me tighter.

“Yes.” I answered them honestly. “But it doesn’t usually get that bad.”

Everyone started to sit up, but we all kept a hand on each other. Apart from Liam, who stayed off to the side. Now that the connections were open again, I could feel his guilt and confusion. I let go of the other guys hands and crawled over to Liam. I felt the flicker of arousal run through him before it was crushed beneath his guilt again. I knew that what happened now was going to be important. He was so close to pulling away from me and I couldn’t lose him. I crawled into his lap, straddling him and cupped his face with both of my hands. Searching his eyes, I slowly lowered my lips, giving him chance to pull away if that was truly what he wanted to do. He didn’t move at all. When my lips met his, I opened our connection as wide as it would go and I pushed every bit of love and adoration that I had towards him. His arms slowly came up and then he suddenly crushed me to his chest and returned the kiss full force. When we finally broke apart, I ran my nose along his and whispered, “I love you too.”

Liam held me tight and buried his face against my neck. I felt his shoulders shaking and I realised that he was crying softly against me. I held onto him as tight as I could, reassuring him that I wasn’t going anywhere. Sykes quietly came up beside us and I opened up one arm for him to slide underneath. He snuggled in against us and held us both tight. We sat for a minute just holding each other, reassuring ourselves that none of us were going anywhere.

*“None of this was your fault.”* I whispered into both of their minds. *“I will explain everything in a minute, but I want you to know that first. My magic overloaded for a different reason. It was just terrible timing. I will admit that I did think that you were telling me that you didn’t want me anymore.”*

*But I know that I was wrong. I am so sorry that you just had to go through that.*” I squeezed them both to me tighter and they hugged me back.

*“You don’t need to apologise kitten.”* Liam whispered back to me. *“I should have thought through what I was going to say.”*

*“It’s okay. Things like this are probably going to happen when we have this many people in a relationship.”* I reassured them. *“But you should know, I already knew about you both and I don’t have any problem with you being together. As long as we love each other, it doesn’t matter how we show that love to each other. Although I will admit that I do want to be involved on a few of those occasions because the thought of you two together is sooooo hot.”* They both laughed, but I felt the arousal surge through our connection and I squirmed uneasily in Liam’s lap. He groaned in frustration, but then he slackened his hold on me and I leant back so that I could look him in the face. I swiped my thumbs under his eyes and wiped away his tears, dropping a kiss on the end of his nose. He gave me a soft smile and I climbed out of his lap so that we could all talk about what just happened.

Kyle and Virion were still sat on the floor behind us. I for one, did not feel like getting up anytime soon so I leant back against Liam and he wrapped his arms around me. Kyle was smiling at all of us. Being the Alpha, I knew he found it difficult if there was tension in the pack. He would be happy that we had worked it out without him having to intervene.

“Is everyone okay?” I asked them and they all nodded at me.

“What happened?” Kyle asked stretching his legs out in front of him and getting comfortable.

“My magic overloaded. I could see that it was hurting you and I pulled on the connections to try to save it from you. But ... I don’t even know how to



say this ... it was my father that overloaded it because he wanted to talk to me.” I said. If anything, I was a little confused about what had happened as well. I wasn’t going to chalk it up to a dream. I know that it had been real, it had just been weird. Story of my life really.

“Your father?” Virion said, cocking his head to the side in confusion. He looked so cute when he did it and I had the urge to laugh, but now really wasn’t the time.

“Apparently he’s a god. He overloaded my magic to pull me into the ether so that he could speak with me.” I explained.

Virion nodded. “I have heard of the ether. It is said to be the place the exists between realms.”

“Just going to brush past the fact that Aria’s father is god?” Sykes asked in surprise.

“I suppose when you think about it, it does make sense.” Kyle said. “We knew that someone powerful had to have crossed the realms to leave her in the human realm and we knew that her magic was stronger than anything we had ever seen. Plus, if her mother is a Valkyrie and they are locked here in Asgard, they don’t really have many other options for mate material.”

“You can’t honestly expect us to believe that you suspected her father was a god all this time.” Sykes said incredulously.

“No, I’m just saying that when you think about it, it does kind of make sense.” Kyle argued.

“Okay, can we just move past this point for now.” I said holding up my hands in an attempt to stop the bickering. “He said that he didn’t think that Odin will open the gates for us and apparently he has my mother locked up somewhere being punished for daring to have me. Oh and there was something about you guys needing magic or sparking magic or something.” I rubbed my temples trying to remember everything that had been said. My brain was feeling pretty fried.

“Okay, that’s a lot to take in. Let’s break it down.” Liam suggested. “So, he doesn’t think that Odin will help us.”

“Well that’s not news, Geta pretty much told us that already.” Sykes added.

We all nodded. “He said that I can’t let Odin suspect who I am or he will punish me as he had done my mother. It sounds like he’s basically a bit of a dick, but he did say that he’s also a little out of his mind.” I added.

“Okay, maybe let’s not call him a dick too loudly while we’re in this realm.” Liam cautioned lifting an eyebrow at me. “The last bit was that we need magic.”

“I’m pretty sure he said something about it sparking the magic in you.” I said scrunching up my face as I tried to recall his exact words. “We were talking about me opening the connections when I came back so that it didn’t damage the mating bonds. Then he said something about you needing to be strong and that it would spark the magic in you.” I was pretty sure that was right. Damn it, why didn’t I pay more attention at the time!

Virion looked at me with a small amount of pity on his face and it just made me more annoyed with myself. I hated that look on people. “Well for shifters, you have more magic than any others because you have established a bond allowing you to speak into each other’s minds. That is magic that

hasn't been seen in a long time." He said. "So maybe it's not too much of a leap to assume that you have something else."

"I think he was including you in that as well." I told him.

"Trust me, at my age I would have known if I had any other magic. The Fae have not seen advanced magic skills since we left and founded Galvinae." Virion told us.

"Wait, so when you left the magic realm you sacrificed your magic." I asked.

Virion nodded. "It was not intentional. We did not know that would be the price that we paid, but our magic lessened over time. We have reached a point where we still have our advanced healing and fighting skills but that is all."

"So, it wasn't just the witches that saw a drop in magic when the Fae left." I said thinking out loud. "What about the shifters? You mentioned that it had been decades since anyone had seen a true bond like ours where they could mind speak. Did that change at the same time?" I asked Kyle.

"I don't know. I wasn't alive then and my father is not one to broadcast what shifters have lost. I only heard tales of bonds as deep as ours from Margie and they were not something that we would have ever asked any questions about." Kyle said looking over at Liam and Sykes who just nodded in agreement with him.

"Anyway," Sykes huffed, "back to the issue at hand. Are we getting more magic?"

“Perhaps we’ve already started developing it.” Liam said thoughtfully before suddenly looking at Kyle. “You were always a strong Alpha, but you have never been able to force someone else to shift before. How did you know that you could do it the other day?”

“I don’t know, I just did. In fact, it was my wolf. He was enraged and he wanted to do it, so we did.” Kyle explained.

“When I first came to the academy you once told me that you could feel my magic. I didn’t understand what you meant because I couldn’t feel anything different from you. But recently I have been able to feel it. Like a buzz in the background. I assumed that it was just a side effect of the bond, but what if it isn’t. What if your magic is growing? Whether that is because of our bond or if it was always going to happen, doesn’t really matter right now.” I reasoned.

“Do I feel any different to you?” Virion asked me.

I looked at him intently and then I closed my eyes and concentrated. Could I feel anything different from them? I could still feel the same buzz surrounding the guys and that included Virion. But if I was honest I wasn’t sure if it had always been there or if it was new. “I can feel the same buzz from you all, but I don’t know if you’ve always had it. I never really thought about it before.” I told him. “I’m sorry.”

Virion just shook his head and told me not to worry about it.

“Britt!” I suddenly said. “Britt has known you guys since you were kids but she wasn’t there when we completed the mating bond. Maybe she can tell you if your magic feels different?” I suggested. It was the only idea which I could think of.

“How did you discover your magic?” Virion asked me.

I thought back through everything that we had been through. “I’ve always been able to feel it. It was always like heat running through me. It started to feel like rage after a while. I used to train until I was exhausted to wear it out. But most of my magic flares and changes have come when I’ve either been able to sense danger or when I’m fighting.” I looked at the others guys and they all agreed.

“Maybe we should see about training with the Valkyrie and see if it sparks anything with us.” Liam suggested.

“I suppose, but I don’t know how I feel about you guys getting hurt.” I told them honestly. “I’m not sure if I might lose it.”

Liam gave me a quick squeeze. “We have to try. This could be useful in the final fight if we are right. It would be a skill that could help us survive.”

He was right. I knew he was. But I was still reluctant to allow the Valkyrie free reign on them. I knew that we didn’t really have a choice. I wouldn’t be able to do it myself. I would train them hard, but there wouldn’t be any element of danger to it. I would always stop before they got hurt. It had to be someone other than me, but that didn’t mean that I had to like it.

## Chapter Ten

Britt came by the house later that evening and we laid out our training plans with her. If anything, she was just excited to see what happened and wanted to take part as well. She wasn't sure when we questioned her on the guys magic and if it had changed. She couldn't feel magic the same way that I did, but she did think that maybe the Alpha waves she felt from Kyle were stronger than they had been when they were kids. Apparently, it was normal for them to increase through adolescence and your early adult years though.

By the time the evening came and it was time to go to the feast the Valkyrie had planned, I was exhausted and not really in a party mood. I wished I had been able to take Liam up on that nap earlier, but as usual my life just spiralled out of control instead. I needed a vacation, somewhere with sandy beaches and cocktails.

Britt lead us around the back of the training ground and behind the infirmary where the Valkyrie had set up a massive fire pit where they were roasting several haunches of meat. There were tables dotted around with drinks and other food on. The warriors and Valkyrie were mingling together, talking, dancing and generally living the party mood. It was surprising. I had assumed that the Valkyrie and Warriors would stay separated. I thought that there would be some snobbery between them as separate classes, but I couldn't have been more wrong. I'd go as far to say that there were friendships between the two groups and if you looked closer some of them seemed to have closer relationships than even that. It must be hard for the Valkyrie to be forbidden to have children. I wondered how that even worked with the Warriors technically being dead. Were they dead? It was all a bit confusing really.

We made a beeline for the food first. One of the Valkyrie who was manning the spit handed me a massive plate of meat. I think it was actually meant for all of us, but there was no way that I was sharing this bad boy. My stomach was about ready to gnaw a hole through me and I would do more than just take the hand off anyone who tried to take it away from me. Virion smiled and took a step toward me, but Sykes put an arm across his chest to stop him.

“Trust me dude, you do not want to get between her and food right now.” He laughed. Virion looked at me confused and I attempted to grin at him, but it was more a baring of teeth. He chuckled along with Sykes and got in line for his own plate.

The table set up next to the fire pits was full of breads, salads, cheeses and platters of fruits. I looked longingly at the table and then at my already full plate.

“Don’t worry.” Britt said as she skipped up beside me. “I’ve got your back boo.” She waved a second plate at me and this time the grin that I gave her was genuine. She loaded up the second plate for me with various things and then we walked over to a free table away from the dance floor.

Britt left me to go and get her own food and I started in on what I had. It was absolutely amazing. I didn’t have any idea what some of it was, but my stomach didn’t care. It wasn’t long before the guys joined me and I was surprised to see that they each had nearly as much as I did. I slowed down slightly on my munching and watched as they seemed to just descend on their food. I just sat and watched for a minute. It was actually quite impressive. They normally ate quite a lot being shifters, but this had to be at least three times what I had seen them normally consume. That was when I realised what was happening and the laughter bubbled out of me until I was rocking in my seat with uncontrollable giggles. It would not be doing my image much good, but I just couldn’t seem to stop them coming.

When I finally managed to pull myself together the guys were all looking at me quizzically. I was still out of breath from laughing so I just started pointing madly around the table, which spurred another fit of the giggles from me. Sucking in a huge breath I laughed out “Justice!” and fist pumped the air.

Now they were all looking at me like I was mental. Liam was the first to look around the table at what I was pointing at and realise what I had. He rolled his eyes and laughed as well. I think it may have been more at me than the issue at hand, but I was still going to take it.

“What?” Sykes sighed dramatically, throwing his hands up in the air.

“Hungry?” I managed to say between giggles.

He frowned in confusion at me and then said “Yeah, I’m starving ...” he looked down at his plate and then up at me giggling hysterically, with tears running down my face. “Oh crap!” He sighed dropping his fork down.

I started flapping my hands in front of my face trying to stop the tears or the laughter, I wasn’t really sure what. The guys were now definitely just laughing at me. Once I managed to pull myself together, I was slumped into Sykes who was at my side with spontaneous laughs bubbling up every so often. It wasn’t even really that funny, I had no idea why it was causing me so much amusement. Maybe it was because, for once, it wasn’t me that was getting all the life changing revelations.

“I still don’t get what’s going on?” Kyle said looking around at us.

“How do you feel?” Liam asked him.



“I don’t know fine. Hungry I suppose.” He looked down at his plate, then he looked across at mine. “Oh fuck, it’s happening to us isn’t it.”

“What?!” Virion cried, clearly hating being out of the loop.

“When Aria’s magic was growing like crazy she was like a ravenous beast all the time.” Sykes laughed.

“Hey, I was not that bad.” I protested. I might have been hungry all the time, but it’s not like it was that bad.

“You’re right.” Sykes said giving me a squeeze.

“But I think it’s possibly a sign that our own individual magic is going to be or is already increasing.” Liam said looking down at his plate before shrugging and carrying on eating. I mean the food here was amazing so maybe it was just that, my appetite was back up through the roof and I couldn’t possibly contain any more magic or I was pretty sure that I would combust. The heat when it ran out of control already felt like it was at my limit.

We ate in silence for a while longer before Britt breezed over to our table. “You guys seem to be having a tonne of fun over here.” She joked. We must have looked pretty miserable just silently shovelling food into my face.

She sat down in the seat on my other side and I nudged her with my shoulder while I tried to quickly chew and swallow what was in my mouth. “Sorry,” I gasped. “I’m just starving.”

“You’re always hungry, what’s their excuse?” She laughed. I couldn’t help it and I just started to laugh along with her until it got to the point where Britt started to give me the side eye like she was worried about my sanity.

“Oh god, you got her started again.” Sykes sighed, grabbing my shoulders and giving me a little shake.

“Hey,” I said indignantly slapping his hands away. “Rude!”

I huffed and turned to Britt. “The boys are getting magic and now it’s their turn to turn into ravenous beasts.” I said sarcastically, giving Sykes my evil eye.

“Yeah I’ve been thinking about that.” Britt said slowly.

“Okay, that doesn’t sound like a good thing for some reason.” Kyle laughed.

“Well, it’s not exactly the best time to suddenly have novice volatile magic.” Britt reasoned.

“It’s not something that we really have any choice in.” Kyle told her. “It’s going to happen no matter what we do, the best we can do is work with it.”

Britt nodded, “I think the training plan is a good idea, but I think that you need to bring Geta in on it. She knows more about this than any of us and if you need to do it fast and dirty, then I’m afraid we’re going to need more help.”

Fast and dirty, I didn't like the insinuation in that phrase and my magic rolled agreeing with me. I was still struggling with the idea of throwing the guys at a bunch of Valkyries and waiting to see what happened. The sensible part of me was telling me that I needed to be somewhere else when they were training, but I wanted to be there for them as well. Plus, I was nosy and I didn't want to be the last one to find out. I was nothing but mature after all.

As if just saying her name had summoned her, Geta appeared next to our table carrying what had to be the world's biggest mug of some kind of beer, I was guessing.

"How are you liking Valhalla?" She asked, dropping down into a seat at the end of the table.

"We haven't really seen much yet." I hedged. "We're looking forward to getting out into the training rings tomorrow though." I told her.

She nodded seriously. "Yes, to have developed a skill such as yours you must have spent many years training." I think maybe that wasn't her first mug of whatever she was drinking.

"We do actually need to talk to you about some training plans we have for the next few days, before we continue into Asgard." I told her. "I was hoping that some of the Valkyrie would help with the guys training. It would benefit them from fighting experienced fighters that they haven't worked with yet."

Geta chugged down an obscene amount of her drink before slamming it on the table and gasping. She nodded her serious nod again. I felt bad not telling her the whole story and Britt was right, she probably had valuable knowledge for us.

“Can we talk about this in the morning? Maybe meet up after breakfast? We have had some developments that we need to discuss in a more private setting initially.” I broached cryptically. I knew that I was being evasive, but I realised that I hadn’t actually discussed with the guys if this was going to be something that we allowed to be general knowledge, or if we want to maybe keep them as a secret weapon.

I caught Kyle’s eye across the table and he just nodded at me. “*I think you are right that we should discuss this in private first.*” He whispered into my mind.

“After breakfast sounds fine. In the meantime, I will prepare a rota for some training partners for you.” Geta said standing up. I wasn’t so sure that going off to work was a sensible idea at the moment for her, but she seemed fairly determined. Plus, she was probably centuries older than me, so who was I to try and tell her what to do.

Geta wandered off, a little wobblier than I had seen her before, but I figured we all would be pretty soon.

“Now, enough of the sensible boring talk. Come and dance with me!” Britt laughed, grabbing my arm and dragging me away from the table.

I gladly followed her, I needed a break and this was the perfect excuse to let my hair down for a bit. As we moved onto the dance floor, it was interesting to see how the two groups intermingled. Once they clocked sight of me though the Valkyrie moved away, giving me space. It was a bit like when your parents showed up at a party. I was clearly killing the buzz. The Warriors on the other hand, had no problems continuing with the party around me. It wasn’t lost on me that most of them were all men and I had to wonder, from the looks I was getting and the wandering hands going on

while we were dancing, if there were some looking to add themselves to the mate pool, which could get a bit awkward. The music had a heavy beat and it easily plucked at your soul. My hips seemed to sway of their own volition and my head rolled from side to side as I found myself swaying to the beat. Britt was still holding my hands and dancing with me.

It didn't take long for several of the Warriors to come over to dance with us. I made sure to shy away from any wandering hands, but it was starting to get challenging. A few of them got the hint immediately and turned their attention to Britt and she was more than happy to soak it up. Some, however, seemed a little more persistent. Fortunately for me, I had four mates who weren't about to let some unknown man grind up against me. Granted I nearly elbowed Sykes in the face as he came up behind me and his hands wrapped around my hips. I felt his arousal filter into the back of my mind, at the same time as I ground back against him and felt him hardening against the small of my back. Liam came up in front of me, slipping one leg between my thighs and Sykes guided my hips to grind me against him.

Kyle's hand slipped to my cheek and he turned my face to him, before devouring my lips with his own. I felt a hand slip up my side and run underneath my breasts that I was sure belonged to Virion. I had all four of my mates surrounding me and touching me, in a moment where we could truly forget our worries, even if only for a little while. I wished we could stay like this. That we could just stay in Valhalla and be happy. But everyone was relying on us and we didn't really have any option. This may not have been the life that we would have chosen, but it was all that we had.

I let my head fall back onto Sykes' shoulder as he gently moved my hips to the rhythm of the music, grinding me against Liam's thigh. If tonight was all we were going to get, our last chance to be free, then I was going to take hold of it and cherish every minute.

As if he could read my mind, Virion leaned in and quietly said, “Let’s take this back to our place.”

Liam stepped away from in front of me and a cold breeze swept down the front of my body. I hadn’t realised that I was so flushed until he did. I could feel my whole body was growing hot with need. I let Liam pulled me away from the dancing and I could sense my other mates trailing behind us as we made our way back to the house. I could feel the need rising in me, it echoed back to me through our bond from all of my mates. Driving it higher and higher.

As soon as we crossed the threshold into the house, we all became a flurry of motion as we moved to the closest bedroom. Clothes were pulled off and left where they fell. It all became a blur of hands and teasing touches until we made it to the bedroom, then Kyle scooped me up and threw me onto the bed.

As I felt my body sail through the air a laugh burst from me. This was exactly like the first time I had been with my mates. I bounced once on the mattress before settling on the bed. Leaning up on my elbows I took in the view of my four mates standing at the end of the bed, looking down at me. I licked my lips at the sight before me. My mates were definitely a delectable group of men and I had to be the luckiest woman alive to get to call them all mine.

I knew that the guys were talking to each other through the bond because I could hear a faint buzz in the back of my mind. Virion stepped forward first and nervously crawled onto the bed with me. This would be his first time with all of us here and I wanted us all to stay together more than anything, but only if he was comfortable with it. I needed us all together. This could be our last time. We were running out of time to the Blood Moon and I didn’t want to think about what would happen then. I needed them. I needed them all.

“What’s wrong Aria?” Virion said, pulling away as if he could sense my unease. “We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

“I want this more than anything.” I said smiling at him as I gazed into his eyes. “I was just thinking about how much time we had left. I want to be here with all of you, while we still have the chance.”

I felt the mattress dip on either side of me as Sykes and Liam climbed onto the bed on either side of me. Kyle crawled across the top of the bed and curled around me. He gently lifted my head and laid it on his stomach.

“I can’t promise you that everything is going to be okay, but I swear to you that I will do absolutely everything in my power to make sure that we all stay together.” Kyle told me leaning his forehead against mine.

Having them all here, surrounding me, was a perfect moment and one that I hoped we would be able to relive time and time again. But right now, I needed to feel their skin against mine. I needed them to complete me and I wanted to fall into bliss with them time and time again.

Kyle leaned over and took my lips in an upside down kiss. It was awkward at first, but as he lazily moved his lips against mine, it didn’t matter. It was still perfect. Liam moved in to my side and gently ran his tongue around my breast, teasing my nipple until it was hard. He gently gripped it between his teeth and flicked his tongue against the hard tip.

“Just let go and feel Aria. We’ve got you.” Sykes murmured as he leaned in and sucked my other nipple into his mouth.

Virion started to lightly kiss his way down my stomach, moving down, closer to the place where I needed to feel him the most.

I did just as Sykes told me and let go. I closed my eyes and just let myself feel the lips and hands of my mates as they trailed across my body. I sank down into the growing heat of the arousal building inside me. I felt Virion pull one of my legs over his shoulder as he settled between my legs. He lapped at my core, teasing my clit with gentle flicks of his tongue. The others were pulling away from my body and I knew that they were enjoying the show. That they would enjoy watching Virion make me shatter before they descended on me again.

My hands reached out and I trailed them across the muscular thighs on either side of me before finding the thick, hard cocks that I was seeking. Taking both of them in my grasp I slowly pumped my hands in time with Virion's tongue as it moved across my clit.

I could feel myself creeping closer and closer to an orgasm and I almost didn't want it to come. I wanted to stay like this, wrapped in the bodies of my mates as we writhed in pleasure. Virion seemed to have other ideas though and as soon as he slipped two fingers inside me at the same time, the sensation of that delicious, nearly painful stretching, pushed me over the edge and I shouted his name as the orgasm pulled me down in wave after wave of pleasure. He kept gently working my clit with his tongue and curling his fingers inside me as he rode me through wave after wave, drawing it out for as long as he could until that pleasure started to almost turn into pain as everything became too sensitive to touch.

"It's too much, I can't ..." I whimpered squirming on the bed, trying to get away from his touch. It was too much and even though I could feel my body telling me that it wanted more, it was also feeling too sensitive to be touched.



“Yes, you can, sweetheart. Give us one more. Let us see you come apart one more time.” Kyle whispered, tipping my head back to steal my lips again.

Liam and Sykes came back to me at the sides, trailing their lips and teeth along my breasts. Virion didn't move from his position between my legs. His tongue still hungrily feasted on my clit and I whimpered and moaned into Kyle's mouth as his tongue moved soothingly against my own. I concentrated on the feeling of Kyle's lips and the way that he kissed me, the feeling of the tip of his tongue teasing against mine.

Soon the over sensitive sensation that I was feeling changed into that comfortable climbing as I felt my body creeping closer to a second orgasm. Virion wrapped his hands around my hips and pulled me harder against his face as he groaned against me. The fact that he was enjoying this was turning me on even more.

I felt myself starting to pant as I crept closer to the edge, Sykes seemed to sense my impending orgasm and suddenly bit down on my nipple, pinching it tightly between his teeth. It was the final thing that I needed to send me soaring again. My cries were muffled by Kyle's lips and I was almost relieved when I felt Virion lay a soft kiss on the inside of my thigh and pull away from my now soaking wet pussy.

“Fuck, you taste delicious.” Virion moaned, leaning down and giving my pussy one last swipe with his tongue, which just had me moaning and arching on the bed again.

“Tell us what you want, sweetheart.” Sykes murmured against my skin as he lazily ran his tongue along the underside of my breast.

I knew what I wanted, but I was unsure if it was okay to ask for it. I didn't want to pressure them into anything that they didn't want to do, but I also

felt like it was important, especially after today, for Liam and Sykes to know that I truly was okay with them being together. More than okay. In fact, it really turned me on.

*“I want to watch you with each other.”* I whispered into both of their minds, opening the connection wider so they could feel just how aroused the thought made me. I didn’t say it out loud in case that was something that they didn’t want to do and then I wouldn’t have already voiced it in front of the others.

“Fuck, that’s hot.” Sykes rumbled, his voice coming out in a low growl.

“Do you want to watch Sykes fuck my mouth kitten?” Liam asked giving me a devilish smirk.

I whimpered, as just hearing him say it out loud was so fucking hot. “Yes.” I told him, holding his gaze so he could see in my eyes just how much the thought of them together turned me on.

Virion surprised me by flipping me over and I suddenly found myself on all fours with Kyle’s beautiful hard cock in front of me. I wasted no time in taking him into my mouth and sucking him down deep. When I drew back, he pulled out of my mouth and moved himself so that he was kneeling in front of me. Sykes and Liam had both climbed off the bed and Sykes was stood in my eye line as Liam sank down to his knees in front of him. Liam reached up and ran one hand over Sykes’ cock making him throw his head back. Virion timed himself perfectly and as I watch Liam take all of Sykes into his mouth, he slowly pushed his way inside my pussy. The moan that came out of me was embarrassingly loud and I didn’t even know what it was for. If it was because of what I was seeing or what I was feeling.

I turned my attention back to Kyle because I didn't want him to feel left out, even though my eyes kept flicking back to Sykes and Liam at the side of us.

Kyle ran his hand through my hair and pulled it up together into one hand, holding it back away from my face. Sykes looked across at all of us on the bed and held my gaze as Kyle slowly fed me his cock. I made sure to swallow him deep, but taking all of him into my mouth was just beyond my capabilities.

Virion started to pick up his pace, every time he thrust his cock deep inside me it just caused me to sink further down onto Kyle's cock. It was almost like Virion had complete control over my body.

Kyle gently moved his hips, fucking my mouth almost lazily. With Virion's thrusts pushing him deeper into my throat he never quite withdrew from my mouth. I swirled my tongue around his length and sucked until my cheeks hollowed. I was rewarded with Kyle's hips snapping forward and his grip tightened in my hair as he swore.

"I'm not going to last if you keep doing that." He groaned.

I could feel another orgasm building again and I wanted him to come with me. I wanted to taste his salty come flowing into my mouth as I shattered. I sucked him down again, as Virion started to pick up his pace, slamming inside of me again and again.

My eyes sought out Liam and Sykes. Sykes had his hands tangled in Liam's hair as he gently thrust inside his mouth. He looked down at him in rapture as Liam opened his throat wide, taking all of him inside. Sykes swore and his hips snapped forward faster before he threw back his head and groaned. His thrusts slowed down as he spilled himself down Liam's throat with a roar.

“Fuck, that was surprisingly hot.” Virion groaned. “Aria, you feel too good. I can’t hold out much longer.”

The sight of seeing Sykes come and Virion’s words was enough to drive me higher. I was so close. So close.

“I think Liam deserves a reward for being so good, don’t you Aria.” Kyle said, tightening his grip on my hair and pulling from my mouth. “Sit down on the edge of the bed Virion.” He instructed.

Virion withdrew from my aching pussy, denying me the orgasm that I was so close to reaching. I whimpered at the feeling of loss and Kyle ran his other hand down the side of my face as he pulled me up so that I was face to face with him.

“Don’t worry, my love. We’ve got you. We’re not done yet.”

Kyle scooped me up and dropped me down so that I was straddling Virion’s lap. I knew immediately what they had planned for me, having been in this position before. I leaned forward and kissed Virion as he fell back against the bed with a sigh. Liam came up behind me and ran his hands down my spine and then back up my sides as he leant over and softly laid his kisses between my shoulder blades.

“Is this okay, kitten? Is this what you want?” He whispered against my skin.

“Please Liam, I need you, I need to feel you.” I said pulling back from Virion’s lips. I was feeling needy and still aching from the orgasm I had been denied but more than that, I needed to feel my mates around me, I needed the reassurance that we were all here together.

Liam slowly pushed himself inside my aching pussy with a groan. I couldn't stop myself from turning my head to watch him, his eyes were clenched tight as he paused once he was hilt deep. His bottom lip was between his teeth as he panted trying to hold himself back.

“I don't know if I'm going to last long enough.” He groaned as he slowly pulled out and then pushed back in achingly slowly as he ran one finger around my ass.

Liam pulled out completely and I felt his fingers running from my pussy to my ass over and over again. Once he was satisfied that I was wet enough he pushed his thumb into my ass as he pushed into my pussy one more time. I groaned and pushed back against him, needing to feel him filling me.

He pulled out again, but this time Virion was there to push himself inside me. I felt Liam line himself up with my ass and then begin the slow process of pushing inside. Once he was fully inside, I knew that I was close to that glorious feeling of being completely full. I just needed one more thing and my beautiful Kyle was there to make it happen. I felt his hand cradle my chin as he turned my face to him. He leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on my lips.

“I love you Aria.” He said running his thumb across my cheek.

“I love you all. But I need you Kyle, please?” I begged.

“I've got you, my love.” He said, straightening up and pushing his cock back into my mouth.

It was exactly what I needed. They all started to move together, moving in synchrony. Sykes came over to my side, running his hands across my chest and teasing my nipples. I reached out for him, I knew that he was finished for now, but I still wanted him to enjoy being with us. I needed him here with us.

I wasn't going to last long, but then I didn't think any of us would. It was all too much. It felt too good. I opened up the connections between us and fell into the sensation of all of us feeling the same joy and ecstasy together. Our bonds drew us closer together and bound us tighter.

Kyle lost himself first and I drank him down before he fell back onto the bed with a sigh. I followed closely behind as my orgasm finally exploded out of me as I screamed out my release. I felt myself clamp down onto both Virion and Liam and they simultaneously came deep inside of me. Liam held onto my hips in an almost painful death grip as I looked down and watched Virion as all his muscles strained in his release. He was beautiful, they all were, but I loved to see them when they completely let go in a moment like this.

Liam gently slide out of me, then he scooped me up in his arms and laid me down on the bed. I was too spent to be able to do much of anything apart from snuggle into Sykes' side as I felt myself slipping into a sex coma. I felt the gentle softness of a cloth cleaning me up as I fell asleep with Sykes whispering sweet words into my ear. I just wished that we could stay like this. That we didn't have to ever leave this place.

## Chapter Eleven

The next morning, I sleepily snuggled further into the covers and against whichever blazing heat source of a mate was laying beside me. I nuzzled my nose and took a deep breath. My snuggle buddy, who turned out to be Liam, snuggled in closer to me and pulled me flush to his front. I should have known that it was Liam, he was always so warm. A cold breeze tickled down my back and I realised that I didn't have anyone cuddled up behind me. When I peered over my shoulder, I found the bed behind me empty and after checking over Liam's shoulder, I realised that we were in bed alone.

“Stop squirming.” Liam complained, holding on to me tighter.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

Liam looked around the bed, similarly to how I had and just said. “They're not in bed.”

“I know that! When did they get up?” I asked. I stretched out and felt a delicious burn in my thighs that only came from having too much fun the night before. A lazy smile flickered across my face as I remembered how hot it had been last night watching Liam and Sykes together.

“Mmmmmm.” Liam purred, nuzzling into my neck. “I can smell your arousal. If you're expecting to get out of bed soon, you need to turn your mind to other things.” He told me. I will admit that I had a moment where I considered not getting out of bed, but then the grown up part of my mind

reminded me that we had limited time to get the guys training. Not only did they need it for the war we were getting ready for, but I had sort of volunteered Kyle to challenge his father and I needed him to make it through that. It didn't matter to me that the guys had pointed out the challenge would have had to take place anyway. I still felt guilty about the discussion that I had with Wyatt about it.

In the end I managed to roll away from Liam with a reluctant groan. He sat up and rubbed his face, dragging his hands back through his hair in an attempt to wake up. I left him to it, pulled on some clothes and wandered out into the sitting room to try and find the other guys. I eventually found them huddled around the small kitchen table talking quietly.

“Hey sleepy head.” Kyle said smiling at me when I came in. When they all leant back, I saw that the table was covered in breakfast food. My stomach gurgled in what I can only imagine was delight and I quickly skipped over to join them. Virion was filling up a plate of food for me and put it in front of me as soon as my ass was on the seat. I smiled across at him and thanked him as I tucked into the spread in front of me.

“Who made all of this?” I asked them. There were eggs, bacon, sausages, home fries and toast.

“We actually went across to the mess hall and just got a huge amount to bring back.” Sykes said looking a bit sheepish. “I was so hungry when I woke up that I didn't want to wait to cook anything.”

Liam stumbled into the kitchen next looking a bit blurry eyed. He chugged down a cup of coffee before he realised that there was a huge amount of food waiting for him as well. It wasn't like him to be so sleepy in the morning. Normally it was Sykes that refused to get going in the morning. He slumped down into one of the chairs and Kyle put a plate of food in front of him.



“You okay man?” He asked Liam looking concerned.

“Yeah, just didn’t get enough sleep I suppose.” Liam said looking confused.

“Maybe this is a side affect of your magic coming in.” I suggested. “I know that mine was eating and you seem to be following that as well, but my father basically said that this was going to jump start yours. Maybe it’s a side affect of it coming in so quickly.”

We all looked across at Liam with concern. He was barely keeping his eyes open, but he was still managing to shovel food into his mouth. I was pretty sure that he didn’t even know what he was eating at this point. Once he had finished his second plate, he did look much better though.

“We need to talk to Geta.” Virion suggested.

We all nodded and started to get up from the table. We hadn’t arranged anywhere to meet up so I was hoping that she was just going to come here. I didn’t normally like to train on a full stomach but like the guys I was going through one of my hungry phases so I didn’t think that it would be a problem. We decided to move to the back of the cottage to start some warm ups while we waited for Geta to come and find us. The training rings were empty, presumably everyone was either sleeping off last night or just hadn’t finished up their breakfast yet. It seemed strange to just take over one of the rings before we had at least spoken to Geta though and we had enough space at the back of the cottage that we could warm up in relative privacy.

The guys were taking a few practice swings and blocks with their swords. The positive side of having the four of them was that they had a training partner each. It left me out on my own, but I had something else that I wanted to work on. I was going to see if I could ignite my flames on

purpose rather than just as a side effect of my magic overloading. I wanted to see if I could get my swords to ignite again.

Geta found us about half an hour later. The guys were moving through some sequences together and I was sat crossed legged on the floor with my eyes closed and my wings spread out, a sword was laying across my lap. I had managed to get my wings to ignite once, but no such luck with getting it to spread down my swords. I don't know how long she had been stood watching before she came and dropped to the ground beside me.

“You are pushing too hard.” She told me, making me jump. When I opened my eyes and looked at her she cocked her head to the side as she searched for the right words, before saying. “Think of your magic like it is a stream of water. You cannot push the water where you want it to go but you can direct the flow of it. Does that make sense?”

I thought about it for a moment. My initial reaction was, no that did not make sense. But when I thought about it a bit more, I think I understood what she was trying to say. I couldn't push the magic where I wanted to go, it wasn't about force. But there was an ebb and flow to it. If I could get the whole of my magic to flow around me, to the parts where I wanted it rather than trying to just grab a chunk of it and put it where I wanted it to go, then it should cover my wings easily. I nodded and closed my eyes again. Instead of thinking about the well where my magic resided inside me, where I had previously grabbed it and pushed it where I wanted, I thought about the path that it usually took. I imagined it flowing around my body and then with a deep breath, I diverted the flow through to my wings, making sure that it looped back around and continued on its usual path as well. I felt my wings ignite at the same time that I heard Geta congratulate me.

I opened my eyes again and saw that the guys had stopped sparring to watch. They all beamed down at me with looks of pride on their faces.

“Britt was right. You are the person to talk to when it comes to understanding magic.” I told Geta. She gave me one of her soft, barely there smiles.

“You wished to discuss training.” She said, changing the subject.

“Yes,” I told her. “But first, I need to tell you something that I only learnt about myself yesterday. I need your word that this conversation will stay between us though and that it will not go any further.” I told her seriously.

She looked a little annoyed by my words, but this was the safety of me and my guys and I couldn’t afford to risk that, just to spare her feelings. “Of course. I did not speak of your blood lust. You are my General. Anything which you say to me will remain in confidence.”

I reached forward and clasped her shoulder. “I know that you will be my most trusted advisor in all of this Geta, you are much more familiar with this world and I will no doubt need your assistance many times before the end of this. But this is the safety of my mates.”

She nodded and seemed a bit more relaxed about the whole issue.

“I spoke with my father yesterday. He was quite evasive, but the insinuation which I got from our conversation was that my mates will be experiencing new magic. There has not been a shifter with active magic for decades. We have no experience with this. We were hoping that as you have far more knowledge of this than us, that you could help us try to figure out how to activate their magic and then eventually control it.”

Geta frowned as she thought through what I had said. “How did you speak with your father yesterday?” She asked me.

“He pulled me into the ether by overloading my magic.”

She nodded thoughtfully. “That was sensible. Your conversation would not have been able to be overheard in the ether. When your mother fell pregnant, it was fairly obvious that it would have to be a god or a Demi-God that had fathered her child.”

“Wait, you know who my mother is?”

“Yes, her name was Myra. She was one of the Captains in the Valkyrie army. A very skilled warrior. She told me when she found out that she was with child. We all knew the penalty for bearing children. When she disappeared, I had hoped that she had somehow escaped Asgard with her child to live a better life.” She looked sad as she stared off into the distance remembering her comrade, and I got the impression that she was her friend as well.

“My mother didn’t escape. I’m sorry.” I told her as I laid a hand over hers. “My father told me that Odin has her held captive somewhere, but he has not been able to reach her.”

She nodded sadly. We sat in silence for a moment. I was grateful that she didn’t ask any questions about who my father was. It would probably be a bit weird to tell her that I didn’t know. After a moment she seemed to shake herself and then she spoke to the guys.

“The way in which we bring out the magic of a Valkyrie is in battle.” She told them. “Now that we do not have the luxury of a battlefield, we will have to try and make do with the training ring.” I wasn’t so sure that I would hold a battlefield as a luxury, but each to their own I suppose.

The guys came over to stand with us, loosely holding their weapons at their sides. They had already stripped off their shirts and had a slight gleam of sweat across their chests. Maybe watching them train wouldn't be too bad after all.

Geta jumped up and started to walk around the edge of the cottage. "Follow me." She shouted over her shoulder as she walked away.

"Guess we're going to follow her then." Kyle muttered as he started to do just that.

I chuckled and followed them both, the rest of the guys trailing behind me. She led us out to the same training ring where I had laid waste to the Valkyrie when I arrived riding hard on a wave of blood lust. It was empty for now but I could see that there was a group heading our way.

"You only have two days?" She asked me. I nodded at her. "Then we will need to do this fast and hard." She said striding away from the guys and heading towards the approaching Valkyrie.

Sykes turned to me with a wicked grin on his face. "Normally fast and hard is something I can get on board with, but I have a feeling this is not going to be one of those times."

I laughed and shook my head. I had a feeling that he was going to be right as well. I moved away to the edge of the ring, leaving my guys standing in the middle. They still each held a sword in their hand from their practice and I had seen them fight. I knew that they were good. Did they need to practice more? Yes. But they still kicked ass and my sexy shifters had come a long way since I started training them. Virion was less of a worry. He had been fighting since he was a child and it showed. I walked around the edge

of the ring heading in the direction of Geta, she clearly had a plan and I didn't want to get in the way. The guys needed this and I couldn't distract them.

Geta stood talking with a group of about ten Valkyrie at the far end of the fighting ring. Before I reached them the Valkyrie nodded at Geta and set off into the ring. I had just reached Geta's side when they all let out their war cry and ran at the guys with their weapons drawn. The guys, because they were truly fucking awesome, just dropped into a defensive position and waited. Virion had just fallen in with the group, I didn't know if they were using their ability to mind speak or if they had just automatically done it. We hadn't really had the opportunity to train to fight as a group and that was what we needed to rectify over the next few days. We had, unfortunately, had the opportunity to fight as a group on a few times though and even though I can't say I was paying huge attention to how we worked as a group, we had at least made it through them relatively unscathed. Really though that sort of fighting, as a cohesive unit, only came through fighting together for years. We didn't have the luxury of time though and this was the only option which we had.

They met in a clash of swords. The Valkyrie weren't taking it easy on them. They hadn't held some back to fight the guys one on one, all ten of them were on the attack. It was hard to keep track of the fight, the Valkyrie had obviously been fighting as a unit for a long time, they seemed to switch out between the guys and I couldn't see any kind of signal that they gave as they did it. It was a unique style that I hadn't seen before.

"This is a style of fighting that I haven't seen before." I told Geta. "The way that they keep moving between targets and swapping out seems to keep their opponents more confused." I observed.

"Yes, it is one of the skirmish techniques which we train in. Battlefield techniques tend to rely more on a one to one fighting technique, but we still

rely on some mass manoeuvres. We will need to discuss battle technique soon.” She told me and I realised that she was right. We had two days before we moved into Asgard. We had no way of knowing how much time, if any, we would have back in Valhalla before we were going to go into battle. How was I supposed to lead an army if I didn’t even know how they fought? The reality of the situation slapped me in the face and the same old insecurities burst into my mind. How did I even end up here? How is this my life? I don’t think I can be the person that everyone seems to either think that I am, or even worse, seems to need me to be.

The fight between the guys was starting to get bloody, and by that I meant bloody for the guys. The Valkyrie hardly had a scratch on them. But all four of the guys were bleeding from various wounds on their arms and legs. It was making me itchy and I was having trouble staying away. My magic was rolling around me, it was like it couldn’t decide what it wanted to do. I wanted to jump in and protect the guys, but I also recognised that this was just me being a bit silly because it was only training. They weren’t going to get properly hurt. Even so, I could see the mounting frustration on the guys faces. They weren’t used to fighting like that and I could tell from where I stood that it was starting to piss them off that the Valkyrie were constantly moving, darting in, taking a hit and then moving on to a different opponent. Kyle looked particularly pissed off. His teeth were gritted and his swings were starting to get sloppy. I could see him shaking his head, like something was wrong and I took a step forward. Geta held out an arm to stop me from going to them. When I looked at her, she smiled calmly at me and it managed to calm me down.

“He is getting close. He needs to do this.” She told me sternly.

I crossed my hands over my chest and tucked my hands tightly under my arm pits to try and stop me from wanted to move from the spot that I was rooted to. Kyle stumbled back from the fight, shaking his head. His sword was held limply at his side and his other hand came up to hold onto his head. The other three guys closed ranks to shield him from the advancing

Valkyrie. They were like sharks that had sensed blood in the water and their attacks came quickly and harder as they pounded against the three trying to shield Kyle. Sykes had his teeth clenched and I could hear his growl from across the ring. His wolf was incensed and his need to protect his pack mate was no doubt strong. I could see that the need was bearing down on him strong. I could feel all of their frustration flowing through our own bond and it was making my own need to step in flare even stronger.

Sykes suddenly threw back his head and roared, I felt pain and confusion run through our connection. Geta clamped down hard on my arm keeping me rooted to the spot. I wasn't sure what I was looking at at first. The three Valkyrie who were in front of Sykes were suddenly forced away from him and about five feet back. They landed on their backs hard on the sand and shook their heads as they came up to their knees. They climbed back up their feet and charged back into the fight. The other seven Valkyrie had continued on the fight and Liam and Virion had now closed together to protect Sykes who still seemed disorientated. Kyle was on his knees holding his head between both hands. There was so much flowing through our bond that it was hard to sort out who was feeling what emotion. The pain and confusion were the most heart breaking for me and if it wasn't for Geta getting a hand on my upper arm, I knew that there was no way that I wouldn't have gone to them by now.

Kyle started to visibly shake, clutching his head in his hands. Fuck Geta, I was going to my mate! As I took a step forward, she clamped down harder on my arm. I could feel Kyle clearly now. It was like he reached out of the chaos of emotions firing through my mind. He was in pain, but he wasn't frightened. He was determined to do what needed to be done, but he was still confused about what was happening to him. I was about to tear out of her grasp when the magic released from him like a wave. It was like the wave transferred through the ground around him and it rippled like the surface of the sea. Everyone in its path was knocked from their feet, including the other guys. Then Kyle collapsed and fell to his side.



Everyone took a moment to struggle to their feet, but then the fight was back on. Kyle was still lying on the ground. I wasn't getting anything from him and I was pretty sure that he had passed out. Sykes was still conscious, but he was still down on his knees. He hadn't recovered from his burst of magic earlier.

Liam and Virion were still taking up a shield position to protect their friends, but they were both starting to show signs of strain. All ten Valkyrie descended on them. I did notice that they were slightly holding back now. They were after all trying to force the magic to flare out of them, not kill them. But from the guys point of view, I could see how it wouldn't feel that way. Liam and Virion were definitely taking hits now. One of the Valkyrie darted out of the group and looked over at Geta, I didn't miss the determined nod that Geta gave her. Before I could ask what was about to happen, the Valkyrie darted forward and with a swipe of her sword took down Virion, running to blade viciously across his thigh. Blood spurted out of his wound. It was much deeper than any of the other blows which he had sustained. He immediately fell down to one knee. Liam tried valiantly to shield his fallen friend but it was ten against one now. He didn't stand a chance. Almost at the same time, it was like Liam and Virion's magic flared as a last resort challenge against the attack against them. Black clouds filled the sky and torrential rain began to fall. Liam seemed to swirl his arms and the falling water followed his movements, the rain battering against the Valkyrie. A few of them cried out and dropped down, bringing their hands up to shield their faces. I could see small rivulets of blood running down their arms but I couldn't tell how they were being wounded from where I stood. But that was when all hell broke loose as Virion's magic flared. A surge of flames exploded out of him. Most of the Valkyrie were able to dive out of the way, but one was caught in the leg by the edge of the blast.

"Enough!" Geta shouted. "Everyone to the infirmary." She started to stride out to the centre of the ring, but as soon as she let go of me, I shot off across the sand.

Sykes and Liam seemed fairly unphased and were slowly getting up and making their way over to Virion and Kyle. Kyle was still laid out on the ground. I reached Virion first, but he waved me off.

“I’m fine, just a little winded.” He told me. I ran my hands over him anyway just in case, paying extra attention to his leg which had taken the slash. It wasn’t quite as bad as it looked. It was deep, but he should be able to heal it fairly quickly.

I dashed over to Kyle next. He was groaning slightly, but at least he was now awake and starting to sit up. I helped him sit up properly and he ran a finger down my cheek giving me a dopey smile.

“You okay there?” I asked him, pursing my lips closed to keep my laugh inside. It was almost like he was drunk with the way that he was swaying, even though he was sat on the ground.

“I’m good, like really good. I’m so lucky that I found you.” He sighed. “I love you.”

“I love you too, big guy.” I laughed. I looked up and saw that Liam and Sykes were back on their feet and Virion was leaning against Sykes. They were all stood around us with grins.

“Can I get a bit of help here?” I asked.

Liam came over and dragged Kyle up to his feet, slinging one of his arms across his shoulders so that he could hold him up. Kyle didn’t seem to be able to support his own weight and every step he took, his knees seemed to give out from under him.

Geta was walking over to the infirmary with the other Valkyrie. They all seemed to be walking under their own steam, apart from the Valkyrie with the burnt leg. She was limping her way there with the help of another Valkyrie. Similarly, to when I had faced them myself, they were laughing and joking and replaying parts of the fight. Even the one with the burn running the full length of one leg seemed to be having a great time. These girls were crazy. I loved them!

When we made it into the infirmary Sykes dropped Virion onto one of the beds and Liam managed to manoeuvre Kyle onto a bed after a bit of convincing. Kyle seemed more interested in trying to give him a hug. Geta strode over to us and gave Kyle a bemused look.

“He seems to be drunk on magic.” She said holding back a grin.

I tried to stop it, but Kyle was currently trying to give Liam a kiss who was frantically struggling to get out of his grasp whilst giggling like a loon, and the laughter just bubbled out of me anyway. Virion and Sykes were just sat by laughing at his predicament.

“How do we stop this from happening every time?” I laughed.

“It should become less and less the more that he uses it and adjusts to the feeling of magic in his system.” She said turning her back on us and I caught her grinning face, just as she tried to hide it from us.

Kyle let out some kind of excited squeal and then passed out of the bed. Liam sighed in relief and sat on the edge of the bed, now that he wasn't having to fight off a suddenly handsy Kyle. He looked over at Sykes, raising an eyebrow, but it was obvious that he wasn't really annoyed.

“So,” Sykes finally said. “My magic seems to be linked with air. Virion, definitely has fire. Kyle seems to be Earth. Liam ...”

“I’m water.” He added.

“You have elemental magic.” Geta confirmed. “You each seem to have one which is unusual. Usually elementals have all four.” She mused.

“But we’re shifters.” Liam said looking confused. “Not elementals.”

“Hmmm.” Geta tapped her chin in thought. “Shifters used to hold natural magic. Perhaps your magic will develop around the particular element that you seem to associate with.” She suggested.

“In other words, you don’t know.” I clarified.

“I am not an encyclopaedia.” She huffed. “And I’ve been stuck in Valhalla for centuries. You are shifters, you should know about the magic of your kind.” She did have us there. If anyone should know about the magic of their race, it should be the members of it.

“You’re right.” Liam conceded. “We haven’t had access to magic for generations and it isn’t encouraged as a subject for us to learn by our Alpha.” He said gritting his teeth.

“Well,” Geta said clapping her hands together. “Time for us all to learn together. But first, let’s get some food. You must be starving after expending your first burst of magic.”

We all looked at one at Kyle. It didn't seem right to leave him here. He was softly snoring on the bed with one arm hanging over the side.

“You guys go, I'll catch you up when he wakes up.” I told them.

“No need, if we wake him and take him with us, the food will help bring him back to his senses quicker.” She turned around and started to walk away from us without waiting for our answer.

“Guess we're all going then.” Sykes said jumping up off the bed. “You need a hand man?” He asked Virion.

“Nah, I'm fine.” He said poking at a dressing that someone had wrapped around his leg whilst I wasn't looking.

“Looks like you and me get to carry the big guy then.” Sykes told Liam.

Virion came over to stand beside me. He was only limping slightly, which I took as a good sign. Whilst Liam and Sykes were trying to get Kyle awake and off the bed, Virion and I got a head start heading over to the food hall. Virion was walking a little slower than usual, but I didn't mind slowing my pace so that I could walk beside him.

“They are exceptional fighters.” He observed as we watched a new group of Valkyrie gather with Geta outside of the food hall. She seemed to be briefing them on the upcoming training. “The tactic which they adopted with us is one which I have never encountered before. It was very effective. We should train with it while we are here.”

I looked up at him as he spoke and grinned. “What?” He asked, when he noticed me watching him.

“Sometimes you are just like one of the guys and then every so often it’s like you slip into Prince mode.” I laughed.

He smiled down at me and gave me a quick squeeze into his side. “When I’m with you, I feel like I can be myself. Every so often I slip back into ‘Prince mode’. It’s nice. To finally be myself.” It was a statement which seemed like it should have been said with a sad look on his face, but I could feel his emotions through our bond and he was still smiling as he watched the Valkyrie. He was happy, content and I was glad that I got to give that to him.

By the time we got to the food hall, Kyle and the others weren’t that far behind us. Apparently, the promise of food had Kyle moving. He seemed to be coming out of his slightly drunk phase and was now entering the ravenously hungry phase.

The food hall was set up similar to a canteen. There were large serving areas that you could slide your tray down the side of where all of the food was laid out. There was no one serving and you just helped yourself to whatever you wanted. That was perfect as far as I was concerned. I didn’t need to be judged for my lack of portion control and I was starting to feel hungry again. As I slide my tray along and helped myself to what I wanted, I was actually surprised by the amount of choice that they had. Someone must work incredibly hard back in the kitchens to keep all of these people fed. I was more surprised when I turned and looked down the row of trays that the guys had filled behind me though. I was normally the one wanting to put away a mountain of food, but I hardly had anything compared to what they helped themselves too. Just as I was about to open my mouth and say something, Liam just raised an eyebrow at me in a ‘just try it’ kind of argument. I suppose he kind of had a point. So, I flashed him my blindingly best grin and sought out a table instead.

We sat and ate in relative silence. None of us wanted to really stop eating for long enough to speak. By about half way through his food, Kyle seemed to have returned to normal and I think his own silence was probably more from embarrassment judging by the blush he currently had across his cheeks.

We were just about finished when Geta came and sat down with us.

“I have spoken with the others and I have a plan in place for the rest of today. We will split you up and give you a team of opponents each, to practice coaxing out your magic with. Just small amounts at a time. Once you can draw it forth on your own, we can start to look to increase the amount each time. Because you don’t have the luxury of time on your side we will have to train until you can activate it alone before we can break for the day. Tomorrow will concentrate on increasing the release amount.” She looked thoughtful for a moment before she turned to me. “Are you sure I can’t persuade you to delay for a week. If you could give me a week, I could have them fairly proficient by the time that you leave, at least is the use of their most basic magic.”

I looked thoughtfully at the guys sat around the table. They needed this. But we only had just over three weeks to get back in time for the Blood Moon. My gut told me that we were going to need all of the time that we had to get our mission accomplished. But if they couldn’t control their magic what chance did they have of surviving the fight at the end. I was torn and I had no idea what to do.

“How long will it take us to reach the centre of Asgard where Odin resides?” I asked her.

“Three days on foot but I could loan you some horses and you could fly in a day.” Geta told me.

I looked across at the guys to see if they had an opinion. They didn't say anything but I could feel their trust and admiration coming through the bond. They were going to leave the final decision to me. Unfortunately, that sucked for me because I didn't want to be the one to have to make it.

“Okay,” I said with a determined nod. “One week of training and then we move on. It will give me time to go through battle techniques as well.”

Geta nodded proudly at me. Clearly this was the decision that she had been hoping that I would make. It was nice to know that someone else at least thought that I was doing it right. The fact that I was making it up as I went along wasn't really filling me with confidence.

We finished our food in quiet and then headed out to the training ring for the first of our gruelling training sessions. At least Geta knew what she was doing and I had every confidence that she could follow through on the promises that she had made.



## Chapter Twelve

### Caleb

The satellite packs had arrived the day after we had discovered Marcus' treachery. The other shifter clans had started to filter through the day after. We had put up as many of the satellite packs in the big house as we could and the rest in the smaller cabins on the property. The clans had filled up what was left and then we had to start breaking out the exhibition tents that Madame Nines had procured for us.

Tensions were high. We hadn't seen a gathering of all of the shifter clans in generations. This didn't even happen during the last demon wars. There had been a few fights breaking out between the different types of shifters, some were natural enemies and others just had superiority complexes. We had shut them down fairly quickly though and overall, it was actually going a lot better than I had expected.

The Elites had split up and were each leading training sessions with any who wanted to join them. We hadn't made the training mandatory. Instead we let their skills speak for themselves. On the first day hardly anyone had turned up to the training session. That night Echo had managed to get herself into a fight with one of the big cat shifters. Well, you couldn't really call it a fight. She laid him out with one punch. The next day there were more in attendance. This increased every day and with every skirmish. Attendance was now overwhelming.

It was amazing really, what Frannie had achieved. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for her. She had been moving all of the playing pieces

all along. If we succeeded it would be because of her ... and Aria. As always, we still needed Aria.

I stood in the window of the big house, watching over one of the training sessions being led by Nix. All of the shifters before her hung on her every word. They were learning quickly. Not as quickly as the Elites had under the tutelage of Aria, but if they kept up at the rate that they were going they would be ready when the Blood Moon came.

“How is the training session going?” I heard Dom ask. I turned around and saw him leaning against the doorway.

“They’re doing well. The Elites have gained a lot of respect from the other shifters over the last few days.” I laughed to myself. This was going to have some strange consequences after all of this judging by the looks that the girls were getting from some of the other shifter clans.

“Hmmm.” Dom walked into the room, and I could tell from the look on his face that something was troubling him. It was no doubt the same thing that had been troubling him for the last few days.

“How is he?” I asked turning back to the window.

“Drunk, again.” Dom sighed.

Once we had dragged Marcus before the pack and a general plan for going forward had been put in place, Wyatt had crashed and he had crashed hard, straight into a whiskey bottle. Every morning he got up, showered, spoke with all of the Alphas and pack leaders and then he went back to his room and opened up the next bottle. Nothing we had tried could drag him out of the pit that he was in. It was like he had given up. He was only putting on a

show to keep the pack going until Kyle could return. He had lost hope of recovering his mate. No matter how hard we questioned Marcus, he refused to tell us where he had sent her. Even Frannie couldn't find her.

"If we could only find her ..." I started.

"We will, I just need more time." Dom interrupted. "I know that there is a way. I just need more time." He turned his back on me in frustration.

I strode over to my closest friend and I clasped his shoulder. I felt his shoulders drop in defeat as his head fell forward onto his chest.

"We will do it together." I promised him. "Wyatt is pack and we will do this together."

Dom turned toward me with a confused look on his face. "Pack? I thought that you had set aside the pack." He looked down at his feet, uncertainly. "I thought that we were pack." He said quietly. I had never seen him like this. He is usually so certain, so sure of himself.

"I did set aside the pack. I still have, but Wyatt is apparently different. My wolf still holds him as pack but only him ..." I braced both of Dom's shoulders with my hands and waited until he looked up to look me in the face. "And, of course, you. Is that okay? The three of us?" I asked him.

Dom cocked his head to the side. I didn't know if it was a good thing or not that he was actually having to think about it. "Wyatt's position has been troubling me more than I would have thought possible." He paced over to the window and stared down at the shifters training below. "I don't like seeing him like his." He said quietly.

“I agree.” I sat on the edge of the bed. We needed Wyatt but more importantly the rest of the pack needed Wyatt. They were looking to him for leadership now, whether he liked it or not. They were scared. They needed him to hold it together. Was it right? Probably not. The man had lost more than any shifter was supposed to be able to bear. But what choice did any of us have? This was not a time where we were afforded the luxury of choices. Once we made it through, if we made it through this, then we could take a step back and start making decisions for ourselves again. We just needed a little more time. The Blood Moon was only two weeks away. We just needed to make it through the next two weeks.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Kyle

The last week had been a living hell. Geta was nothing short of a sadist. But, even though I hurt all over, and I was talking about all of the inside places as well as the outside ones, she had done what she had promised.

That first day, when the magic had first surfaced, she took us to task for the rest of the day until we could draw it out at will. She had us on that training sand until the early hours of the next day before she would let us leave. As soon as the group of Valkyrie we were training with got tired, she swopped them out for another group. It was like she had a never ending supply of them.

She then graciously allowed us four hours sleep before she dragged us out there and did it all over again. I had no idea how easy Aria had taken it on us back at the academy. I had never training so hard in my life. Or eaten as much. The burn from the magic was brutal, I kind of felt bad for how we used to tease Aria about it now.

You had to give it to her though. She might have been hard on us. She definitely ground us into nothing. But she took the time to mould us back into something. I could feel the magic now. Simmering away inside of me. It was a strange feeling. It was like I had a whole new sense and could feel across the ground under my feet. It was disorientated at first. Now that I was used to it, I don't know how I ever did without it. But moving the ground was the only thing that had come to be. It was the same for the other guys. That first burst of magic was all we had. Geta had tried to console us

with the fact that we were only a week into training. The amount of hours that we had put in made it feel like we had been at it for months. I should have been further on than I was now. I knew I was being unreasonable and beating myself up for nothing, but I felt a little bit like a disappointment. Aria needs us to be our best so that we can stand beside her. We need to be our best so we had a fighting chance of getting out of this alive.

Geta had been so convinced at the beginning that our magic would develop. It had got stronger and it was easier to call forth. Thankfully the giddy drunk feeling I got the first time was gone now. That was fucking embarrassing! Hopefully I wouldn't have to go through that again. There was no way that Sykes was ever going to let me live it down. The dick.

We hadn't seen much of Aria this past week. She spent most of the day locked away with Geta or training herself. We rarely did any training together. We had wanted to use this time to train as a group but the magic aspect was just more important to get a hold of. Hopefully we would be able to carve out some more time in the next couple of week. Aria and Geta had gone over all of the tactics that the Valkyrie utilised and also some maps of where the final battle was supposed to take place on the Blood Moon. They had a loose plan in place that Aria was going to put forward to everyone when we got back home.

But now the week of training was over and it was time for us to leave. When we woke up this morning, we had gone to the food hall for breakfast. We ate nearly all of our meals there now. We were usually too tired to cook for ourselves. It had been heart breaking watching Aria have breakfast with Britt one last time. We didn't know when we would get to see her again. Aria looked like she was going to slip into the grief of losing her friend all over again. She had put a brave face on it, but we could feel her sadness simmering through our bond. The bond between us all was definitely getting stronger. I had a near constant awareness of Aria and all of the guys now. Virion thought that it could be due to the increased amounts of magic now flowing through us all. Even Aria had been getting stronger over the

last week. The fire that she could call now made her look like such a bad ass. When she stood there, ready to fight with her wings and her swords ablaze, she looked like a war goddess getting ready to smite everyone who fucked her off.

Liam had theorised, back when we first found Virion, that Aria could have another mate out there. That if her magic was going to keep growing we would require another in our bond so that it could even out the amount of magic that she fed into it. Our own growing magic had delayed the need for a fifth mate for a while, but when Aria was practicing her magic in the training ring, I knew that she wouldn't be able to grow for much longer unless that fifth mate came forward. I had never felt anything as strong as she was. It made sense now that we knew that her father was a god. She was a Demi-Goddess. It didn't make any difference for us. She was always going to be the centre of our world. But Aria had asked us not to tell anyone else about her father. She was happy for the world to think of her as just as Valkyrie, that on its own was still pretty cool.

Now here we were stood outside of the training ring, which I'm pretty sure my ass had sat on more often than my feet had stood on, looking up at the horses which Geta had leant us. Except they weren't horses, they were fucking Pegasus'. Apparently, they had a herd for the wingless Warriors. We were all stood there with our mouths hanging open just staring at them. Well all of us except Aria, who had a cute little pout going on. She had her own wings, she didn't need a Pegasus to fly on. They were truly beautiful though. I ran my hand down the neck of the one which had strode over to me. It was almost like they had chosen which of us they were going to let ride them. They were all pure white and they had the softest coats I had ever felt. We didn't really have any horses back at the pack, they tended not to like us what with us being wolves and all. Plus, we didn't really need them. When you can transform into a wolf it would be a bit weird to go around riding on horses. I was a little nervous about riding it though. Not that I would admit it to the rest of them, even if they could probably feel it. As long as I didn't fall off how bad could it be? I grimaced when I hit upon

the thought of falling off. That was something we definitely didn't need to try out.

Geta had the Pegasus saddled up for us already and packs for us had been strapped to them.

“Time to say goodbye then I suppose.” Aria said turning back to the group who had come to see us off. Several of the Valkyrie had come out. We had got to know quite a few of them whilst they were beating us senseless over the last week. I owed them a great debt though, they had made my pack stronger and for that I would be forever grateful.

Britt walked over and gave Aria a hug. They held each other for a while having a quiet conversation that no one else could hear. Everyone gave them their space to say goodbye. I saw Britt pass something to Aria which she slipped into her pocket as Britt stepped back. Aria stepped over to Geta and shook her hand thanking her. All of the Valkyrie wished us well and several wise cracks were made about beating on us later. Then we were mounting up and heading on our way.

We walked the Pegasus out of the camp until we reached an area with enough space for them to build up the speed needed to take off. The moment that the Pegasus beneath me beat its massive wings and we lifted from the ground, I felt my stomach drop out from underneath me. It climbed quickly until we had cloud cover and it wasn't until we had levelled out that the queasy feeling died down. I had always hated heights. Now that I had a growing affinity with the earth element, it seemed to have got worse. Climbing Yggdrasil was the worst thing I had ever done, until I had thought it would be a good idea to get on a Pegasus. All I could do was lock my eyes straight ahead and try not to look down. I could already feel a cold sweat breaking out over me which I was pretty sure was from fear rather than anything else. I took a deep breath, closing my eyes and slowly blowing it out.



*“You look so hot riding that beast.”* Aria whispered into my mind. I opened my eyes and grinned across at her. I had never been able to be up close to Aria when she was flying, having always been left behind on the ground. But now that I was flying with her, and I could see the happiness shining out of her face, I could see just how much she was in her element up here. It was a shame that we wouldn’t be able to do this again. Even if I was absolutely terrified, it was worth it to see the smile on her face.

## Chapter Fourteen

### Aria

We must have been flying for nearly eleven hours when the city came into view. Apart from one brief rest to eat, we hadn't stopped. The muscles in my back were screaming in pain. I had never flown for so long, ever.

*"We should land here and make camp for the night."* Kyle whispered into everyone's mind. There was no point in trying to talk up here, the wind was just too loud.

I looked down at the ground and saw that the forest which we were flying over came to an end and there were some fields laying beyond it. We could bring the Pegasus down in the field and backtrack a way into the forest to make camp. I didn't really want us out in the open if we could get away with it.

The Pegasus landed relatively easily and the guys clambered off to stretch out their muscles. I flew on ahead to the edge of the forest before slamming into the ground. I was hoping that I was far enough off that the guys wouldn't notice my less than graceful landing. The muscles in my back were knotted tight and it was a wonder I hadn't just dropped out of the sky earlier. I slumped down on the ground and my wings lay limp at my sides as I waited for the guys to catch up. It would at least give me a few minutes to maybe see if my legs were going to work. I really hope that we didn't have far to go before making camp. I gritted my teeth and pulled my wings back inside me. I don't know if it hurt more or less, in fact I don't think it made

any difference at all, but at least I wouldn't be dragging my wings behind me as we walked through the forest.

I wasn't sat for long before Virion found me with his Pegasus trailing behind him. He dropped to his knees behind me.

"We can feel your pain through the bond Aria." He said digging his thumbs into the muscles in my back. I groaned at the flare of pain through my muscles and he eased up on the pressure.

"No, don't stop, it's working." I gritted out.

Virion pushed down on my muscles again and I managed to hold in the groan this time. Every time the pain seemed to lessen, he would move on to another muscle and the pain would flare hard again.

By the time that the other guys got to us a few minutes later I couldn't decide if it was feeling better or worse. I even had a couple tears running down my face and I wasn't even going to try and hide them. Liam dropped down to the ground at my side and nuzzled his face into my neck.

"I got you kitten." He said, scooping me up in his arms and standing up.

"Let's get a bit further into the forest and find somewhere we can camp for the night." Kyle said. "Sykes can you scout ahead."

Sykes gave me a worried look and then with a nod, he shifted to his wolf and took off at a run. Liam held me close against his chest and I leant my head against his shoulders with a sigh.

“You should have said something earlier.” Liam told me quietly. “We could have stopped earlier.”

I shook my head. “If I’d have stopped, I wouldn’t have been able to get going again. It’s okay. I’ll be fine by the morning.” I mumbled. I was so tired and I closed my eyes trusting the guys to get me where we needed to be.

I heard Kyle mumble something and we shifted direction a bit. About ten minutes later the guys came to a stop and I raised my head and had a look around. We seemed to be in a small clearing in between the trees. Sykes had already set up a fire and Liam settled me down on the ground. I looked around and saw that Sykes was missing.

“He’s hunting.” Liam told me knowing who I was looking for.

The guys dropped down on the ground around the fire. Liam was behind me and he gently pulled me back against his chest so that I could relax. The Pegasus were grazing on some grass further into the trees. Geta had assured us that they would return when we told them that we didn’t need them anymore.

“So, what’s the plan?” Virion said leaning back on his hands.

“No idea.” I said with faux cheerfulness.

Kyle smiled and laughed. “I guess we make our way across to the city and see what happens.”

“Works for me.” I said, yawning and scrubbing my hands across my face to try and wake myself up as we sat and waited for Sykes.

I was just about to suggest that one of guys go and see where he was, when he strolled into the clearing with five rabbits hanging in a brace. He had them skinned, gutted and roasting over the fire in no time at all. I could see the guys eyeing up the rabbit and I had a feeling that it maybe wasn't going to be enough for them. The magic burn was really kicking in for them and I remembered the feeling well.

“While we have some down time you guys should practice using your magic in small amounts.” I suggested.

They all looked at me with big puppy dog eyes and I could tell that they weren't quite on board with the idea.

“It's only a suggestion, you don't have to.” I laughed. “But we might not get many other opportunities when we are alone like this for you to try.” I shrugged and left it for them to decide. If they decided to rest, I would press Kyle again later. I hadn't forgotten about his ever-approaching challenge with his father. This magic was a weapon that none of the pack were aware of. But it was more than that, when the pack saw him wield it, there could be no question that he was the right man for the position, that he would bring back the old ways. I don't know how I feel about him taking over the position, but it was something that we were going to have to worry about later. We had far greater problems in our near future that we needed to concentrate on first.

I felt a gust of wind tickle across my chest and I looked up to see Sykes grinning at me. “I didn't mean to practice on me.” I laughed. Just the small movement of it caused my back muscles to spasm and I grunted in pain.

Sykes immediately shot up and jogged across to me. “I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't mean to hurt you.” He lowered me down to the ground where Liam

had laid out some blankets for me. I smiled up at him in thanks. The exhaustion was getting ready to pull me under, but I really did need to eat before I passed out.

“Sleep for a bit. We’ll wake you when the food is ready.” Liam told me, essentially tucking me in with another blanket. I smiled sleepily at his mothering. I felt a warm body lie down and wrap around my back gently pulling me in close. I knew it was Sykes because I felt his feeling of content wash across my mind.

I snuggled back against him and my eyes drifted closed. I couldn’t wait for all of this to be over with. It would be interesting to see how we all fared just living a normal life together.

The guys had woken me to eat and then they had let me sleep while they took turns keeping watch. I was annoyed at first when I woke up and realised that they had left me out of the rotation, but when I flexed my back muscles and wasn’t greeted with a stab of pain, I was grateful that they had let me sleep and heal.

The guys were set around the fire finishing off roasting some more rabbit. I’m not sure if it was a favourite of theirs or if it was just the easiest to hunt, but it seemed to be a frequent visitor to their menu.

I joined them, plopped down on my butt next to Virion who silently passed me some breakfast and dropped a quick peck on my cheek.

*“Are you okay?”* I whispered into his mind. *“I can feel your conflicting emotions.”*

*“I am just nervous about what is to come.”* He whispered back to me. I wasn't convinced that he was telling me the truth but I decided not to push him on the subject, hoping that he would tell me on his own in time.

“So, what's the plan?” I asked as I started tucking into my breakfast. The hunger wasn't pulling at me too much this morning, but the guys descended on their own food like they hadn't eaten in weeks.

“I guess we just head towards the city and see what happens?” Kyle shrugged. “We don't know where Odin is or what type of reception we're going to get when we find anyone. But we don't really have any choice. I figure that if we happen across someone friendly, we can maybe get information. If they are not so friendly, they'll probably end up taking us to Odin to anyway.”

It was a good point. One way or the other we were going to end up in front of the All Father. I just hoped that we didn't end up there in chains.

## Chapter Fifteen

As it turned out, I had apparently been expected a bit too much about the whole chains part.

We had barely even made it a few minutes down the road heading towards the city before we were stopped by a group of soldiers. We had seen them in the distance, perhaps it was stupid to just walk up to them, but as Kyle had pointed out we needed to get to Odin and either way this was probably our quickest way.

As soon as they had seen us walking down the road they had stiffened and their hands had dropped to the hilts of the swords they carried at their waists.

“Everyone stay calm and keep your hands away from any of your weapons.” I murmured as we walked closer, not slowing our steps.

What we had forgotten to consider was that Asgard was closed and we were clearly not from around here. Once we were within about twenty paces of them, it was like they all drew their weapons as one. They fell into a loose formation. One at the front, two slightly behind and then a row of four behind them. It was quite a show of force for a random collection of soldiers on a road and my interest was immediately peaked. I stayed at the front of our group, which was no doubt going to be pissing off all of the guys, and raised my hands to show that they were empty. One of the soldiers in the second row was giving me the strangest look of exasperation. I had no idea what his deal was, but there was something about him that



seemed almost familiar. Once I caught his eye, I almost forgot what to say. He had such beautiful grey eyes.

“We have come to speak with Odin.” I told them. No point in beating around the bush. The soldier in the second row actually rolled his eyes at me and I scoffed in disbelief. Who did he think he was? Unfortunately for me, the officer in charge clearly thought it was intended for him and his level of pissiness just jumped by about one hundred.

“How did you enter Asgard?” The soldier at the front shouted across to me. I mean I was less than ten feet away from him when we finally stopped, there really wasn’t any need to shout.

“We were given a key by a seer.” I told him honestly. I needed these men to realise that we weren’t any threat and get us to where we needed to be.

“There are no keys.” He sneered at me. “The realm was locked by the gods themselves.” He turned his back to us and addressed the man who stood directly behind him. “Transfer them to the interrogation cells.”

What happened next was the most confusing moment I had for a long time and considering the way my life had been going for a while, that was saying a lot. There was a sudden blinding flash of white light. It was so bright that I felt like my eyeballs were burnt. I heard the grunt of the guys behind me as they were hit by the same blast. I didn’t hear any movement coming from the soldiers so whilst I staggered and pressed my fingers into my eyes to try and ease the ache, I didn’t sense anyone making any movement towards us so I wasn’t going to pull a blade out for now.

As my vision was starting to clear I realised that the light around us was significantly dimmer at the same time that the rancid smell of sweat and urine hit me.

*“Is everyone okay?”* I whispered out to the guys.

*“I can’t see for shit.”* Sykes growled.

*“I’m good.”* Liam said, *“Blinded but fine.”*

*“My eyes are out but I’m good.”* Kyle filled in.

*“I am pretty much in the same situation.”* Virion answered.

*“Can anyone else smell that?”* I asked. *“Also, my eyesight is still coming back in, but I’m pretty sure that we are not in the same place.”*

There was silence for a minute before Virion added. *“It smells like we are in a holding cell. Perhaps this is the interrogation cell the soldier mentioned.”*

*“It smells like piss.”* Sykes grumbled. *“What type of holding cells do you have?”*

*“Effective ones.”* Virion mumbled.

My eyesight was pretty much clear after the guys got done taking their grumbling out on each other and I realised that it wasn’t that there was a problem with my eyes, but more that it was pretty dark where we were. Virion was right, this was definitely a holding cell. Or at least that’s what the iron bars were telling me now that I could focus on them. At least we were all in the same cell, small mercies and all that. I looked around me to try and gage just how bad a situation we were in. The cell was definitely

underground. There were no windows and no natural light that I could see. The only light source I could see seemed to be an actual flaming torch in front of the cell. The walls floor and ceiling were all rough hewn rock. The front of the cell was just floor to ceiling bars. There was nothing in here apart from us. We didn't even have a bucket. Hopefully we weren't going to be in here for too long because have you ever noticed that as soon as you realise you don't have anywhere to go to the bathroom, you immediately need to pee! Firstly, I was not going to pee on the floor and lastly there was no way that I was going to pee in front of the guys. I didn't care if we were written in the stars fated lovers, some things need to remain private.

The guys all huddled together discussing what to do, although I have to say it does come across more as bickering at the moment. I lean into the cell bars and try to get a view on what's outside. We seem to be in a long corridor of cells. There is another one directly across from us but it's empty. From what I can see the corridor is lined on both sides with cells. I can't see into any of the other cells on our side because the corridor is straight and disappears into darkness on each end. The cells across the way are mostly dark and it's impossible to see the back of them. They could be filled with people watching us, but we wouldn't know. Although anyone watching us would be in the same position as we were, so I'm not sure that it should really bother us. It's not like any of us are going anywhere.

Kyle appeared next to me, copying my movements and checking out the corridor of cells outside as well. "We need to get out of here." He mumbled.

"I thought we said that if someone took us at least we would be going to see Odin, in any event." Liam said confused.

"This isn't being taken to Odin." He said squinting to look into the dark cells across from us. "This isn't a place we should linger. My wolf senses something here."

“Death.” A disembodied female voice croaks from one of the cells across from us. “There is nothing here but death, if you are lucky enough to find it.” Her dry, cracked voice broke into weak coughs and I felt myself clinging to the bars even tighter.

“We came here to speak with Odin. Will they take us to him?” I asked the woman I couldn’t see.

“You don’t want to see Odin.” She whispered almost too quietly for me to hear.

“We need to speak with him, we need him to open the gate of Valhalla. The Valkyrie are needed to save the magic realm. There is a demon army about to descend on them.” I said recognising the desperation in my own voice.

“He won’t care. He gave up caring, long before the madness took over. Now all he cares about is holding his throne”

“What do you mean madness?” Virion asked her quietly. I hadn’t realised that he had even walked up to the bars and was standing next to me. I was pretty sure that the woman was in the cell to the left of the one opposite us and I was intently staring into the darkness to try and see her.

“Madness can be the only excuse for what he has done. If he hasn’t gone mad, then what hope is there for any of us?” Her voice broke again and it broke my heart to hear it. She had clearly given up. She had the voice of a broken person.

“How long have you been here?” I asked, sinking down to my knees and holding onto the bars. Liam knelt down behind me and held me against his chest. I could feel the sympathy and hurt flowing through our bond as the

guys were clearly coming to the same conclusion which I had. What had happened to this woman?

“Decades.” She said, breaking down into weak coughs again. “I won’t last much longer though. I used to be naïve enough to think that someone would come for me. That he would save me. But he never came.” Her voice hitched and she went quiet. I could tell that she was weeping, even if I couldn’t hear or see it.

“We need to help her.” I told the guys, who had formed a protective circle around me.

“We might need to try and help ourselves first.” Virion said examining the bars to our cell. “Can you loosen the stone holding these bars in place?” He asked Kyle.

Kyle looked up at where Virion was looking with a pained look on his face. I knew that they all felt like they hadn’t come far enough on in their magic but really, with just a week under their belt, they had come forward in huge strides. Geta was good, but even I knew that what they were expecting in only a week would have been a miracle.

“I don’t know.” Kyle said reluctantly. “How far underground are we? What if I cause a collapse or something?”

I placed a reassuring hand on his arm and gave him a squeeze. “Just do what Geta said, let a tiny bit out at first and then increase it gradually, if you get worried about anything, at any point, just cut it off. I would have thought that you would have to release a huge burst to be able to cause a collapse.”

“Geta?” The voice cut in. “You have seen Geta?”

*“We should consider that this is not a true prisoner, but merely an interrogation technique.”* Virion whispered into all of our minds.

*“I don’t know. My magic doesn’t sense her as a threat. She seems genuinely distressed.”* I whispered back.

*“Even so, it is better to err on the side of caution.”* Virion whispered. The other guys nodded solemnly and even though I knew it made sense, part of me trusted her. I suppose that was the point of this type of interrogation technique though. I just nodded back to them to indicate that I would be careful.

“Can you come closer to the bars?” I asked the woman.

I heard the brief shifting of chains. “I cannot move that far.” She said quietly.

No one spoke in reply and I felt the smallest twinge in my magic as Kyle began to slowly feed his magic into the stones surrounding us. The effect was underwhelming to say the least. A bit of stone dust fell, but that was it. I could feel an increase in the pressure in the air that I recognised as Kyle’s magic, but then it suddenly popped and Kyle sagged down to the floor.

“There is something suppressing my magic here. It’s like trying to wade through mud.” He panted.

“You are in the cells of Asgard, of course your magic is suppressed.” The woman’s voice sounds almost amused and I feel a flare of annoyance at her

disregard for the situation we so stupidly stumbled into. “There is no escape from this place.”

I knelt down next to Kyle and pulled him to me, so that he could rest his head on my shoulder. He might not be saying it, but I can feel the exhaustion setting in to him. Using their magic always take something out of them, but he must have pushed it too far to be this tired already.

“Are you alright?” I ask him.

Kyle tried to stand up but slumped back down, putting most of his weight on me. If I didn’t know better, I would have thought that he had passed out. I looked up at Sykes and Liam in panic, not knowing what to do. This is beyond what ever happened to them in the practice yard. Sykes crouched down beside Kyle and rested a hand on his shoulder, concern etched across his face.

“There is something wrong with our friend.” Virion tells the prisoner across the way.

“It is the backlash.” She says quietly. “To discourage you trying to use your magic to escape. It saps your strength.”

We all looked down at Kyle and panic suddenly flashed through my mind. I knew that the others would be able to feel it too, but I couldn’t hold it back. This is a prime example of why we should not be the ones to be doing this fucking thing. We didn’t know what we were doing. We haven’t had any kind of training. We were just making it up as we went along and apparently fucking it up as well. Walking up to those soldiers was possibly the stupidest thing we have ever done. How are we supposed to even get out of here? I should have waited to speak with my father again. I should have asked him for more information about Odin. But then I told him that we

were going to speak with him. Why didn't he tell me that he had gone fucking crazy?

"Kitten?" Liam said, shaking my shoulder. My eyes focus in on his face in front of mine and I realised that I might have just zoned out for a minute while I ranted at myself in my head.

"I'm sorry." I whispered quietly.

"Don't worry, we are going to get out of here." He said running his hand through my hair and I leant into his touch as he ran his nails across my scalp.

A noise came from the far end of the corridor and footsteps echoed through the quietness. They seemed so much more foreboding with the darkness enveloping the surrounding cells. This is it then, they were coming for us. Liam, Sykes and Virion moved in front of Kyle and I, shielding us with their bodies. Even Kyle moved to slump across the front of me and try to cover me with his body. The footsteps grow louder and quicker and the woman in the cell across from us started to quietly whimper.

By the time that the steps seemed to be closing in on us, whoever was making the noise was at a full run. I had a moment to realise how strange that was before the soldier from earlier stepped into the light and in front of our cell.

"We have to be quick." He panted. "We have to get you out of here before the shifts change and the new guards check the cells." He pulled a key out of his trousers and unlocked the cell door pulling it open quickly.



We all just stayed where we were in varying amounts of shock looking at him like idiots. I didn't even have words at that moment to ask what was happening.

"I know you speak the same language as me because you talked to me earlier. What I'm not understanding is what about what I just said that seems to make you not realise the urgency of this situation." He snapped at us. And just like that we start to move.

Liam and Sykes stooped down and pulled Kyle to his feet, slinging one of his arms over each of their shoulders. Virion reached a hand down and helped me to my feet and then we reluctantly stepped out of our cell. We didn't really have a choice but to trust this soldier. There's something about him though, he feels familiar and I didn't think that he would betray us.

"There is a system of tunnels we can take that will lead us out of the city. They're an old escape route so once we're inside we shouldn't meet anyone who's going to try and stop us." He said looking nervously down the corridor in the direction that he came from.

"We have to get her out too." I tell him pointing in the vague direction of where I think that the other woman is.

His eyes flick across to the other cell and I see a flash of pain cross his face. "We can't take her with us. They already know that there should be someone in that cell. Besides, Odin will realise that she is missing and we can't afford for him to be on our trail before we can put enough distance between us and the city."

I'm about to argue with him when he steps towards me and puts his hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry. We can't take her now, but we are working on a way to get her out of here, I promise you."

I lock eyes with him while he tells me and I can see his determination in them. I realise then that I not only believe him, but I trust him. I know that he means what he is saying. I give him a nod and he turned and started to walk back the way that he came waving over his shoulder for us to follow him. “We need to be quiet until we are out of the tunnels, some of them run under populated areas and we can’t afford to draw any attention to ourselves.”

It only takes me a few steps to draw level with the cell that holds the woman who was speaking with us. I was going to tell her that we would come back for her. That she just needed to hold on for a little longer and we would find a way to get her out. But then I saw her and my feet refused to move. She was kneeling on the ground at the back of the cell. Her wrists shackled to the ground. The chains are so short that they pull her arms out wide and keep her hunched over. She can’t even sit up straight. But the horror of how they are holding her is nothing compared to her condition. She is filthy and her clothes have turned to rags, rotting away from her body. But rising from her back, on display from the cruel way that they have chained her, are the bloody stumps where a pair of wings must have once been. A few feathers remain on the mangled stumps. They are charred and festering. Someone has torn the wings from her body. This woman is a Valkyrie, like me. But it’s more than that, she is mine. She is one of my people.

I turn to look at the others and the guys have all stopped as well, looks of anger cross their faces. My magic rages at the sight of the woman, matching my own rage. Why would someone do this to her? There is nothing that anyone could ever do that would warrant this treatment.

I try to clamp down on my magic as it burns and flashes through my system, but there is no controlling it. Part of me doesn’t even want to, but I have enough sense to realise that releasing my magic here is not the

smartest thing to do when we are trying to sneak our way out. I drop down to one knee and clench my teeth so hard I'm almost certain that I hear one of them crack. My hands are in fists and sweat starts to bead on my forehead.

"What's happening to her?" The soldier whispers in panic.

"She's losing control." Virion realises dropping down in front of me. He goes to put his hands on my face, but I rear back from him in panic.

"No." I huff out through my clenched teeth. "I can't hold it ... I don't want to burn you."

"You can't burn me." He says with a smile, shuffling towards me on his knees. "I am your mate. I was made for you. Your magic will not harm me. Besides, my magic burns just as hot as yours now." He says pulling me into his arms.

I allow myself to slump forward against him. I can't hold him back, I feel like if I relax at all I will lose control of the tenuous grip that I have. I'm also not entirely convinced that he is right about my magic and, even though I know I'm being entirely unreasonable, a little upset that he thinks that my magic isn't better than his. I grit out a smile at my ridiculous ass self and it's almost like just that one moment helps me grip the raging inferno inside me and shove it down. It is excruciating and it feels like it burns right down to the very essence of me as it fights me every step of the way. I don't know how Virion can be so calm about my flames when they burn even me. I suppose I haven't ever told them that though.

Once I know that I have control again I pat Virion's arm and he pulls away from me. Looking up I see that Liam is holding the soldier back from trying

to reach me and I cock my head to the side in confusion. Liam whispers something into his ear and he nods in acceptance, stepping back.

Virion goes to help me up, but I shake my head and shuffle over to the bars of the woman's cell. She won't be able to see me if I'm standing and I don't want to add to her pain. She locks eyes with me at the same time as I grasp hold of her cell bars.

"You must leave me." She says quietly as a single tear runs down her cheek. From the grime on her face it is clear that she hasn't allowed herself to cry for a long time.

"You just need to survive a little longer. We will get you out of here." I tell her.

She gives me a placating smile and I know that she doesn't believe me. "What's your name?" I ask her.

"Myra." She tells me and that one word sends my magic raging to be released again. Thankfully I have it in my hold now and I'm not at risk of bursting into a raging inferno, no matter how much I want to be.

I look across at the soldier who is now talking quietly with the guys. His attention isn't on me for the moment. I press my face against the bars, trying to get as close as I can to the woman in front of me. She doesn't look much older than me, but then neither did Geta and she must have been hundreds of years old.

"Myra," I know we don't have much time but I need to know. "Could you be my mother?" I ask her as quietly as I can.

Her eyes flare wide in panic and sudden recognition and that is all that I need for confirmation. The tears come fast down her face and I can feel my own trailing down my cheeks. All this time, she was here, all this time. The realisation that there was someone out there that did care for me rocks me to my very foundation. She has suffered for my entire life, here in this disgusting cell, just because she dared to birth me. I wasn't abandoned. I was hidden. And even though it didn't turn out to be the safest place that I could have been, what she has gone through is far, far worse. I stretch an arm through the bars towards her, even though I know that I have no chance of reaching her. She strains against her own chains trying to reach me, but there is no way.

“You have to leave.” She whispered urgently to me. “They cannot discover that you are here or who you are.”

“Come with us.” I told her. “Come with us now.”

“I cannot. They will notice that I am missing and you will not have enough time to get away. You have to leave now. Do not tell anyone who I am. You do not know who could be listening.” She whispered quietly.

“I will come back for you.” I tell her firmly.

She smiles and I see the hope in her eyes. “I can feel your magic. You are strong. And so beautiful.” She says with a hitch in her voice.

“Geta calls me ...” I look behind me, but the guys are still distracted talking and for some reason it's important to me that they don't overhear us. “... the Phoenix General.”

Hope lights her face almost like she only now realises that I actually might be coming back for her. She is no longer humouring me, but daring to allow herself to hope. I know, deep down in the very fibre of my being, that even if I have to rip this realm apart and drive my sword through Odin's heart, I will come back for her. She will be free. My magic flickers inside me in response and I feel the heat of it blaze through my eyes. I can see through the flames that I know flicker in my eyes. It turns the world around me into varying colours of orange and red, almost like the realm is already burning.

My mother smiles and nods gently. Her eyes flicker to the guys and then back to me. "Be safe my daughter. Find your father, he will help you."

I reluctantly get to my feet, I don't want to leave her here, but if this soldier is correct, we don't have a choice. The guys stop talking when they realise that I have stood and I squint in suspicion at them. It's never good when they do this. When they realise something before I do.

Kyle weakly pats the soldier's shoulder. "Time to go." He says leaning heavily against Liam. Sykes pulls Kyle's other arm back over his shoulder and Virion reaches back and takes my hand.

*"Are you okay?"* Virion whispers into my mind.

I nod, not quite ready to talk about it. Leaving my mother here is the hardest thing I have ever done. But we can't afford to fail the mission which has brought us here. Not even for her. My heart breaks as we walk further down the corridor and into the darkness. Ever since I was thrown into this world, I feel like I have had to sacrifice so much. My freedom, my future and now my family. I know that others have lost just as much, sometimes even more, but it's still hard to accept. But that is why what we are doing is so important. We have to bring all of this to an end. These people deserve a time of peace and unity. Changes need to be made and if I have to, I will force them to make them.

Virion gives my hand a squeeze and I follow quietly behind them. The flames in my eyes died as soon as I turned away from my mother. It was almost like my magic was trying to reach out to her just as much as I was. Now I'm left trying to strain my eyes to see through the dark. This soldier seems confident that we will be safe heading into these tunnels, but I can't help but strain my eyes and ears seeking any sign of anyone ready to intercept us.

Once we come towards a bend in the tunnel the soldier slows his steps. There is a stone spiral staircase taking up the entire bend in the corridor. Torches line it as far as I can see and it's the most we've seen since we were somehow transported here. The soldier who is escorting us darts into a shadow, ducking down behind the turn in the staircase, I heard the noise of stone dragging on stone and then his hand appeared back around the corner waving us forward. Liam and Sykes negotiate Kyle around while Virion and I keep watch in the corridor. I'm not exactly sure what we're thinking we're going to do if someone appears on the corridor because I can still feel the oppressive nature in the air pushing down on my magic. After what feels like hours, but was probably only moments, Sykes' head pops around the corner and he beckons us over. Virion pushes me in front of him and I glare back at him even though I appreciate the gesture, but not so much the shove. He just grins at me. I'm finding it increasingly difficult to be annoyed with any of them which is more annoying than the fact he just shoved me. I'm still grumbling under my breath about it when I duck down beneath the steps and see the opening in the stone floor beneath the stairwell, with half of Sykes popping out of it. He reaches up to help me down through the hole and whilst I would normally insist on going alone, I can't see a thing down there so I gladly accept his assistance this time.

Sykes lowers me down into a dark, damp and pretty terrifying tunnel. It's tall enough to stand comfortably in and you could probably walk two abreast in here. The soldier seems to have moved a bit further down and has a torch in his hand. Kyle is leaning against a wall nearby and Liam is

talking quietly with him. Something is going on between the guys and it's pissing me off that they are keeping it from me. I hear the scuff of Virion dropping down into the tunnel and turn just in time to see him and Sykes drag the stone back in place, sealing us inside. I have a split moment of panic at the thought of being sealed in here, but I take a deep breath, pull up my big girl pants and turn back down the tunnel. Kyle pushes away from the wall and walks towards the soldier. He seems a bit shaky on his feet, but he's much better than he was before when the others had to carry him. Now that I think about it, the heavy weight in the air from above is significantly less down here.

*"How are you feeling?"* I whisper into Kyle's mind and then internally laugh at how many times we seem to have said that to each other over the last day.

*"Better, I can feel my wolf again now and I already feel stronger."* He whispers back to me.

*"You couldn't feel him before, when we were upstairs."* I whisper back in concern.

*"I could but it was more like when you're trying to hear something under water, muffled or further away than normal."* He answers.

*"That's pretty terrifying."* I shudder internally at the thought. What must it feel like to suddenly lose a part of yourself? That thought immediately sends my mind back to my mother who we just left behind in that cell. Her wings torn from her back. I've only had my wings for a short time, but I don't know how I would survive without them. Which leads me to the painful question of if she can do it either. We have to find a way to get back here to help her. I hate Odin, I hate him so much that my magic rolls in joy at the things that I wish we could do to him. He doesn't deserve to sit in any position of power. I don't care if he has gone crazy, he needs to be stopped.



We all shuffle quietly down the tunnel for well over an hour before the soldier draws to a stop ahead of us. When we catch him up, he turns back and quietly tells us that we should take a break.

Kyle seems to gratefully drop to the ground and I'm worried about how much has been taken out of him. He shouldn't be this tired. Liam stays by his side and Virion and Sykes pull me to the ground between them. The damp tunnel is getting increasingly cold the further we travel down it and the heat of having two mates pressed against me is blissful. I snuggle deeper into Virion and make sure to pull Sykes against my back so that he gets the message that I want him close. I can feel his chest huff as he silently laughs at me.

*"I'm not a blanket."* He laughs into my mind.

*"Mmmmm yes you are. You're my warm snuggly blanket right now."* I whisper into his mind with a grin.

He wraps his arms around me, and even Virion, and leans against me, keeping me warm with his body heat.

*"I love you all so much."* I whisper to them all. *"But I'm sorry that you've been dragged into this. That you've ended up in this place because of me."* I end sadly.

Virion pulls me into his lap and Sykes shuffles closer, wrapping his arms around us both. It should be weird that he is essentially cuddling Virion, but it's not. It seems completely natural for us to be wrapped up together.

I feel the warmth of Virion's breath on my neck as he lightly draws his tongue from my shoulder to my earlobe. He gently pinches my lob between his teeth and I squirm in delicious delight as I feel myself grow wet from the small contact. It has been too long since we all took the time to be together and my body is craving the touch of all of them. Sykes inhales deeply and then softly growls next to me. He ducks his head down and lightly brushes his lips against mine, before we hear the sound of someone softly clearing their throat.

“We need to keep moving.” The soldier quietly tells us. “We have another two hours before the tunnel ends and we need to clear it before my patrol returns to the city expecting to find you in the cells. As long as we are outside of the city walls by the time that the alarm is raised, they will not be able to pinpoint your location with magic.”

We all reluctantly get to our feet and then the trek through the dark tunnel continues. The further we move away from my mother, the heavier my heart feels. I can't help but feel like I've just made the biggest mistake of my life and I only hope that after all of this is done that it isn't the final thing that eventually breaks me.

## Chapter Sixteen

### Dom

The bottle shattered against the wall next to my head and I felt the small shards of glass hit the field of magic that surrounded me, before dropping to the ground. Wyatt was more drunk than I had ever seen him. I didn't even know where he was getting the booze from anymore. Every morning when he went out to deal with pack business I would come into his room and clean him out. Yet once he got back here after lunch, he still managed to get blind drunk, drowning his sorrows in a sea of whiskey.

“What the fuck?” I growled at him. “You need to pull it together!”

“Fuck off!” Wyatt screamed at me. “Just fucking leave me alone.”

Wyatt was half laid on the floor and half propped up against the side of his bed, no doubt where he had fallen at some point and was now too drunk to be able to get his ass off the floor. I was done with babying him. All the time that I spent at the academy, I had to be the calm and reassuring principle. Well, all of that burnt to the ground with the academy and now I was done being that person any more. I slid down the closed door and sat on the floor with my legs braced in front of me.

“Why are you still here?” He said quietly, pulling another bottle of whiskey out from under the bed and opening it. He even had the audacity to smirk at me as he lifted it to his lips and gulped it down. I know that I had cleared

out the bottles from under there this morning. Someone must be bringing them in for him.

“I need you to tell me about her.” I said quietly. “I need more information about her. We’ve found some journals hidden in a safe in Marcus’ room but they are encoded.”

Caleb had wanted to keep the journals quiet. He had argued that if we couldn’t decode them or if they came to a dead end it would push Wyatt further into the depression that he was already in. I think that he needs the hope of a potential way to find her to pull him out of this. We only have just over a week to go. We need Wyatt functional now. The pack is starting to whisper about where Wyatt goes. He needs to offer them his support. The satellite packs are getting restless and if he isn’t careful one of the lesser Alphas is going to step up and claim this pack for themselves. The women, more than anyone, need him to keep the pack whole until Kyle gets back.

Wyatt slumped further down to the floor. “She’s gone. What’s the point?” He mumbled swigging hard from the bottle again.

I took a moment to think. In the grand scheme of things, Wyatt was too drunk to notice anyway. Tough love seemed to be the best way to go, but I wasn’t sure if in his current state he could take it. I couldn’t risk pushing him further off the deep end, but he needed to snap out of this. For some reason I need to find his mate.

“She needs you.” I seethed. “You were lucky enough to find your fated mate. You know who she is. And now, when she needs you the most, you’re just going to drown yourself in whiskey and abandon her? I thought you were a better man than that.” I accused him. I almost felt like holding my breath while I waited to see what he would do. It was like a whole array of emotions passed across his face as he sat there, slumped against the bed,

drunk off his arse. There was definitely hate in there, but I wasn't sure if it was for me or for himself.

Wyatt breathed deeply, sucking great lungfuls of air through his nose and forcing them out through his mouth. He was either getting ready to jump up and tear me apart or he was actually getting ready to do something. At this point, it could go either way and I didn't know him well enough to be able to guess which way he was going to go.

Wyatt's uncoordinated arm swung up and across the top of his bed. He hauled himself to his feet and wobbled precariously on the spot. Looking down at the bottle in his hand in disgust he set it down on the bedside table with such a slam that I was surprised it didn't shatter in his hand.

"Tell me about the journal." Wyatt demanded as he pulled off his shirt. He staggered over to the en-suite bathroom and left the door open. I heard the shower turn on and the distinct sound of the fly on his jeans being pulled down before he stepped into the shower with a litany of curse words flowing from his lips. Finally, Wyatt was stepping up. And if I was right, hopefully the cold shower he was currently taking would be enough to snap him out of his drunken haze enough for us to start planning our next move.

## Chapter Seventeen

### Aria

When we finally reached the end of the tunnel it took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the blinding sunlight. We had probably only been in there for a few hours but it felt like the sun was scorching across my retinas. The soldier drew to a sudden stop at the end of the tunnel and we all stumbled into a collision with each other as we each suffered with the same temporary blindness. No one dared to speak. We knew that he was taking a risk to sneak us out of the city of Asgard and after seeing what Odin had done to my mother, I didn't want to end up back in one of those cells.

He gave us a moment to regain our sensors and as soon as my eyes started to work again, I realised that the arms that I currently found myself cradled in were the soldier's. Not only that but he was looking down at me with an emotion in his eyes which I felt sure must have been my mind playing tricks on me.

“Erm ... where next?” I asked, struggling for anything else to say.

I heard one of the guys, Sykes if I had to guess, laugh at my predicament and I had a moment when I began to wonder why he wasn't flying off the handle about another man holding onto his mate. Then the realisation hit me. The whispers in corners, the cryptic comments.

“Oh, you have to be fucking kidding me!” I suddenly proclaimed.

Everyone around me hissed and shushed at me, making far more noise than I originally had and basically just pissing me off.

*“Don’t fucking shush me!”* I angrily whispered into my mates’ minds. *“I can’t believe that you would keep this from me ... again!”*

Sykes cradled his temple with one hand, I knew that he hated it when I shouted into his mind. But really, it was their own fault. We were mates, we were a team. We were supposed to work together. They needed to stop trying to leave me out of things. The only reason that they could have to do that would be because they thought I was too weak to handle the truth. And fuck that! With everything that I had been through. I had more than proved to anyone that I was not weak. But I shouldn’t have to prove it to them. They should support me no matter what.

They must have been able to feel the anger blazing through me through our bond because they all looked extremely chastised and upset about the whole predicament that they suddenly found themselves in. The soldier, whose name we hadn’t even learned yet, or rather whose name no one had decided to bother to tell me, looked between us all in concern. Part of me felt sorry for him that he was about to be sucked into this, but then another part of me thought fuck that! He should think for himself and learn not to take this bunch of idiots’ advice!

I looked around me and noticed that we weren’t actually in a city, but rather that our tunnel seemed to have opened up on the edge of a waterway. It looked like one of the storm drain outlets that we had in the big cities back home. Home. I didn’t even know where that was anymore. A treeline lay not too far ahead and we stopped in the opening of the tunnel watching the land between us and the trees. The idea was clear, we were going to make a run for it and hope that we weren’t seen. Even though I was annoyed I looked back at Kyle. He seemed much better and was standing on his own now.

“Can you make it?” I asked him quietly. He gave me a hard nod and I turned back to look at what lay ahead of us.

I had to admit that Asgard was a beautiful place. Beyond the trees which lay in front of us was a huge mountain range. I’d never been up close to mountains before and it took my breath away to see how enormous they were in real life. Everything here was just so clean and new looking. Probably because they didn’t have the pollution problems that the human realm had. Or at least I assumed that they didn’t. There didn’t seem to be any cars about that I had seen. The sky was a vivid blue and the clouds even seemed whiter than I’d ever seen before. Maybe I was just feeling grateful that we didn’t end up stuck in that cell.

The soldier turned back to us. “We should cross in small groups as quickly as possible. Head into the trees a short way and we can meet up under the canopy where it’s thicker.” He told us quietly.

He reached back and took hold of my hand. For a moment I just stared at it like an idiot. His hands were so much bigger than mine and I could feel the callouses formed from extensive weapons training. It was nice though and I felt my magic purr through my system in response to his touch. When I looked back up at his face, after an embarrassingly long while, I saw his eyes flash with gold before he scrunched them shut and took a few deep breaths. It was nice to know that I affected him as well.

When he opened his eyes they were back to his original deep brown colour. There was something about his eyes that just looked so sad. “On three.” He told me. I took one last look at the guys behind me and then dropped into a crouch ready to run. When he hit three he squeezed my hand hard and we both shot off at a run. After a few steps I dropped his hand so that I could pump my arms while I sprinted across the clearing. It was just a flat expanse of meadow so it wasn’t challenging. It only took three or four



minutes before we were under the cool shade of the trees, but my heart was pounding from the adrenalin. I cast a quick glance over my shoulder to make sure that the meadow was still quiet and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw no one following us and my guys still hunkered down in the shadow of the tunnel opening. The soldier had pulled ahead of me by a few steps, but he came to a stop by a fallen tree where the underbrush was thicker. When I dropped to the ground beside him, he pulled me tight against him and I willingly went. His strong arms wrapped around me and I took the opportunity to look up at him.

“Thank you for coming for us.” I told him. And I meant it. We would never have made it out of there if he hadn’t.

He dropped his forehead down to mine and I felt my muscles relax in his hold. My heart was still pounding, but I didn’t know if it was from the adrenalin of the run or if it was because he was holding me in his arms. I knew what he was, I’m almost certain that the guys did as well, and judging by his actions I was hoping that he knew it as well. My magic was being weird, just for a change. I could feel it pushing against my chest, almost like it was trying to reach out for him. I saw confusion flicker across his face and I hoped it wasn’t because he was unsure of me. We didn’t have long here and I knew that he needed to come with me. I just didn’t know how I was going to persuade him on that if he wasn’t willing to come. I suppose I could arrange to meet him back in Valhalla after the battle, but my heart broke at the thought of having to leave him behind. Anyway, we didn’t even know if we were going to be able to make it back.

“I don’t even know your name.” I whispered.

“Braedon.” He told me, just as Sykes and Kyle burst through the trees and dropped down beside me.

Braedon was still holding me in his arms when they dropped down and neither of them looked bothered about it at all. That was the confirmation that I needed that they already knew that we had found my fifth mate. It was alright for them. They had their wolves to tell them that he was pack. I only had my weird ass magic and my hormones.

After ten minutes had passed and Liam and Virion hadn't joined us, I started to worry. I tried to look over the log, but Braedon just held onto me tighter. I was starting to wonder if this was more about keeping me down than taking an opportunity to embrace me. I gave him one of my 'don't make me smack you' looks and a huge grin took over his face, making dimples pop on both his cheeks. That just annoyed me even more. Of course, he has dimples. He will no doubt use them against me in the future because now all I could think about was licking them.

Braedon slowly lowered his head and ran his nose along the length of my neck, breathing in my scent. When he reached my ear, he whispered. "They are waiting for a guard to move out of the meadow."

I was basically liquid in his arms by now and my weird ass magic was purring like a kitten. I knew that Kyle and Sykes would be able to smell my arousal and I hoped that it wouldn't bother them. It hadn't bothered them when we first met Virion, but now that my collection of mates seemed to be growing I didn't want them to think that I wanted them any less.

*"It's almost as hot watching her with someone else, as it is when she's in my arms."* I heard Kyle whisper into my mind. It was no doubt Sykes that he was talking to, but I appreciated that he had let me hear. He would probably have been able to feel my unease. The bond was handy when it came to managing a relationship between more than two people, you always knew what the others were feeling. Yes, it was possible to shut things out of the bond, but that was telling in itself.

Sykes growled in response and it wasn't an angry growl. It was my favourite kind of growl, and I really hoped that we reached where ever we were going soon because I was long overdue some alone time with my mates.

Braedon's arms tightened at Sykes' growl and I lightly ran my fingers down his chest to reassure him. It must be difficult not only being outside of the bond, but finding your mate and then realising that you had to share her. I know the guys keep telling me that it is normal. But we don't know if it is normal for Braedon. Maybe Virion should speak with him about it, he knows what it's like to come into the bond with us.

Waiting for Liam and Virion was making me antsy though. It was taking too long and when they finally burst through the trees and dropped down beside us, I was nearly beside myself. I was ready to burst out of here, swords swinging and just clear their path, regardless of the consequences. We gave them a moment to catch their breath and then Braedon was leading the way again. We wove through the trees for another hour or so and I realised that we were heading towards the mountain. The trees seemed to grow up the base for a short distance and it wasn't long before we were walking up a hard incline. It occurred to me that I could just open my wings and fly to save my legs, but that would mean leaving the others behind and, even if I was a bit annoyed with my guys, I wasn't willing to do that.

Once we reached the edge of the treeline all of my guys sunk down to the ground, but Kyle didn't look like he was fairing too well. He looked exhausted. The other guys looking tired, but he looked completely wiped out. He needed to rest after whatever had happened back at the cells. Ahead of us the terrain was rocky and steeper. We were definitely on the mountain proper now.

Braedon was leaning against one of the trees, his eyes scanning the route ahead of us. He never seemed to relax. He always seemed to be constantly

on alert. There was definitely something going on within Asgard and I was surprised that Geta hadn't known about it. I knew that the Valkyrie kept to Valhalla and didn't travel into Asgard itself, but still. You would have thought that they would have had some knowledge of what was happening in their world.

*"What's wrong kitten? You seem on edge about something."* Liam whispered into my mind.

*"Braedon."* I reached out to all of their minds as I said it.

*"It's okay, kitten. We knew that a fifth was coming and we are okay with it. It doesn't bother us. You know this from when we welcomed Virion into the bond."* Liam told me.

*"It's not that. He just seems very on edge."* I told them, watching Braedon closely.

*"Well we are currently running for our lives having escaped some kind of torture dungeon."* Sykes unhelpfully filling in.

*"I know that but it just seems more than that. There's something else going on, I'm sure of it."*

*"I think that we can trust him."* Virion told us. *"He can feel the mate bond and I don't think that he would act against it. It would go against his very nature to put you in a position of danger."*

*"How do you know that he feels it?"* I asked. I hadn't taken my eyes off Braedon. It killed me to feel suspicious of him, but what did we really know about him and what he was involved in.

*“He told us.” Sykes said cheerfully. “While you were talking with that prisoner, he just came out and told us that he knew you were his mate and he asked us about our bond with you. I think he felt it as soon as he saw you back on that highway.”*

I didn't reply. I didn't want to draw any questions about what I had been speaking with my mother about. I didn't want to discuss the fact that she was my mother. Not yet. Not until I had time to process it as well. My father had said that he hadn't been able to reach her, but it seemed like the cells were easily reached through the tunnel.

Braedon turned back to us and silently waved us forward. When we were level with him, he quietly spoke. “We need to travel to the entrance of the caves which is about another hours climb up the mountain.” He knelt down and pointed up the mountain. I followed his finger but I couldn't see any cave entrance where he was pointing. It all just looked like mountain to me.

“You see where the outcrop of rocks turns to a darker grey? There is a small bush just level with the change in colour.”

I squinted harder and I thought that I could see where he was pointing, but again there wasn't a cave entrance there.

“The entrance is shielded. There is a small trail which runs along there. Once you reach the bush you need to take five steps forward on the trail and then step through the mountain face.” He told us.

I looked at him like he was crazy. He wanted us to walk into a rock wall?

“The shield prevents you from being able to see the entrance and also anyone stepping through. You need to have the position in your mind because you won’t be able to see where it is otherwise. Once you step through, keep walking. It will feel similar to stepping through a portal, but you need to keep walking. It is a short distance until you reach the cave system on the other side and step out of the shielding. Do not panic. You will not get stuck, as long as you keep moving.” He quietly informed us.

“I fucking hate portals.” I grumbled quietly and Sykes slung his arm around my shoulders and gave me a squeeze. I could feel his chest heaving and I knew that he was silently laughing at me, the dick.

“We need to move fast, I don’t like being out in the open this long, but it’s the quickest way into the cave system from the tunnels.” Braedon informs us.

We all nod resolutely and then I glance back at Kyle. I didn’t know how fast he could move. He’s definitely drained, even if he is putting a brave face on it.

“Aria, you should fly to the entrance. If you keep low to the ground it won’t be any different than if you were running, but you’ll be able to cover the ground much quicker.” Virion suggests.

“Fly?” Braedon repeats looking at me in question.

“I can carry you.” I suggest to Kyle. From the look on his face, you would have thought that I had punched him.

“No!” He firmly answers. I think I might have bruised a man card there a bit.

“How fast can you fly?” Braedon asks.

I look at the guys because I have no idea. They all just look back at me, no help at all. I shrug. “Faster than I can run.” I say lamely.

“She could out fly my panther and I move pretty quick.” Liam says trying to help.

Braedon frowns in thought. “It would be better if you could take someone with you then. I don’t like the idea of you getting out of reach and no one being with you to guard you.” I couldn’t help but laugh at that. Guard me. That’s the best joke I’ve heard all day.

Kyle smiles with I hope the same thought, then sighs in resignation. “Fine.”

“Hey, if it’s a problem she can carry me.” Sykes says practically bouncing on the spot. “I would love to have a go at flying with her.” I’m not sure if he is saying it to try and appease Kyle, or if he actually means it, but I realise that I would actually love to go flying with them too.

Braedon still looks slightly confused about the situation and I can’t wait to see the look on his face when I release my wings and take my Valkyrie form.

“Okay, Kyle goes with Aria and the rest of us will follow as quickly as possible. Don’t wait for us at the entrance, go straight through. We will meet you in the cave system.” Braedon said sternly and we all nodded in agreement whilst keeping low to the ground and under the cover of the trees.

My magic was purring like a happy little kitten, almost like it was excited to show Braedon what it could do. It washed over me eagerly leaving a delicious gentle burn running through my body in its wake. Braedon's eyes widened in surprise and then they flickered across me. I fought the urge to shout surprise with some pretty cool jazz hands added in.

Kyle hauled himself up off the ground, leaning heavily against the tree next to him. I don't know how he thought that he was going to run up the side of a mountain when he could barely stand up.

"Where do you want me then?" He asked stubbornly. I resisted the urge to laugh because I knew that he was feeling sensitive about this and I didn't want to make it any harder for him. I really was becoming a better person.

I considered it for a moment and then turned my back to him. "I think it will be easier if you wrap your arms around my neck." It would mean that he would be lying flush against my back while we were flying. It would be easier to see where we were going and make any quick turns if we needed to. Kyle stepped up to me and pressed himself flush against my back.

I cleared my throat to try and push the blast of lust I felt from having him pressed against me. It really had been too long. "Are my swords digging into you too much?" I lamely asked.

"No sweetheart." He murmured into my ear. "I can't remember why I didn't want to do this now." He rubbed his head against the side of mine and that blast of lust came back full force. Followed by a very wicked idea of what we should do together later.

"Actually, do you think we should go last?" I asked looking up to the others. It was clear that there was a large amount of jealousy being felt at the moment, but not in a bad way.



“Why?” Braedon asked.

“I can move quicker than you. If we draw attention then you won’t be able to move up the trail as fast as I can. I would just be drawing them in to intercept you whereas I can probably outrun them.” I reasoned even though I had no idea if that was true. After all, one of them had transported us to that cell in a blast of light.

“You might be right.” Braedon said with a frown and then he looked at the other guys in question. They shuffled uneasily on the spot and I could tell that they didn’t like the idea of me going last, but they couldn’t fault my logic.

“I have her.” Kyle said.

“Dude, don’t take this the wrong way, but you can barely stand.” Sykes told him.

“My wolf is strong. If I need to, I will shift. Do not question my ability as an Alpha to keep my mate safe.” He growled.

I could tell that the guys wanted to argue with him, but they also didn’t want to speak out against their Alpha. In the end they just gave a firm nod and reluctantly turned back to the mountain in front of us.

“The four of us will go first.” Braedon told us. “That way you can get a general idea of where the trail is. Follow when you see us nearing the entrance. Remember, keep your eyes on the bush. Five steps past then step through the rock face.”

They all stood together, bracing ready to run. It was an hour's hike up the mountain to the entrance and if we were waiting for them to get close before we left, that meant that we had a long wait yet.

"Might as well get comfy." I muttered as I watched the four of them take off at a run.

"I am comfy." Kyle said, still standing flush against my back.

I leant back into him and he wrapped his arms around my waist. We stood there for a moment watching the others take to the trail at a quick run. When I felt Kyle stagger back a step, I felt guilty about leaning against him and immediately pulled forward. I could feel his frustration through our bond and my magic wrapped around the bond wanting to reach out to him. I knew that he hated to feel weak, but right now I was riding hard on the need to look after my mate. I looked back at him, words of reassurance on the tip of my tongue, but bit them back when I saw the look on his face. He didn't need me to reassure him. He needed me to treat him like my strong Alpha mate.

My eyes turned back to the trail and I saw that the guys were already half way up to the area where the bush was. They were making good time, but it probably helped that they were still going at a full out run. I suspected that there was a bit of male ego spurring them on. I looked around the area, happy to see that no one seemed to be in the area or trying to intercept them. I even checked the sky but that was clear as well. Hopefully we were going to make it into the cave systems without being seen.

"When should we set off?" I asked Kyle not taking my eyes off the guys running further away from us.

Kyle came to my side and squinted at the guys in the distance. It was actually quite impressive that they were still managing to keep up the pace.

“I think we should try and get to the doorway slightly after them. I don’t like the idea of travelling across without them at least on this side, in case we need backup.” Kyle grumbled. At least now he seemed to be conceding that he may need some help if something happened. I nudged him playfully with my hip, but kept my eyes forward watching the guys run.

I saw the flicker of movement before Kyle did, but I felt him tense at my back when he saw it too. I instinctively took a step forward but Kyle dropped his hand on my shoulder and held me in place.

“They are too far out to intercept them. They will be fine.” He said to me.

I watched the group of soldiers appear about halfway down one of the slopes. Kyle was right, the only problem they were going to cause was going to be for us. It looked like they were on a different trail but now they were climbing to try and intercept the others as they raced to the opening of the cave system. They must have been hiding out to try and find out where the entrance was and we were just unfortunate enough to be the first ones to come across them.

Once the others were almost there, Kyle stepped behind me and pulled me back flush against him. “We should leave now. I think that you should be able to arrive just after the others and the soldiers shouldn’t cause us too much trouble. They seem to be having trouble climbing up the face that they are currently on.” He pointed out, before he ran his nose down the side of my neck. “I’m going to enjoy this far more than I first realised.” He growled into my ear and I shifted on the spot. The heat inside me was not just from my magic and they had all been gradually stoking it over the last few hours.

Kyle wrapped his arms around my shoulders and I gave my wings a slow flap to make sure that I had enough movement in them.

“You ready for this?” I asked him. Just as he started to say yes, I bent my knees and pushed up with the strength of my legs and wings.

Kyle’s arms tightened around me on reflex and I pushed down the giggle that threatened to burst out of me. There was something about flying that just filled me with joy. It was freedom. This type of flying was different to what I was used to though. Normally I was a soar through the clouds kind of person, mainly because that was all that I had needed to do. But this flying close to the ground, skirting around objects, was thrill seeking at its best. I didn’t miss when Kyle pressed his face against my shoulder at one point when I had to zig zag around a set of boulders, but most of the time he seemed to be enjoying himself. The soldiers didn’t seem to have noticed that we were quickly approaching from behind. Kyle was right, they did seem to be struggling with the climb but they were still drawing closer to the others than I was comfortable with. The guys were just about where the entrance seemed to be when Braedon looked back over his shoulder to check that we had set off no doubt. I saw the concern on his face as he tried to gauge the distance between us and the encroaching soldiers. Sykes leaned down and spoke to him and Braedon just gave him a firm nod. He gave me one last longing look as we rushed towards them, then he disappeared. I was nearly certain that I knew where the entrance was. Which was a good thing, because as we got closer I caught the sounds of shouting on the wind. Kyle turned his head and swore and I realised that we had been spotted. I couldn’t turn to see how close they were without risking crashing. That was the downside to flying this close to the ground. That just meant that I was going to have to do the most reckless thing that I had ever done in my life and I wasn’t sure if my heart was going to explode first or if I was just going to throw up. I had my eyes firmly fixed on the spot that I was almost certain that the entrance was. I surged forward putting more force into my wings.

“Close your eyes.” I warned him.

“Oh fuck, fuck, fucking hell.” Kyle said, pressing his face into the back of my shoulder.

I don't know about Kyle, but the urge to close my own eyes was overwhelming. My heart was pounding in my chest. This went against every natural instinct that anyone had had, ever! Thankfully, I think, but that could just be my own fucking up thinking, the sounds of shouting were growing closer which was urging me on.

I fixed my eyes on where I was now only about 90% certain the entrance was and lowered my head slightly and with one last huge surge from my wings, went for it. Every muscle in my body tensed bracing for the impact. I pulled in my wings tight just before we hit, but I wasn't fast enough and my left wing clipped the edge of the entrance as we hurtled through. I cried out as the pain flashed up through my wing. I pulled them in tight and held Kyle against my back with them as much as I could because whilst we were hurtling through the sliminess of the shielding, we were definitely crash landing when we got to the other side.

Braedon had been right, passing through the shielding was very much like travelling through the portal and even if it hadn't been for the excruciating pain in my wing, I still would have hated every minute of it. It did seem to last longer than normal portal travel though, but with my mind pre-occupied with what I was sure was a broken wing, it didn't take long until we burst out the other side.

My vision was blurring, but I saw the ground rushing up towards us. Thankfully the other guys were stood off to the side when we burst through so at least we didn't take them down with us. I hit the ground at top speed. I had been flying harder than I ever had and passing through the shielding had not slowed us down at all. I kept Kyle held against my back with my wings and landed hard on my side. I felt several ribs snap as we impacted with the stone floor and then slid along. Thankfully we came to a natural skidding stop before we smashed into a stone wall. I don't think I could have taken another hit.

I felt Kyle quickly untangle himself from my wings, unintentionally jostling my injured wing in the process. His face swarmed in front of mine as he pressed his head against the stone floor so that he could look me in the eye without moving me.

“Stay with me sweetheart.” Was all I heard him say before the blackness swarmed in front of my eyes and I sank into the painless bliss of unconsciousness.

## Chapter Eighteen

Liam

As soon as Aria burst through the shielding it was obvious that something was wrong. But when she crashed into the floor and skidded along it, I was certain that my heart would stop dead in my chest. I watched in horror, cemented to the spot, while Kyle rushed to peer into her face crying for her to stay with him.

She lay so still. She groaned in pain when they first came to a stop but then she stopped making any sound. She didn't move. She just stopped. Everything about her stopped.

We all burst into movement at the same time.

“What the fuck happened?” Sykes shouted as he dropped down on the other side of Aria.

“Don't move her!” Kyle cried out, stopping Sykes just as he was about to pull Aria into his lap. We all froze and looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to explain. “They were too close to the entrance when we got there and we couldn't stop.”

Braedon swore and started to shout orders at someone behind us.

“She came into the shielding still flying, but I think she clipped her wing on the rock.” Kyle’s hands were skimming over the top of Aria, not knowing where to touch. “I think she broke her wing.”

None of us had any medical training and even if we did, none of us had wings. I didn’t know anything about them to be able to even provide her with first aid. Kyle’s first instinct to not move her was probably for the best, from my limited knowledge that seemed like the best idea. But we couldn’t just leave her lying on the stone floor like this.

Virion was kneeling next to me and I could see his eyes scanning over Aria like he was cataloguing her potential injuries. “We need a stretcher.” He said looking up at Braedon. “Do you have somewhere we can make her comfortable? We’re going to need something to splint her wing with.”

Braedon started shouting orders to people who seemed to have started to gather around us, I couldn’t even concentrate on them right now. All I could see was my injured mate in front of us.

“Is she safe here?” Kyle asked. “What about the people who were chasing us?”

“They can’t get through the shielding. The spell that holds it in place won’t even let them remember where you entered the mountain. We won’t be able to use that entrance for a while, but they won’t be able to get inside. She will be safe.” Braedon said dropping to his knees and gently putting his hand on Aria’s calf.

How had this all turned to shit so quickly? When Aria had been injured fighting the demon at the pack house, she had healed overnight. I had to hope that was going to be the case again. I ran my hand along her arm which was lying at her side. The stone floor was sharp and cold and I hated



the fact that she was still laying on it. When I felt a warm sensation soaking into my knees I was confused, when I looked down at the puddle of blood that was forming around Aria, it scared the ever loving shit out of me.

“She’s bleeding!” I gasped.

Virion came around to my side and gently moved me to the side. He seemed to know more about what he was doing, which I suppose made sense if he was in some kind of military. Virion gently rolled Aria a fraction and ducked down to look underneath here, where the blood was coming from, swearing softly.

“It looks like a piece of stone in the floor is penetrating her abdomen.” He said sitting up and looking around.

Two people ran up to the group carrying a stretcher and a large bag. Braedon looked to have just closed down in shock. His eyes were frozen wide, staring down at the increasing pool of blood spreading across the stone.

“Okay, this is what we are going to do.” Virion explained calmly. “Put the stretcher down next to her. We need to work together to lift her off the stone and roll her to her back onto the stretcher. Two of us need to take control of her wings and as soon as we have her lifted I’m going to put pressure on her abdomen. You’ll need to keep bracing her wings while we move her on the stretcher.”

It was almost like his calm words snapped everyone out of the trance that they were in. The two guys who had brought the stretcher through placed it down on the opposite side of Aria and stayed ducked down keeping hold of the handles.

“Okay, Sykes I want you take control of her right wing. When we roll her over you need to pass it underneath her as she rolls and Liam is going to take it from you. Braedon, her left wing is the injured one so you’re going to need to keep it as still as you can and you’re going to have to pass it across the top of her to Sykes as we roll her. Do you all understand?” We all nodded and got ready for the transfer.

Virion turned to the two guys with the stretcher. “Can you help us lift and roll her?” He asked them and they both nodded. One came across to her shoulders and the other to her feet.

“Kyle, I need you to take her head. Try to make sure that her head moves as little as possible until we can check her neck.” Kyle nodded and took position around one of our unnamed helpers, bracing Aria’s neck as much as he could.

If Aria hadn’t wrapped her wings around him as much as she had, we would have been dealing with two injured people right now. I’m sure that wasn’t making Kyle feel any better though, even if having her wings wrapped around him had probably stopped her from damaging them any further.

We executed the move seamlessly under the guidance of Virion and I felt a small amount of relief once Aria was laying on the stretcher. We all looked at Braedon in expectation of him telling us where to go, but he was frozen to the spot now that he didn’t have anything to concentrate. He just looked at where Virion’s hand held a pad of cloth against Aria’s stomach which had already turned bright red from her blood. She shouldn’t be bleeding that much.

The two guys with the stretcher fortunately seemed to know what to do and they picked Aria up and we started the slow shuffle towards an infirmary under their directions. It was slow moving as we tried to keep Aria’s neck and wings stabilised. Thankfully the infirmary didn’t seem far and as soon

as we reached it the staff were pushing together beds so that we could lay Aria down with her wings supported. They had to drag the beds into the centre of the room and opted for three pushed together in the end. The two side beds were angled away from her body so that her wings could lay perfectly across them, but we would still have access to the wound on her abdomen.

We were ushered to the side as the staff got to work examining her stomach and neck. It seemed like for now, her wing was taking a backseat, having been deemed the less serious of the injuries. I was starting to wonder if it was really because no one actually knew what to do with it.

We were watching in silence oblivious to what else was happening around us. The staff clearly wanted us to move out of the room and leave them to their work, but none of us could bear to take our eyes off our injured mate. I was so thankful for the bond right now. Whilst it meant that I could feel the other's fear which was just ramping up my own anxiety, it also meant that I could still feel Aria as a presence in my mind. She may have been unconscious, but as long as I could feel her, I had hope that she was going to pull through this.

“What the hell happened?” A voice boomed through the infirmary.

We all turned in curiosity and saw what could only be described as a giant storm into the infirmary. He had shoulder length red hair and a long beard. He was muscle on top of muscle and dressed in some kind of leather and fur outfit. The dude even had a cape on. I mean come on! But the most noticeable thing about him was the fact that he was very, very, pissed off right now.

Braedon didn't move. He hardly even acknowledged him. He just stood there staring down at Aria and muttered, “My mate is hurt.”

Kyle moved up next to Braedon and placed a hand on his back. I knew that we all felt that Braedon was pack, as soon as we had seen him, but watching Kyle now it was even more obvious. Being our Alpha Kyle was more in tune with us and he hated to see any of his pack members hurting. He was very protective over all of us.

The big angry dude seemed to soften a bit when he took in how obviously distressed we all were, but he was clearly still pissed.

“Explain to me what happened.” He said walking over to where Aria lay.

The medical team were at work. They had wrapped her neck in thick padding and were working on her stomach. They had informed us that the damage to her stomach wasn't too extensive and they were working on stitching is closed now. I was more concerned about her wing though. I had seen how quickly she healed after the demon attack and I knew that the wound on her abdomen would be gone by tomorrow, but I didn't know how it would work with her wings. She had only just got them. If they were taken away from her now, I didn't know how she was going to take it. She seemed to love to fly so much, but then who wouldn't. It wasn't until we got to fly with her on the Pegasus that I realised just how in her element she was up there. Seeing the smile stretched across her face as she radiated pure joy was so telling. Being able to experience it with her was amazing. I had been a bit jealous when it was decided that Kyle would get to have a go at flying with her. I just hoped that this experience wasn't going to put her off because I couldn't wait until I got the opportunity to fly with her. If her wing would be healed that was. Now that she was laid out on the infirmary bed with her wings spread to either side of her, it was easier to see just how bad the damage to her wing was. Whereas the other held a general shape the injured wing was just mangled on the end. It looked like the bones in it had completely shattered. She had lost several feathers and blood coated the beautiful white feathers that remained.

“She was evading some of Odin’s scouts and had to come into the entrance too fast. She hit her wing on the rock face and then crashed through the shielding.” Braedon answered, not drawing his eyes away from her for a second. “She was impaled on some rock when she landed.” He said flinching.

“Braedon,” Kyle rumbled next to him. I could tell from his voice that he was having difficulties holding his wolf back. “Aria has been injured before. She took a large laceration to her side during a fight with four demons. It was bad, really bad. But she fully healed overnight. She doesn’t even have a scar. She can pull through this.” I don’t know if he was trying to convince Braedon or himself, but right now, we all needed to hear that.

“Can you set her wing?” The giant of a man rumbled to the medical staff.

One of them was ducked down closely examining the damage. He didn’t have an overly confident look on his face.

“If she heals as fast as they say, I think we can splint the wing in position and then reassess tomorrow. If it doesn’t heal right, we may need to rebreak the bones and re-splint them until it heals properly.” He said with a wince.

The new addition to the room just nodded thoughtfully. “See that it is splinted quickly. She needs to recover quickly. She has an important job to do.” With that he turned and started to stride out of the room. “Your mate is in good hands, come, we need to discuss our next steps.” He called over his shoulder.

I wasn’t sure if he meant all of us or just Braedon. Braedon tore himself away from Aria and strode towards the door. When he reached the doorway, his shoulders tensed and hunched up. “You all coming?” He asked without

looking back. I knew how he felt. I think if I turned back to her, I wouldn't be able to make myself leave either. We all just silently filed out after him instead.

## Chapter Nineteen

### Aria

My eyes snapped open and I tried to sit up, but the flash of pain caused me to freeze on the spot. The last thing that I remembered was the blinding pain. It was hard to forget. I was getting a pretty familiar reminder of it right now, although if I concentrated I was pretty sure that it wasn't quite as bad.

I took a few deep breaths to try and calm myself and then tried to take stock of my surroundings. I was on a soft bed and my wings were supported beside me. A deep ache radiated up through my left wing and I couldn't move it even a fraction. When I twisted to try and look a blinding flash of pain radiated from my stomach and I grunted in surprise. That was new. I lifted the soft sheet which was draped over me and looked down at my stomach to see a large dressing stuck to me. I didn't remember that. I just remembered hitting the rock face and not too much after that. I was pretty sure that we crash landed. Kyle! I glanced around me in panic. Where was Kyle? Was he okay? Was he injured when I crashed? I should have listened when he clearly didn't want to fly with me.

It took me a moment to remember that I could contact the guys through the bond and I almost kicked myself when I did.

"Kyle?" I whispered quietly through the bond, almost afraid that I wasn't going to get a response.

No answer came and my heart dropped down low into my stomach as I suddenly felt like I was going to throw up. I realised that I may have been slightly over-reacting through when they all suddenly burst through the doors and ran to my bedside. I was so happy to see that they were okay and Kyle had to push me back down to the bed as I tried to sit up and check him over.

“Are you okay?” I croaked out, my voice breaking from a dry throat.

“I’m fine. Barely a scratch on me, thanks to you.” He told me, dipping his head down and laying his forehead against mine.

“I was thinking about that.” Liam added. “I think that Aria wrapping her wings around you would have stopped her from sustaining any more damage to them.”

I glanced nervously at my left wing, which I hadn’t been able to move and my heart sank at the implication. I felt my eyes grow wet and a single tear escaped from the corner of my eye. Kyle saw it immediately and gently ran his thumb under my eye, brushing my tears away.

“I can’t move it.” I whispered quietly to him.

“It’s broken.” He told me gently. “But the only reason that you can’t move it at the moment is because it’s splinted to hold the bones in the right place. Because you’ve got so many bones in your wings, they had to put a lot of splints on it. It’s best not to try and move it until they set. The doctors are worried that if it doesn’t set right, they would have to rebreak the bones and set them again.” He looked slightly green at the thought of that and even I would admit that I wasn’t a massive fan of that idea. I was definitely going to be the best patient these doctors had ever seen because there was no way I wanted to go through the pain of someone having to rebreak my bones.



The guys all stood around the bed, gently running their hands soothingly on some part of my arms or legs. If I wasn't already hurting so much this would definitely be turning me on. They all had such looks of love in their eyes and I felt truly cherished in that moment, until I realised that someone was missing.

"Braedon. Where's Braedon?" I asked trying to look around the room in case he felt like he needed to hang back from the group.

"We were just about to go into a meeting with some, well I'm going to go with giant for want of a better word, when we heard you call out to us." Sykes told me as he started running his fingers through my hair and dropped a quick kiss onto my forehead. "He said he would just be a minute."

"Where are we anyway?" I asked. Before my accident Braedon had said that he was going to take us into a cave system. But this looked like a full-on clinic.

"I'm not sure, but there seems to be a lot of people here and they are extremely well organised." Virion answered looking around in suspicion. I loved when he got that look. It was the same look that he had got when he first found us and look at how well that had turned out.

The doors burst open again and Braedon came in quickly followed by someone else.

"You're in the headquarters for the rebellion." He boomed.

The guys looked around in shock and I quickly realised that this was the giant that they had been referring to. I almost laughed when I thought how much this was going to blow their mind.

“Hello again father.” I said.

The guys looked ready to swallow their own tongues in surprise, but Braedon’s reaction was the best. I wasn’t sure if he was going to throw up or pass out, or maybe both. Poor guy. I think my father was his boss or something.

“We might as well have our meeting her then, since you are awake.” My father told me. “Firstly, I think I have found an answer to your predicament ...”

“No, I have some more important news.” I interrupted, trying to sit myself up, only to have everyone push me back down to lie flat. I growled low in my throat, hating how weak I was at the moment.

“More important than opening Valhalla and saving an entire realm, please do fill us in.” My father laughed, clearly just humouring me.

“I saw her.” I told him. “I saw Myra.”

He shot up off the edge of the bed which he had been sat on and was immediately on his knees at my side. “How is she?” Was the first thing that fell from his lips and I could see the pain in his eyes.

“She ... they took her wings.” I whispered. I didn’t want to be the one to have to tell him but there was no way to break it easily. “I think she’s giving up.”

His head dropped to the edge of my bed and he just shook it back and forth in denial. I hated to be the one to do this to him. I didn't know him. I didn't even know his name. But he was still my father and even though he couldn't be there for me during my childhood, I was mature enough to realise that it wasn't in his control.

He looked up at me and the pure anguish in his eyes nearly broke my heart. "Odin's cruelty knows no bounds, daughter. I have always known where she was but I have never been able to find a way to get her free. It is a simple system that he has but I haven't been able to find a way around it." He said.

"I don't understand. If you have known that she was there all this time, why haven't you got her out." I could feel the tears forming in my eyes as I thought about everything that she must have been through.

"The only way to get her out is to send a team. But we didn't know where she was until she had already been held there for a few months. Once a prisoner is registered into the system they take a trace of their magic. The guards check the cells on a rotation. If a prisoner is missing they can use that trace of magic to instantly pinpoint their location. It is impossible to move outside of the city walls before the next guard is due at the cell. He has so many soldiers stationed in the city that we would need an army to fight our way through them to escape." He explained.

"I can bring a legion of Valkyrie. We can storm the prison." I said trying to get up again, only to be pushed back down again.

My father looked me sadly in the eye. "So brave, your mother would be so proud." He smiled.

“Wait, the Valkyrie in the cell was your mother.” Sykes blurted out.

“Why didn’t you tell us kitten?” Liam asked, his beautiful face marred with a frown. I knew that he was upset that I hadn’t told them about her and if I was in his shoes, I knew that I would be upset too.

“She asked me not to tell anyone, she said that we couldn’t know if anyone was listening. I’m sorry. I was so confused. It was just a lot to deal with and then we started running and everything just got away from me.” I confessed. What I really wanted to say was that I was so concerned about Kyle, but I knew that he wouldn’t like me saying that in front of everyone.

My father was sitting back on his heels, his hands fisted in his hair and a manic look on his face for a moment. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know him well enough to be able to comfort him. He started to shake his head and then sighed and seemed to deflate on the spot.

“She can hang on for just a little while longer.” He sounded so broken when he said it. “We have to get you out of here first.” He gave me a sad smile and added. “She would kill me if I risked you.”

I tried to sit up again so that I could argue with him, but was pushed back down again. Okay, now they were starting to piss me off and I could feel the need to start swearing at someone bubbling out of me.

Sykes just gave me his trademark cheeky grin and told me. “Stop struggling sweetheart. It’s time to rest and heal now. Plans can be made when you’re ready to get back up and kick ass.”

“He’s right. You’ll heal quicker if you sleep and then tomorrow we can assess your injuries and see where we stand.” Kyle said firmly.

I looked at Liam, Virion and even Braedon to see if one of them would step up and take my side. “Traitors.” I grumbled before finally feeling the fight drain out of my muscles. I was pretty tired. But I would go to my grave before I admitted it.

My father just laughed, shaking his head. “So much like your mother.” He climbed to his feet but I could see the despair still settled in his eyes, even if he wasn’t going to admit it. I don’t know how I would cope if it had been one of my mates down there. Well no that’s a lie, I did. I would burn the entire fucking world down. Fuck the magic realm, I wouldn’t think twice about letting them all die if it was a decision between them or one of mates. I felt a twinge of guilt at the thought, especially when I thought of my Elites and I swallowed hard as I understood the position that he was in.

“I’ll go and find you something to eat.” Braedon said quietly moving out of the room. He hadn’t spoken to me really and it hurt. I didn’t want him to feel pushed out by the other guys and I was certain that we had a moment earlier when he held me his arms.

“Don’t worry, kitten. He just found his mate and then saw you hurt. It’s a lot to deal with.” Liam reassured me.

My father smiled gently down at me and I had a moment where I wondered if this would have been what it would have been like if I had grown up with him around. “I will show your mates where they can sleep, but tomorrow, I think we need to talk, daughter.”

I nodded. He was right we did have a lot to talk through. There was a lot to say, not only about the past, but about the present and what we were going to do next. It seemed like every time we got a step closer to our goal another obstacle was put in our way. I was so tired.

The guys reluctantly left the infirmary, following behind my father and Braedon came in a short while later carrying a bowl of something that smelt incredible and a chunk of bread. My stomach chose that moment to basically scream out its distress and his dimple popping grin came back with a vengeance. It was good to see him smile. Braedon sat the bowl down on a small table next to me and then frowned at me. Fuck, what had I done now!

“I’m not sure how we are going to do this.” He stated looking down at me. My heart dropped, it was difficult having multiple mates, but we were making it work and finding our way. Granted the current situation was making things more difficult, but hopefully things would settle down at some point.

“Maybe if we prop your head up a bit with a pillow and I could feed you.” He said looking innocently around him for a pillow.

I laughed on impulse. I don’t know why my brain immediately jumps to the worst possible conclusion. Braedon looked a bit shocked by the sound and his face immediately flushed, which was nearly as adorable as his dimples.

“Sorry, I just assumed. I can get one of the others.” He said backing away from me.

“No!” I said trying to sit up again, only to have him stride forward and push me back down again. I raised an eyebrow in challenge at him and he just grinned. “I just thought that you were talking about being my mate.” I said, drifting off towards the end when I realised how embarrassing it was to admit something like that.

“What do you mean?” He asked, finally pulling a pillow off one of the other beds and coming back over to me. He gently lifted my head and shoulders and slipped the pillow underneath. It felt so much more comfortable and less like everyone was talking down to me now that I could actually see around me. “Do you need any more for your wings?” He asked.

“No, that’s perfect. Thank you.” I told him, appreciating the soft pillow under my head, more than I ever would have before this moment. “And erm, well, when you said you didn’t know how we were going to do this, I thought you meant, well ... us.” I cringed at the awkwardness of myself. I suppose that I should really give him the opportunity of an out though. Here I was assuming that he would want me as a mate, but I suppose that he could want to stay here in Asgard and I wouldn’t be able to stay with him if he did.

“Oh, my sweet mate,” he said dropping down onto the edge of my bed, carefully trying not to jostle me. “How could I ever leave you?” His eyes grew misty and he gazed into mine.

“If you think I’m sweet, you’re going to be really disappointed.” I said, ruining the moment.

He laughed and gently picked up my hand, running his thumb over the top of my knuckles. “I should have said, my beautiful, brave, selfless, fierce, warrior of a mate.”

“I mean most of those are right.” I joke and it makes me deliriously happy that he laughs with me.

“You need to think this through though.” I tell him seriously. “We live in different realms, I’m about to go into a fight that I don’t know if I can win. What about what you have here? You have a life here already.” This is such

déjà vu and I can't help but remember having this exact same conversation with Virion. What is it with me and plucking men out of their lives where ever I go?

Braedon doesn't even take a moment to think about it, which I'm hoping is a good thing. "I would follow you wherever you go. I was made for you and you were made for me. Why would I ever want to be anywhere but by your side? I would fight any battle for you, in this realm or the next."

"I wish that I could hug you right now." I say as tears collect in the corners of my eyes. Argh, I hate girly hormones.

Braedon stoops down and lays a gentle kiss on my lips. "There are other things I would rather do to you when I have you in my arms." He growls.

I chase his lips for another kiss and he gently presses my shoulders back down onto the bed giving me another gentle kiss. "You are the worst patient ever." He laughs.

I just shrug because whilst I was earlier promising to be the best in the world, he's right. It didn't really last very long but oh well.

"What are you?" I ask and then blush when I realise that was probably a bit rude.

"Same as you." He laughs sensing my predicament.

"A Valkyrie?" I say in confusion, I thought that they were only woman.

"Do I look like a Valkyrie?" He laughs. "No, a Demi-God."



“Oh right. Yeah, a Demi-God, that’s apparently me.” Please universe, I just need one day off! Can’t you give a girl a break?

“You sound positively thrilled about that.” He jokes. “You know most people would give their soul to be a Demi-God.”

“I mean I guess it’s okay.” I shrug. “In fact, no it’s not. It’s nothing special.” I say shaking my head. “It’s not that different from anyone else.”

He looks mildly offended by my statement, but I stand by it. I haven’t really felt any different than anyone else that I’ve seen. I don’t think that I am any better than anyone else. Unless you count my awesome skills at kicking ass, but all the Valkyrie have them. They’re a race of kick ass women. It’s no wonder Britt loves being there.

“Nothing special.” He scoffs. “Aria, you carry the power of the eternal flame in you. You have the power to lead the greatest army ever created, in all of the realms.”

“I mean when you put it that way, it does sound pretty impressive. But I don’t know what the power of the eternal flame is, in fact this is the first I’ve heard about it. And that army, is trapped inside a sealed realm controlled by apparently a half arsed crazy god.”

“Half arsed crazy god. I have never heard a better description for Odin.” My father’s voice booms from the doorway.

Braedon ducks his head down and laughs quietly. At least he didn’t come in earlier.

“Now daughter of mine. I came to check that you were actually getting some rest, but instead I find you canoodling with your mate.” Ah seems he did walk in a bit earlier then.

“I would never canoodle!” I said in fake outrage. “Braedon just swung by to bring me something to eat.”

My father at least just laughed and shook his head. “Food and then sleep.” He ordered. This was weird suddenly being subjected to fatherly concern. Maybe it would be nice to come back here when all of this was over and get to know him and my mother.

“Understood sir.” Braedon said seriously, picking up the bowl from the small side table.

As my father strode from the room, Braedon started to slowly feed me the stew he had brought. It had gone a little cold but it was still delicious. I really needed to learn how to make stew. It was fast becoming one of my favourite foods. Then when I was finished, Braedon left me to sleep like a good little soldier. I was slightly disappointed, but there was no way that we could have shared this tiny bed with my wings stretched out and splinted around me.

## Chapter Twenty

The next day I woke up to someone kissing both my cheeks and both sides of my neck. It was disorientating at first until I realised that it was actually two someones. When I opened my eyes and saw Liam and Sykes grinning down at me my heart flipped in happiness. I went to sit up and they slowly pushed me back down to the bed.

“Oh, for god’s sake. I can’t keep laying here.” I fume. I now hate this bed and once I get out of it, I want it burnt.

“You have to let the doctor check you out before you’re allowed to start throwing yourself around again.” Liam says attempting to scowl at me.

“Fine.” I throw my hands up in the air. Even I think I’m being a bit ridiculous now, but I’m bored and I want to do something, anything.

The doctor, as it turns out, was stood in the corner of the room greatly enjoying the ridiculous show we were putting on. Apparently, I was not the worst patient he had ever had and he promised to tell me a story about my father getting hurt when he was training with my mother once. The dressing on my stomach was gently peeled away but I already knew what they would see underneath. I felt fine. It would be the same as last time. And it was. See! I should be allowed to decide if I was healthy enough to sit up. The doctor removed the stitches which were now sticking out of my now flawless skin. While he was doing his eyes kept flicking between my stitches and my face and I knew that he wanted to ask me some questions, but didn’t seem to dare. Next, he examined my wing which was the weirdest feeling ever. He gently unwrapped the splints and then checked the

bones, moving my feathers around to get a better look. I hated every minute of it. It was like someone was prodding me like a science experiment and I did not appreciate it at all. My wing was declared fully healed, but I was told that I would need to wait at least another day before trying out flying as he was concerned about some of the muscles. I felt fine, but I didn't dare argue with him for fear that I would be passively aggressively trapped in this bed for even longer. I was discharged from the infirmary on the promise that I would not attempt to fly and that I would be back the next morning for him to check my wings again.

My guys were waiting for me outside the infirmary and when I came strolling out Braedon looked like he was about to either pass out or punch someone in the face. I was starting to find his conflicting emotion faces greatly amusing.

“Why are you not in bed?” He all but screeched, doing that weird thing that all the guys seem to do when they think I'm hurt when they hover their hands all around me like they aren't touch me for fear that I will crumble to dust.

“All healed.” I said bouncing up and down.

“No, no.” He demands grabbing hold of my shoulders to try and keep me still.

Sykes thankfully is on my side and laughs slapping Braedon on the back and pulling him away from me. “Just show him sweetheart then we he can take a breath.”

I take a step back, swoop down in a deep bow, because I am a bit weird and it's always worth embracing it whenever you get the chance. Then, when I

stand up, I pull up my top enough to show the now flawless skin of my stomach.

“That is not possible.” Braedon says stepping out of Sykes’ hold and dropping to his knees in front of me so that his face is level with my stomach, running his hands over my skin. As soon as I look down at him on his knees in front of me, his face very close to where I need somewhere to be, I immediately grow wet and need slams into me, harder than I have felt it before.

The other four guys all step up to me and a series of growls erupt from the shifters. Braedon looks confused at first, no doubt wondering if he’s done something wrong, but when he sees my face his eyes fill with heat and I think he realises that he is definitely doing something right.

“You smell even better than normal.” Sykes says inhaling deeply.

“It must be because Braedon is going to complete the bond when he accepts the mate bond. This must be it.” Liam surmises.

“What do you mean?” I ask breathlessly. I’m fidgeting on the spot just thinking about bonds being made and I’m kicking myself for asking questions rather than suggesting that we get right on it.

“Once all of the members of a bond have been found you give off a scent to encourage your mates to complete the bond with you. The bond wants to be formed and it is pushing us to do so.” Liam clarifies.

My scent is definitely doing something because Braedon is still on his knees, but is now rubbing his face against my stomach like a needy cat. Kyle and Virion are side by side against my back and Sykes has started to

drop kisses along one of my shoulders. As much as I want to do this, and I mean that as in more than anything I ever wanted in my life ever, including breathing, in the middle of this corridor outside of the infirmary is probably not the right place.

As if to demonstrate that point exactly, someone clears their throat behind us and of course it would be my father that finds us in this slightly embarrassing position. Braedon jumps up off the ground like he is suddenly on fire and the other guys just step back doing one of those self-assured masculine chuckles that always makes me want to lick one of them.

“Now seems like an excellent time for that meeting.” My father laughs. Cockblocked by my own father. It really is like having a proper parent.

We all follow him quietly down the corridor, Braedon sneaks up beside me and takes hold of my hand as we walk and I smile across at him. Leaning my head in closely I quietly ask. “What’s his name anyway?”

“Whose name?” He asked looking confused. I nod towards my father and his face drops as he realises that I don’t even know the name of my own father. “Thor.” He answered quietly.

“Fuck off!” I shout back at him. He just laughs and squeezes my hand as we follow everyone else down the corridor. The other guys don’t even turn around. They’re used to my weirdness by now.

We end up sat around a conference table, in a cave, with Thor, who’s my father, Thor, did I mention that he’s Thor and that he’s my father. Everyone is looking at me silently waiting for me to say something but I think my brain might be broken.

Of course the first comment that comes to mind is the most ridiculous one that I could think, but give me a break, I just found out that Thor is my father.

“Do you really have a hammer?” I ask out of nowhere.

My father grins and shakes his head. “Yes.”

“Murmener ... meurmer ... menurmenor?” I know that I know this

“I think Aria’s having a stroke.” Sykes fake whispers to Liam who is sat next to him.

“Its ...”

“No, don’t tell me. I know this. It was in a movie and everything.” I say scrunching up my face in thought like I can force the memory out. “Meurmenur ... argh!”

“Mjolnir” My father supplies helpfully.

I slump down in my seat. “So close.”

“Yeah babe,” Sykes says rolling his eyes. “Totally close.” I just stick my tongue out at him that the mature demur lady that I am.

“Well now that the introductions have been dealt with, I know that you all have questions.” My father smirks. He seems like a good person. Granted I’ve only spent probably less than an hour with him but he seems to be kind and understanding. Or at least he was when he walked in on Braedon and I.

I smile at the thought. I can't help, but wonder where it would have gone if we hadn't been interrupted. It was probably for the best though. I don't want my first time with him to be clouded with pain and thoughts of injury. He deserves more than that.

"Where are we?" I ask. Seems like a good place to start.

"This is the main base for the rebellion. It's inside one of the mountains but not the mountain that you entered from. The shielding that covers the entrance moves straight into a portal which moves you further into the mountain range. In actuality, the entrance where you entered was nothing more than a depression in the rock face. We try to keep them moving around, but somehow Odin's scouts keep getting close enough to find the entrance. It's troubling." He says frowning and growing.

"Always troubling when you have a spy in the midst." Virion mutters.

"Hmmm." My father agrees, but says nothing else. Okay, guess we aren't going to discuss their espionage problem. I suppose it's for the best, there's only so much that can fit on my plate and it's pretty full right now.

"What is the rebellion fighting?" I ask.

"Odin." My father says simply looking at me like an idiot.

"Well of course Odin." I scoff. It's almost like dragging blood out of a stone, or information out of a politician. "I mean, what sparked your rebellion. We aren't from your realm and we know nothing of your troubles. Shit, even the Valkyrie don't seem to know. Which I don't understand. I don't understand why you wouldn't ask them to fight with you."



“Because they cannot leave Valhalla and even if they did Odin would know straight away. For now, he is still too powerful. As for what sparked our little rebellion, it was his deteriorating madness. He was always a bit of a control freak, but once Asgard was sealed it only grew worse. We didn’t notice at first, it must have been a century or so before we noticed that our power was weakening and of course at that point Odin did all that he could to cover it up. He has a treaty with Zeus, Jupiter and Marduk. From what I understand from our spies, all of the Courts have the same problem.” He frowned stroking his beard.

“Okay, I think we’re getting a bit ahead of ourselves.” Liam adds in diplomatically. “Maybe if you could explain the structure of Asgard. Who are these other gods which Odin has a treaty with?”

Thor looks at us as if realising for the first time who he is speaking with. “I am sorry. You are right. You don’t know our realm. Asgard is split into four Courts. The pantheons of Roman, Greek, Norse and Babylonian gods each rule a Court. Each Court generally holds the gods and goddess of their own Pantheon apart from the Babylonian who hold gods from other cultures and belief systems. It was felt that the other three pantheons were too powerful to bolster them with extra gods and this way there is a more equal power distribution. Jupiter rules over the Roman Pantheon, Zeus the Greek and Marduk the Babylonia. Of course, Odin rules over our own Pantheon.”

“That makes sense.” I add nodding, finally being able to follow along. “And your ruling Gods are descending to madness?” I ask sceptically. Seems a bit convenient.

“When Asgard was closed it did something. No one knows for sure where we gain our power. Most just assume that it is naturally inherent, others think it comes from the worship by others. Whatever the case, once the realm gates were closed our power started to decrease. We have very little natural magic left but the ruling Gods, having always been the strongest of

all of us have retained enough that they are still able to rule with an iron fist, at the cost of their citizens. Whether Odin was always mad, whether he is facing a natural decline or something is doing this to him, I don't know. But now that we have a very distinct unbalance in power between the citizens and those in charge it is becoming more and more apparent every day. People are being allocated food and resources on the basis of how powerful they are, public executions started a few years ago for dissidence, which is basically just speaking out against the inequality. Children who don't display high enough power levels are being denied access to education. Those who have almost entirely lost their power already are being forced into basically slavery. People, especially women, disappear off the streets every day and no one is even looking for them." Thor looks positively distraught by the end of it. This is even worse than in the magic realm.

"What can we do?" I ask him genuinely. If there is something that I can do to help I will, but I cannot forget the reason why we are here to begin with.

My father shakes his head sadly, but I can see the look of pride on his face even as he does it. "We cannot divert you from your current task. If you fail to free the Valkyrie then thousands will die."

I drop my head into my hands. The burden of what is apparently my life weighs heavy on me. I can't help but feel that if everyone is relying on me, they are well and truly fucked!

"Okay, one problem at a time." Kyle suggested. "This realm has been a mess for centuries, we deal with the immediate threat and then we look at what's left."

I smile across the table at him, even though I feel like rolling my eyes and pointing out the enormous amount of 'what's left' we actually have. This

isn't the time for all of us to start snarking at each, and anyway, he's right. We do have to deal with the urgent situation first.

"How long do we have left?" I ask the guys.

"Six days." Liam answers making me immediately want to throw up.

"Six days to find a way to force Captain Crazypants to open up Valhalla for us? We are so fucked." I point out.

"Actually, six days to convince Captain Crazypants, get the realm opened, get back to our realm with the Valkyrie and then ride into battle." Virion unhelpfully points out. "Oh, and for Kyle to face his father in the challenge." If I had something in my hand, I would totally throw it at him right now.

"I think I might be able to help you out with that." My father points out, and for the first time in what feels like forever, I have a small glimmer of hope. I wonder how long it will take before it gets crushed this time. "Heimdellr is still holding the eye of worlds and I am told that he has possession of the Gjallarhorn."

Braedon gasps and I'm sure the rest of us would join him if we understood all of the words which my father had just said. Thor has that look on his face like he's waiting for us to wade in with a congratulation or some form of excitement and we are all just sitting here like idiots, staring at him blankly.

"From the top?" He asks me and I nod. I hope I'm not a complete disappointment for him. "Heimdellr is one of the strongest gods which we have left, and yes I am including Odin in that. He is the watcher. He lives at

the end of the Bifrost, in the eye of worlds, and he keeps watch for invaders. He created the Gjallarhorn which is the legendary horn that when blown, will summon the Valkyrie to defend against Ragnarok, which is essentially the end of the world. I believe that the horn is powerful enough that if blown it will force the gates of Valhalla open so that the Valkyrie and the Warrior army can descend to whichever battlefield the horn is blown on.”

“Okay, so we need the horn.” I say, that glimmer of hope is still holding out strong so far. “Will Heimdellr give it to us. If he is stronger than Odin it seems unlikely that we will be able to just take it from him.”

“Heimdellr sees all. If you reach him, I believe that he will see that your purpose is just and give you the horn.” Thor informs us.

“Okay, I’m sensing that there is a but coming up.” I say preparing myself for the inevitable.

“But ...”

“Argh, I fucking knew it.” I sigh, sagging back down into my seat.

Thor just laughs and forges on. “But, the Bifrost is guarded by Odin’s soldiers and it is the only way to reach the eye of the worlds.”

“So, we need to fight our way through?” Kyle asks.

Braedon shakes his head. “No, that’s not possible. I have done a rotation around the city and seen the guard at the entrance for the Bifrost, the six of us would never be able to breach them.”

“The Bifrost is a bridge, right?” I ask Thor.

“Yes, was that in your movie as well?” He laughs.

“Yes, yes it was. So, what does the bridge go over?”

“It is where the two rivers meet and the force of them crashing together causes the water to boil.” Thor tells me thoughtfully.

“Okay, not sure physics works that way but anyway, that’s probably not going to be a way to cross.” I sigh.

“You might be onto something there.” Braedon says thoughtfully glancing at Thor. “What if we seek the assistance of the Naiad? They may agree to assist if Aria asks them.” He suggests.

Thor turns back to me in thought, like he’s suddenly weighing up the pros and cons of me. If only he truly knew me, he definitely wouldn’t have that smile on his face right now.

“It could work.” He agrees. “If not, then the only option which you have is to distract the guard while Aria tries to fly ahead.”

“That would be suicide.” Braedon scoffs. He seems to have a lot of faith in these guards.

“Okay, once we have the horn though, what then?” Liam asks.

“Heimdellr will be able to send you back to your realm.” Thor tells us. “He is powerful enough to be able to open a portal between realms.”

“We have a loose plan, for now then.” I say getting up and stretching. “Do you guys have a gym round here? I need to stretch out some of these aches before I seize up.” My back still hurts a bit and this is as close as I’m going to come to admitting it. My magic is purring away like a happy little kitten inside me so for once I don’t need to work out to wear off the burn. In fact, now that I think about it, I haven’t needed to do that for a while. Maybe Liam’s theory about the magic flowing through the bond is right. My eyes flick across to Braedon. I can’t believe that he is so ready to leave everything behind for me. I know Virion made the same promise, but they are actively fighting their own war here. What if he regrets coming with us? Being with me?

“You guys coming?” I ask, looking around the table. “Kyle you need to train more and you all need to keep working with your magic.” I remind them. There’s a round of groans sounding off around the table, but all the guys climb to their feet anyway.

Thor stands as well and comes around the table. He gently places his arm around my shoulders, almost like he’s not sure that he would be welcome. I give him a smile and nudge him with my shoulder so that he knows he’s good. I’m not good at the affection part and I definitely don’t know how you’re supposed to act around parents.

“I didn’t think that the shifters had recovered their magic.” Thor says looking intently at the guys. “Magic is waning across the realms. Why are the shifters suddenly regaining some of theirs?” He asked.

“We think it has to do with the bond we have with Aria.” Liam answers.

“Makes sense.” Thor nods thoughtfully. “How you boys getting on managing your new found god magic?”

“God magic?” Liam frowns confused.

“Hate to break it to you, but the magic flowing through your bond is god magic.” Thor laughs clapping Liam on the back as he moves away and walks toward the door. “Braedon can help you learn how to harness it. Took him long enough to learn it himself.” He laughs over his shoulder. Braedon rolls his eyes but leads us out to the gym laughing and joking with the other guys.

## Chapter Twenty One

Kyle

Braedon really knew what he was talking about. I had been having difficulties connecting with my magic because it was so new to me and he taught me some different visualisation techniques until we found one that clicked. Once I had a grasp on that it came far easier and it didn't seem to drain my energy quite as much. I will never forget the feeling of having my magic drained from me in that cell. It was like as soon as I forced it out something grabbed hold of it and sucked it out of me. I very nearly lost contact with my wolf. We were both so weak afterwards that I didn't think I was going to make it on the trek to the rebel base.

I can't believe that Aria got hurt so bad. I still felt bad about the fact that she was carrying me at the time and it still made me feel partially responsible. Liam's theory about her wrapping her wings around me and saving them from further damage, did make me feel a little better.

I sunk down to the ground panting, but not anywhere near as tired as I had been when training with Geta. I could now recreate the ripple across the ground like I had done the first time, but it was hard to use that much magic at once. My goal though was going to be to split the ground and see if I could create a chasm, then reseal it.

The guys were doing just as well. Liam and Virion were channelling their magic into some kind of whip weapons. It was amazing to watch. Liam's was made of water and Virion's was made of fire. Once Braedon had got them creating them, Aria was teaching them how to fight with them. She



never ceased to amaze me. She had this inherent ability to just use whatever weapon she laid her hands on. I know that she went through a lot of training since she was a kid, but surely that hadn't included whips.

Sykes was having a bit more of a hard time with his magic. Braedon's theory is that it's because Sykes can't see it as well as the rest of us. Because Sykes manipulates air, it's hard to see where it's channelling. Braedon was currently teaching a way to push the air into some kind of sonic boom type weapon. I couldn't even follow the theory of it so I was grateful that mine was a little less complicated.

If we could get a handle on this, our chance in the fight during the Blood Moon, was going to be much better. We had such little time though and we still needed to get the Gjallarhorn and back to the pack. I couldn't even think about challenging my father right now.

Aria dropped down to the ground to sit next to me and leant in, nudging me playfully with one shoulder. "What you thinking about so hard?" She asked.

"Everything." I sighed.

"That must be why you're thinking so hard then, that's a lot to think about all at once." She said nodding seriously. I knew she was making fun of me and I was grateful that she was trying to take my mind off it.

"Your dad seems nice." I tell her. I actually mean it. Thor does seem really cool. It breaks my heart that she didn't get to grow up with someone like that to look after her, but after seeing what her mother was going through in that cell, I'm glad he sent her away. I can't decide if that's selfish or not.

Aria leans back on her hands and stretches out next to me. She shifted her wings away before we got to the gym so that she could move easier. I've noticed that she isn't moving quite as well as she normally would and I know that she must be feeling stiff from being injured so badly yesterday. I can't get over how quickly she heals, it's crazy, but I am really fucking grateful for it.

"I think you're ready to face your father. At least from a training point of view." She quietly tells me. I get it. Encouraging me to kill my father is probably not something most people would talk about.

"Yeah. I should have done it before we left." I grit my teeth. This is something that I've been thinking about a lot recently. "Everything that Wyatt has been though. I knew I could win a challenge against him when we got to the pack after fleeing the academy, but we had so much going on that it just didn't seem like the time. I probably would have walked away from it badly injured, but I would have won. I could have saved Wyatt so much pain if I had just done it then. He's done so much for me and I should have stood up for him. I should have saved him from this." I admit, letting the guilt flow over me.

"You had no way of knowing back then what was going on." Aria says leaning into me and putting her head on my shoulder.

"You knew. You knew that something was going on straight away." I don't know if I'm more disappointed at myself or just angry.

"It's easier to see some problems when you are standing on the outside looking in. You can be too close it sometimes. Plus, you were a kid when it started and they hid it from you your whole life. By this point they would have to be pretty good at it." She says, trying to save my feelings.

Deep down I know that she's right. The problem is that I don't think I want to admit it. Maybe after everything is done, but right now I need the guilt and the anger to help me through what I need to do.

"You want to train some more?" She asks.

I can't help but laugh. "Woman, you're a machine. Leave me to die in peace." I groan, dramatically flopping back onto the ground.

Aria just jumped to her feet and headed over to a punching bag in the corner and set into one of her training routines. She gave herself to our training so selflessly that she didn't often have time to train herself. We would need to make sure that we weren't smothering her. It wasn't uncommon for packs to have seven males to one mate so I know in theory it should be able to work fine with the five of us, but maybe we need to sit down and all talk about this. Especially Braedon. I was already counting him into the pack, but he hadn't actually mentioned to any of us if he intended on joining us. He seemed very interested in Aria and my wolf was adamant that he was pack. We all just seemed to seamlessly fit together like a pack should.

After about twenty minutes all of the guys had gravitated over to where I was sitting and we were all just lounging on the ground now, drinking water, talking and mainly watching Aria train.

"She's amazing." Braedon sighed, causing us all to start laughing at him. "Well, she is. How is she still going?"

Sykes looked over as Aria swept the legs from her imaginary opponent. "She's got at least another hour in her. Maybe two." I considered Aria for a moment. She wasn't even slowing down. We knew that she could go for hours if she needed to, she'd done it before and saved all our lives numerous times.

I looked over at Braedon who was watching Aria with a look of awe.

“You are pack now.” I tell him seriously. “Aria is our mate and we would lay down our lives to protect her. Will you stand with us as our brother?” I ask him.

Braedon looks around all of us. His eyebrows are raised in surprise. “You would name me pack?” He asks.

“My wolf recognises you as pack.” I tell him.

“You have no idea what that means to me.” He says quietly. “Before I came here, before I joined the rebellion, I was left at the barracks by my parents when I was just a baby. They did not want me. They didn’t care what happened to me. I suppose I was lucky that they didn’t just throw me off the Bifrost.”

“You should talk to Aria.” Liam says softly putting a hand on Braedon’s shoulder and rubbing it gently. “She will understand your pain. She has not had an easy life.”

Braedon’s eyes flicker across Aria’s back as she continues in her training, oblivious to what we are talking about. I love that she no longer tries to hide her scars. I know that she is not ashamed of them and she absolutely should not be. They show that she has walked through fire and whilst she did get burnt, she found a way to fight through it and come out the other side. She is my warrior and it is my absolute honour to fight beside her.

## Chapter Twenty Two

### Aria

It felt amazing to actually push my muscles and do some training. I think it might have freed up some of the muscles in my back that were bothering me. Either that or the adrenalin crash in a little while was going to really suck.

I stopped my routine early because I was all too aware of the guys sat watching me and talking amongst themselves. I felt bad making them wait for me, but I had needed a little bit of time to myself to straighten out some things in my head.

The guilt of leaving my mother in that cell was still crushing me, but I was at a point where I realised that there was no other way. If I had stayed, or worse got caught trying to break her out, Odin would have realised who I was and everything that she had been through would have been for nothing. Having said that, there was no way that I was going to let her stay in that cell for a minute longer than necessary. I had the beginnings of a plan forming in mind. Training always helps me centre my thoughts and I had spent the last two hours not only working my muscles, but also considering her escape.

After we left the gym, we went through to some kind of mess hall. It was fairly late and there weren't many people about, but those who were there made sure to come over and speak with Braedon. He seemed to be pretty popular. No one really paid much attention to the rest of us and I wondered if maybe my father was keeping it quite about who I was. That was

probably a good idea, especially if my initial thoughts of them having a spy at the base were right.

There was a huge station set up in the mess hall and everyone was just helping themselves. There were a couple of huge pots of the stew that I had last night and loaves of bread laid out next to them. Then there a basket of fruit with fresh fruit in it. Braedon passed me a bowl and I looked around him to see if there was a bigger one.

“Erm, we live pretty simply here.” He said, sheepishly rubbing the back of his neck.

Sykes burst out laughing next to us as he took his own bowl. “She doesn’t care dude, if I had to guess she just wants a bigger bowl.” I grinned at him until the next words came out of his mouth. “Girl is always hungry.” He said rolling his eyes.

“Rude!” I grumbled. All of the guys laughed as they helped themselves to the food. I looked over at Braedon and gave him a small smile as I filled my bowl to nearly overflowing. It wasn’t until we sat down that I realised the other guys all had two bowls each and I looked down at my one measly, far more than a single portion for a normal person, bowl with a pout. Braedon slide his own bowl across the table in front of me and went up to get another one for himself.

“Now, I’m not saying that he’s my favourite, but he did just give me food.” I said loud enough for Braedon to hear.

The other guys all burst into examples of when they had done the same and we spent the rest of the meal talking, laughing and sharing stories. It was nice. As I looked around all my mates, sat around me, I realised just how lucky I was. Yeah, we might be stuck in some fucked up situation, but it

was moments like this that made it sort of worth it. Don't get me wrong if I could trade this off to someone else I totally would. I have no business being in charge of saving the world. But it was time to woman up and kick this problem in the face, because whoever had started this was threatening the safety of my mates and I was going to enjoy tearing them apart, piece by piece.

## Chapter Twenty Three

### Braedon

Dinner had been nice. It was the closest I have ever felt to having a family. When I first realised that Aria was my mate, I was scared out of my mind. Here was this sassy woman marching up to my unit asking to talk to Odin. She was either out of mind or insanely brave. I didn't even update Thor that I was breaking my cover to pull her out. I had to get to her before the shift change and before she was registered into the prison.

Then finding out she already had four mates was the strangest experience of my life. I felt like I was supposed to be upset or disappointed that I was going to have to share her. But there was something about the men around her that just drew me into their group. Don't get me wrong I don't have any romantic feelings for them. It's more like they feel like brothers to me. Kyle says that it's because we are pack, but I don't understand that either.

Life has not been easy for me. Initially because I was just an unwanted child, but then I suppose once I joined the resistance that was of my own doing. Sitting around and sharing a meal with these people is probably the best experience of my life and looking around them now, I realise just how much of my life I've wasted.

Aria sits back from the table and cradles her stomach with a sigh after she mopped up the gravy from her second bowl of stew. She looks so happy and content right now. Every part of my body is screaming at me to complete the bond with her, but I don't want to push her too quickly. She was so badly injured yesterday. The fact that she is even up and moving about



today is a minor miracle. Even if she is a Demi-Goddess, shattered bones are still supposed to take time to heal.

She looks across at me with one of her soft smiles and I feel Sykes clap me on the shoulder. That's the moment that I realise I've just been staring dreamily at her.

"It never gets any better." Sykes sighed. "I constantly feel like that, man."

Aria is talking to Liam and Kyle quietly and it seems like they are getting into something serious. I can't help myself from sitting up in concern when I notice.

Sykes hand is still on my shoulder and he gives me a squeeze and pushes me back down.

"It's okay, mate. They're just talking about the challenge. Kyle's father is a massive douche and he also happens to be our Prime Alpha. He sent someone out to kill us before we set off on this mad adventure. When we get back, he's got to challenge him." Sykes looks kind of sad as he tells me.

"So, he's going to have to fight his father?" I ask. We don't really have shifters in our realm, but I've heard a little about how their pack structures can work. "I don't understand this term Prime Alpha though."

"He is the Alpha who rules over all of the packs. The strongest Alpha." Sykes explains.

"So, he is like your King then?" I ask.

“I suppose it has become like that. It never used to be that way. Packs used to govern themselves, but then once the magic in our realm started to weaken it seems to have just evolved into this fucked up system.” Sykes grimaces.

“Why is it fucked up?” I ask. If this place is going to become my home, I need to understand their ways.

“Female shifters are rare and they are not treated like they used to be. The less females we had the more satellite packs started to pop up. Groups of males who knew that they shared a bond because they were supposed to share a mate. But then when they never got those mates ... it seems that some started to trade in women. Taking females as mates that weren't fated to be theirs. Forcing them to mate with them.” The colour in his face leaches out to white as he watches Aria. “When we first found Aria, we were scared to announce that she was ours. There was only the three of us originally and we knew that once everyone knew how strong Aria's magic was, that they would challenge us for her. To try and take her from us. We didn't think that we would be able to protect her because there were only three of us and some of the other satellite packs had seven or eight in them.”

“Aria doesn't seem like the kind of woman that needs someone to protect her.” I point out. From what little time I have spent with her, she is clearly a warrior, which makes sense seems as her mother is a Valkyrie.

Sykes laughs and smiles. “No, she shut that down real fast. They all backed down because she threatened to kick their asses. Then she took some of the other girls under her wing and trained them. In six weeks, she had them turned into an Elite fighting unit. We joined as well. It's a side affect of her magic or something. When she trains us, we just get it, I don't know how to explain it.”

“She has a kind heart.” I realise out loud.

“She is the kindest and the fiercest woman I have ever met. And I am proud to call her mate.” Sykes says with determination.

Aria looks over at us and gives us a blinding smile. “What are you two talking about?”

“You.” Sykes says waggling his eyebrows at her. “Braedon’s going to show you where our rooms are so we can all get some shut eye for the night.” He says with a grin.

“Ah, right, okay.” We hadn’t been talking about that and apparently, I sucked at lying to our mate. Aria just rolled her eyes at Sykes, but then she stood up and held her hand out to me. I took it blushing like some of virgin. Before I stood up Sykes leant over and whispered in my ear.

“We’re going to bunk in the other room tonight.” He slapped me hard on my back and I appreciated that they would so easily let me have time alone with Aria. I didn’t get why they would do it, but I was grateful that they were.

Aria tugged on my hand and I let her lead me out of the mess hall. Then she stopped and stared up at me with her beautiful gold flecked eyes. “I don’t know where we’re going.” She said quietly to me.

“Right, yes.” I laughed and then led her down the corridor towards our room, shaking my head. I don’t know what was getting into me. It’s like this woman turned me back into a rambling teenager.

Aria slipped an arm around my waist and snuggled into me as we walked. “This okay?” She asked quietly.

I held her against me and dropped a kiss on top of her head. “Of course it is.” And I definitely meant it. It was like she just fit against me and it felt like I was finally home.

When we made it to our room, I opened the door for her, and showed her inside. “It’s not much, but we try and make sure that everyone has their own space.” I tell her.

It’s actually one of the nicer rooms, but they’re all set up basically the same. Bed, dresser and this one has a couch while some of them just have an armchair. Some of the people who live in the base permanently have brought in some extras, but I never saw the point. It just a place to sleep, anyway up until now I spent most of my time in Odin’s barracks.

Aria sat down at the edge of the bed and cocked her head at me in question. This just got weirdly awkward, really quickly.

“Awkward right?” Aria said, almost like she was reading my mind. She held out her hand to me and when I took it, she pulled me down to sit down on the bed next to her.

“We can just go to sleep if you want. I mean, we don’t have to, you know.” What was wrong with me? When had I lost the ability to speak to a woman? And why am I fucking blushing?

Aria kicked off her boots and then leant down and pulled mine off my feet. I sat there frozen like I had no idea what to do. She pushed me back onto the bed and then cuddled up next to me, laying her head on my chest. She

started to tell me the story of her childhood, as I ran my fingers over her back and my heart broke for the little girl she had been. She told me the story of every one of the scars and I listened. She told me the story of meeting the guys. The massacre at the academy and the death of her friend. The time they spent with the pack and the journey they took to find Virion and then the rest of their story up to meeting me. By the end, she had cried her tears and dried her eyes, cried some more and then the most beautiful smile broke across her face. She had bared her soul and dealt with her demons. She talked for hours and I didn't stop her. I just laid there, held her and listened. When she looked down at me and kissed me softly, I knew that I wanted that opportunity. I wanted that feeling, that release. So, when she sat back up, I took my turn and I started to talk.

I told her about how I was abandoned and left at the barracks. The childhood I had, the training, the beatings, the loneliness of growing up as a child soldier, but never getting to be a child. I'd never spoken to anyone about it before. I'd never said half of it out loud.

“Why did you join the rebellion?” She asked quietly.

“It was about ten years ago. I was still classed as a trainee, so they sent me on all the shit duties. There was an order that came through saying that there were some dissidents in one of the villages and we were sent to raid this house. When we got there, it was just a family home, mum and dad and a little boy having dinner. The other soldiers started tearing the place apart looking for something. I didn't know what. My job was to make sure that the family stayed in the kitchen. Then there was all this screaming and crying coming from the other room. The parents started freaking out. Fighting to try and get into the other room. The other guy with me killed the father and the mother threw herself over the kid. Then they dragged this little girl into the kitchen, crying and screaming. This poor mother is trying to stop anyone getting the boy and trying to get to the girl. All of the soldiers are just laughing at her. One of them rips the boy out of her arms and just slits his throat. Right there in front of his mother. Leaves him dead

at her feet. It was like she just shut down. Like her brain couldn't process it anymore. They dragged that little girl out and then they started in on the mother. I couldn't stay there. I didn't do anything to help her. I knew what they were going to do. I knew they were going to force themselves on her and I didn't do anything. I just walked out of there and I left her with them. Turns out that the girl had some crazy amount of magic. Odin somehow found out and decided that he wanted her for himself. Her family had only been trying to protect her, hide her from him. I never found out what happened to her, still don't. Not long after that the rebellion approached me and I knew that I needed to join them. I knew that what was happening here wasn't right and something needed to change." My voice drifted off as my mind was sucked back to that kitchen. To that night. "That woman begged me to help her. And I did nothing. It is the greatest shame of my life. You need to know what kind of man I am."

"How old are you?" She asks.

"Twenty four." I tell her, confused by her question.

"So, if this happened ten years ago, then you were only fourteen years old. You were still a child." She says running her hand down my cheek. I lean into her touch, even if I don't deserve it. "I know what kind of man you are. You're the kind of man that has worked with a rebellion for ten years, that is doing all that he can to try and help those that no one else will. You've put your life on the line every day for ten years. There are a lot of people here who have done a lot less. You have nothing to be ashamed of." She says firmly.

"No matter how many lives I save, it won't wash the blood from my hands." I tell her, feeling the familiar shame wash over me.

"When I arrived at the academy, I didn't know what to think. I had lived my life hiding what I was and suddenly these people came to me saying they

were going to help me and teach me more about my magic. I didn't trust them at first, but then I met the guys and Britt. Fucking Britt. She gets right under your skin and makes you love her. When I made the deal with Caleb to take on the girls and train them, I didn't want to help any of the others. I knew what was coming for them and I didn't train them. I didn't give them the skills to protect themselves. I was too caught up in trying to win that competition, in my own pride, to consider their safety. You might have three lives on your conscience Braedon, but I've got over a hundred." By the end she can't even look me in the eye.

"No," I gently place a finger under her chin and turn her face so that she's looking at me. "It was not your decision, nor your responsibility, to train the people at that school. None of them would have gotten out if you hadn't been there. You saved so many and you risked yourself to do it. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Own your mistakes Aria, but don't take on other peoples'. The weight of their guilt will crush you, and baby, you need to fly."

I held her tightly against me and kissed her softly. It seemed like we were both guilty of the same thing. Thor had tried to have the same conversation with me but I never listened. I suppose I didn't want to. No one stayed in the ranks for as long as I had. Thor had wanted to pull me out when I was eighteen, but I refused. It was only a matter of time before they discovered that I was their leak. I didn't care back then. Maybe I was looking for atonement, maybe I just agreed with my parents and saw myself as worthless. I don't know. I don't know if I even want to. Because now I've got Aria and she changes everything.

As soon as my lips pressed against Aria's, I knew I would never be able to let her go. Her hands slipped up into my hair and she pulled me against her. I slid my hand from her waist, under her top and danced my fingers along the edge of her bra. As she gasped in desire, thrusting her hips against my thigh, I slipped my tongue into her mouth. She tasted like honey and it was addicting.

Aria sat up and pulled her clothes off, before gazing down at where I was laying on the bed watching her. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I couldn't stop myself from reaching out to touch her, I don't think I ever would be able to. I sat up and my lips closed around one her nipples as I teased it into my mouth with my tongue, swirling around it and flicking just the tip of my tongue against her. Aria gasped and dug her fingers through my hair as she pulled my head closer to her breast.

I broke free of her grasp so that I could pull off my shirt. I needed to feel her against my skin. I pulled her tight against me and claimed her lips again. She fit against me perfectly, she was made for me. I didn't know how much I needed her until she was finally here.

I swept my tongue into her mouth and she tangled her own with mine. I felt her hands fall to the fastening on my trousers and she started to unthread them and push them down my hips. She clearly needed this just as much as I did. I needed to be inside her so much, my cock was getting to the point where it hurt, it was that hard.

Aria's lips broke away from mine as she laughed at us struggling to get me free from my trousers. We needed to break apart to have the room to get them off, but neither of us seemed to want to let go of each other. We're both grinning and Aria lets go of me enough so that I can roll to my back and kick myself free. She doesn't quite let me completely go and keeps her hands running across my chest and stomach. There's something about the fact that she can't stop touching me that is so fucking hot.

I come up on my knees between Aria's legs, I need to taste her. I want to feel her come apart on my tongue. As I duck down and lay a kiss between her breasts, I slowly start to make my way down her stomach, dropping soft kisses as I go. She feels so soft and perfect, I almost don't understand how she feels that way.



Once I've made my way to her stomach Aria places a hand on my shoulder and stops me.

“Please Braedon, I need to feel you inside me.” She begs.

Well, who am I to disappoint my mate? I can't help but smirk as I make my way back up to her lips. It does do the ego a lot of good to hear a woman begging like that and I want to be inside her as well.

Just as I line myself up, my elbows bracketing either side of her head, I stop. “Are you sure?” I ask her.

Aria hooks one foot behind my ass and pulls me towards her, sinking my cock slowly inside her wet pussy.

“Yes!” She sighs once I'm fully sheathed inside her.

I use one hand to pull the leg she had already hooked around me up onto my hip and then I start to move. She feels like perfection and she is so fucking tight. It was probably a good idea that we didn't sink down into too much foreplay or I wouldn't have lasted and I need this more than I think I need to breathe right now.

Aria moves with me, grinding down against me every time I thrust fully inside of her. Trailing my hand back up her leg, I move my hand so that I can reach between us and work her clit. I desperately want to see what she looks like when she comes. She's beautiful as she throws her head back on a moan. I can feel her pussy rippling against my cock as I ease my way inside her. I can't hold back any more while she's gripping me tight like that and I lose hold of my control and start to slam into her. I know she's on the

verge of coming when that delicious pussy clamps down on me and she screams my name.

It takes every ounce of will that I have not to spill inside her there and then. But this is only the first time that she's come and call me a gentleman, but I want to see her do it again.

Aria is still quivering as she basks in the glow of her release and gazes up at me from the bed.

I can feel the wicked grin forming on my face as I decide my next move. Hooking my arms under both of her knees I take hold of her ass and scoop her up off the bed as I sit back on my haunches. I'm still deep inside her when she reflexively wraps her arms around my neck with a giggle. She's completely powerless in this position and I'm not going to lie, that turns me on more than I thought it would. I lift her up and down on my cock, I can get so much deeper inside her in this position. As if coming to the same conclusion as I have, Aria leans her forehead against mine as she whimpers and groans her approval.

She whispers my name and just the sound of it makes me lose control. I lift and drop her back down onto my cock, over and over again, as I slam myself inside of her. Aria runs her nails across my scalp before she grabs a chunk of my hair and pulls my head to the side. I see her eyes flick to mine almost like she asking for permission before she goes any further.

“Do it. Please.” I beg.

She licks her lips and then darts forwards and sinks her teeth into my neck. The pain quickly feels like it wraps around me, like a velvet caress and pleasure flows from my neck and through my entire body. I can't hold myself back and I bite down on her neck in a mirror image of her own. Aria

cries out as soon as my teeth breach her skin, but I know that it's not from pain as I feel her pussy clamp down around my cock as an orgasm slams into her. It's more than I can take and I quickly follow her over the edge, groaning with my teeth still embedded in her neck. The taste of the blood in my mouth is like sipping on a fine wine and when I open my mouth I lazily lick at a drop of blood that rolls down her neck. My mate. My beautiful, warrior mate.

I gently place Aria back down on the bed before I sag down beside her. She rolls towards me and places her head on my chest as I wrap her in my arms.

*"That was perfect."* I hear Aria whisper into my mind.

I look down at her to make sure that I haven't just lost my mind from the amazing sex and she just smiles up at me.

*"Did you just say that inside my head?"* I think.

Her smile widens and she lays her head back down on my chest. *"Let's sleep, for some reason I suddenly find myself to be exhausted."* She whispers into my mind.

I can't help but laugh as I hold her closely to me. She falls asleep almost immediately and I lay there for a minute watching her, watching how perfect she is, before my own eyes close and I drift into the best sleep of my life.

## Chapter Twenty Four

### Aria

I woke up the next morning with a delicious ache on my neck, high on the right side where Braedon had left his mating bite. I wasn't sure why we were all compelled to mark each other like shifters did and I had to assume that it was because of the shifters in our bond.

We had fallen asleep a couple of hours ago, but now someone was banging on the door to our room and I was tempted to just snuggle up against my mate and ignore the world. I couldn't smell smoke so I was ninety per cent sure that we weren't in a fire type scenario and surely, they could get on without us for a while.

The door clicked open and slowly started to open. I pulled a throwing knife into my hand and prepared to throw myself over my still sleeping mate. When Virion's head and very surprised expression popped around the door, I sighed in relief and released my magic on the blade, making it fade out of my hand.

"You planning on stabbing me?" Virion smiled. I could hear his laugh in his voice even if he was holding it in. "Now I know why the others volunteered me to come and wake you up. You always wake up cranky like this?"

"No. I just didn't get much sleep and I was a bit disorientated for a minute." Even though it was the truth, it still sounded like a lame excuse. The story that Braedon had told me last night might have made me a little protective

over him. “I’m sorry Virion.” I told him and I meant it. At least I didn’t just throw it at him.

I raised my hand up and he quietly slipped into the room and climbed onto the bed beside me, kissing me gently.

“No apologies necessary. Did you have fun last night?” He asked running his nose up the side of mine. I really needed to find more time with all of my mates, this saving the world bullshit was really playing havoc with our love life.

Braedon’s sleepy voice grumbled from beside me. “If you get her all worked up, you’re going to have to help me satisfy that need.”

Virion’s eyes just flicked from me to Braedon and back again. I couldn’t help but laugh at his face. It was a cross between excitement and disbelief, as he tried to decide if Braedon was being serious. I have to admit I was hoping that he was being serious, because now that he had put the thought in my head, I could feel the heat of arousal starting to run through my body.

Braedon sat up on the bed and the sheet that was over us pooled around his waist and I was never more grateful than I was then that we had both fallen asleep naked. Virion’s hand slide slowly up my body, he grasped the top of the sheet and gently dragged it down me. As it whispered down my skin, across my already hard nipples and the soft skin of my stomach, I almost started holding my breath. Virion’s lips slowly followed the sheet as he kept revealing my body for himself to enjoy.

Braedon rolled to my back and presses himself flush against me. His hands come around to my front as he gently rubbed them across the underside of my breasts before scissoring two fingers on either side of my nipples and

pinching them closed. His lips started to kiss along the back of my neck and shoulder and it was nearly enough to distract me away from Virion.

Almost like he knew my attention was starting to be drawn somewhere else, Virion ducked his head down lower and started to gently bite my inner thighs before kissing away the sting.

I can't help the sigh that escapes me as I sink back into the sensation of my two mates' touch.

I'm still laying on my side, with Braedon pushed up against my back, when Virion puts one of my legs over his shoulder and moves his face to my core. I know I'm already wet, I'm so turned on by their attentions that it would be impossible not to be. Virion runs his tongue up my seam before flicking across my clit and then repeating the motion. He pays hardly any attention to my aching clit and it's driving me crazy.

"Virion, please, I need more." I beg, not even caring that it comes out as a breathy whine.

Virion lifts his head up to look at me and licks his lips, something about the motion is so fucking hot that it makes me squirm on the spot. I can't even clench my thighs to try to alleviate some of the ache because he's still holding one of my legs over his shoulder. His eyes flick behind me to Braedon. "You heard the lady," he says with a grin, "she needs more."

I feel Braedon line his hard cock up with me and then, almost like they timed it, he pushes inside in one swift thrust just as Virion closes his lips around my clit and sucks it into his mouth. The orgasm explodes out of me immediately. There was no gentle climb to oblivion, it just takes over my body and I have no choice but to ride out the wave. Braedon thrusts his hips

into me again and again, drawing out the pleasure even longer as Virion gently rolls my clit around his tongue.

Once I can focus my eyes again, Virion moves up the bed and gently kisses my lips. I can taste my arousal on his lips and I greedily lick it away, making me groan my name.

“I want you in my mouth.” I tell him, not sure where this suddenly wanton woman has come from.

Before Virion can even respond, Braedon has lifted one of my legs across his body and rolled me onto my back all while still pounding away inside of me. This boy has definitely got some moves and I can't help the giggle that bubbles out of me as he picks me up and positions me on the bed so that I'm laying across the bed on my back with my head hanging down off the end.

“Oh, I like how you think.” Virion grins across at Braedon.

Braedon does that masculine self confident chuckle that makes my insides turn to liquid, then he gets up on his knees, lifting my hips off the bed to keep me in line with him as he keeps himself inside of me. I'm not entirely sure what's about to happen until Virion climbs off the bed and walks up to my head. I let my head hang down and get an upside down view of Virion's cock as it moves towards my mouth and now I'm clued in.

I reach my hands back to hold onto Virion's thighs as he slides his cock deep inside my mouth. At this angle I can swallow him down far deeper than I have ever been able to before and he is almost hilt deep before he starts to withdraw swearing under his breath.

With the way that Braedon has my hips lifted off the bed, I have absolutely no control over what happens now. I feel like I'm just balanced between the two of them and all control goes over to them. There is something completely freeing about it. It takes absolute trust to be able to give all control to your partner, but it also lets me just relax and enjoy all of the sensations that they wring out of my body.

Braedon started to gently move inside me again, but they soon fall into a rhythm of them both moving together. I found myself wrapping my hands around the backs of Virion's thighs to pull him closer to me. I wanted him deeper, I wanted him all. Braedon didn't need any encouragement, it was like he could read my body and he knew exactly when to start picking up the pace.

"Fuck, Aria. You're so beautiful like this." Virion groaned. "But, fuck, I'm not going to last, this is too much."

I pulled him into me again, swallowing him deep. I could feel my own orgasm building and I wanted him to come with me. I wanted us all to fall into it together.

Braedon held my hips tight so that his thrusts barely moved my body at all and he picked up his pace as he pounded into me, swivelling his hips as he pushed inside of me to tease himself across my clit.

I was so close when Virion shouted out his release and I swallowed him down. Almost as if watching Virion come was too much for him, Braedon's hips started to lose their rhythm and I knew that he was moments away. Virion pulled out of my mouth, just as Braedon slammed himself inside of me as he lowered my hips back down to the mattress. Adjusting his angle, he reached for clit with one hand and circled his thumb around my aching bud as he pounded himself inside of me. It was like he was about to lose control, but he was hanging on as tight as he could because he wanted to get



me there first. He didn't have to wait long though, because as soon as his thumb circled my clit just once I shouted his name as I came around him. I felt my pussy clamp down hard on his cock as he slammed it into me one last time, roaring out his own release as he came deep inside me.

We all collapsed in a heap on the bed, tangled up together. It was nice to see that Braedon and Virion weren't bothered about being naked around each other. It almost felt like we had always been together.

"I don't think I can feel my legs anymore." I mumbled as I snuggled against Virion's chest and reached behind me to pull Braedon closer to my back.

Virion laughed as he looked down at me, pushing my hair away from my face. "I was supposed to be coming in here to tell you that you were needed in a strategy meeting."

"Oh, why did you have to go and say that?" I moaned and not in a good way.

I felt Braedon's chest rumble behind me with his laughter. "They're not going to just forget about us you know."

"I know, but I bet they wouldn't have come looking for us just yet." I said as I ran my hand down his back and across his ass cheek. There was not an ounce of fat on this man, every inch of him was just hard muscle and I wanted to spend the day enjoying it.

"You are insatiable." Virion murmured as he moved me off his chest so that he could kiss his way across my shoulder to my neck.

I felt Braedon move to my other shoulder, mirroring his movements and I sighed as my head rolled back onto Braedon's shoulder. This was where I wanted to be. Just for a little while. I needed to forget that the outside world was waiting for us to jump up and save the day. Waiting and dying. Stupid conscience!

Both men pulled away at the same time and I didn't even whinge about it as I sat up in the bed. This time my sigh was one of reluctant acceptance.

"I suppose I best have a shower." I said as I scooted off the end of the bed.

I walked across to the bathroom door and was just pushing it open when I felt Virion scoop up my hand in his. I turned to see that they had both followed me across the room.

"We should probably help you out with that, you know just to make sure that you don't miss any spots." He pulled me into his arms and kissed me deeply as he walked me backwards into the bathroom.

I couldn't help but smile against his lips, as Braedon moved past us and started the water running in the shower. Maybe the others could wait for just a little bit longer.

## Chapter Twenty Five

We met up with the other guys in the same conference room we had been in yesterday. They were already sat around the table discussing the next steps in our journey and Liam was taking notes on what we were going to need to take with us. They all looked up and gave us various greetings before getting back down to work. No one asked where we had been. I suppose it was fairly obvious.

We all took seats and I listened to them discussing things between themselves. My father was sat at the head of the table quietly watching and if I wasn't mistaken, he seemed fairly impressed.

"I've been thinking," I told him as I moved to sit beside him and leave the guys to what they were doing. "About my mother and how to get her out of that cell."

I saw the pain flicker across his face. I had no idea how he was keeping it together. I couldn't help but think about Wyatt. He had been going through the exact same thing. That was something else that I needed to add to my ever-increasing list of things that needed doing.

"You said that the majority of Odin's forces are stationed at the Bifrost. How long does it take to get from the start of the Bifrost to the eye?" I asked him.

"At a full run you could probably make it in twenty minutes." He said thoughtfully.

“Would forty minutes give you enough time?” I asked him. “If we timed it, to draw his forces down the Bifrost to us before the shift change at the prison, you would get at least forty minutes. I would think maybe longer, probably closer to an hour, because they are unlikely to run straight back and into the prison and I will try and keep their attention for as long as I could to buy you even more time?”

Thor looked me straight in the eye as he considered it. I could see his gaze flickering from one of my eyes to the other. “She would never forgive me if anything happened to you.” He said quietly.

“She’s going to die in there.” I told him. My voice hitched as I admitted what I had been thinking ever since I saw her chained to the floor. “She can’t hold on any longer. This is our only option and I can’t leave here until I know that I have at least done all that I can to help.”

Thor sighed and slumped in his seat. His head fell into his hands as he braced his elbows on the table. “I almost stopped looking for a way. I was starting to convince myself that she was already gone.” He whispered. “Odin moves her around. She was chained in front of his throne for years. She was only transferred to the cells when he grew bored of her. I actually thought she was dead at that point. It wasn’t until we got word that she was put in the cells where you were that I realised she was still alive.”

“If the majority of his guards are pulled to the Bifrost you should be able to get through and out before anyone is aware she is missing. You would have to move fast but if it takes forty minutes to travel the Bifrost I’d say you would have an hour before normal activities resume. It took us longer than that to move through the tunnels, but we were going slowly because Kyle’s magic had been drained from him. If you can make it through the tunnels before we pull their attention to the Bifrost and free her, you would only

have to travel back the same way in the time that we can buy you. I think you can do it if we time it right.”

“You’re assuming that the prison guards will be sent to reinforce the others on the Bifrost.” Braedon said from the other side of the table. I hadn’t realised that they had stopped talking and were listening to our conversation.

“What’s the one thing that Odin wants more than anything else?” I asked Braedon.

“Power.” He answered quickly.

“If we use enough magic, show our hand and flaunt it in front of him. What would he do?” I asked Braedon.

He cocked his head to the side in thought, but in the end it was my father who answered. “He would send everything that he has to seize it for him. He would not risk losing it.” Thor stops speaking and goes back to looking at me thoughtfully.

“You’d be cutting it tight on time.” Braedon warned him.

“What if we destroy the Bifrost?” Kyle asked.

“What?” Braedon said turning to him in shock.

“Just a little bit of it.” Kyle said quickly almost in apology.

Thor burst out into his big guffawing laughter that seemed like his trademark. “Odin will shit a brick!” Then he just continued to laugh. Shit a brick was not a term I was familiar with, but hearing it come out of Thor’s mouth was enough to push me into a fit of laughter. The guys joined in, but Braedon just sat there with his mouth hanging open in shock.

“Heimdellr will never agree.” Braedon said once we had all managed to get ourselves under control.

“I need this old friend.” Thor said on a sigh sitting back in his chair. His face tilted up to the ceiling and he closed his eyes. “She has lingered in there for far too long. I promise that I will lend you some power to rebuild with. Please. I have not asked you to stand with the rebellion. I haven’t asked you to choose a side. But I need this.” He ended on a whisper.

Sykes was looking around him like he was expecting someone to jump out the wall and stab him. The evil side of me made a mental note to watch some horror films with him when we got back to normal.

It was a silent for a few minutes, no one knew what to say and we all just sat and watched Thor who continued to stare at the ceiling. Finally, he looked down at Kyle.

“Do you think that your magic is strong enough to break open the Bifrost?” He asked him. We all looked at Kyle, but he sat straight and proud and didn’t waver under our stares.

“Honestly, I have no idea.” He said with a shrug.

“If we all worked together, we could probably do it.” I decided. The guys thought about it for a moment and then nodded in agreement.

We spent the next hour going through the details of what we needed and how we were going to make it work. By the end of our planning session, Thor promised to have provisions and equipment ready for us to leave the next morning. He left to go and brief his own squad on the prison break part of the plan and we all headed off for something to eat. I planned to sleep for the next ten hours at least. I was going to need it to recharge my magic and I wanted to be on top form by the time that we left the next morning. Dinner in the mess hall was some kind of curry type dish with a vegetable rice and flat breads. The baskets of fruit was there as well. It was insanely good. I had three bowls, much to the amusement of Braedon. The guys topped out at two heaped bowls and Braedon just ate one, because he was still a normal person. For now at least.

“You laugh now but once the extra magic hit gets you, you’re going to start to feel the crazy calorie burn as well.” Liam warned him.

“What do you mean?” Braedon asked. “I don’t have any active magic, I thought you knew that. Well not really, I basically have similar battle type magic to Aria, it just helps me fight better.” He looked slightly embarrassed when he said it.

“Yeah, welcome to the club mate.” Sykes laughed. “None of us had active magic before we mated with the magical dynamo over there.” He said waving his fork in my general direction.

“You think I’ll get magic?” I could hear the hope in Braedon’s voice and I could kick the guys for putting it there. Braedon was abandoned by his parents because he didn’t have any ‘real’ magic. If he didn’t get any now, it was going to be so much worse for him.

“I don’t know.” I told him honestly. “I’ll confess, I have no idea what my crazy magic is going to do half the time. Maybe Thor will know.” I suggested. Yes, it was mean of me to push the buck across to my father and yes, I would definitely do it again.

Braedon just nodded thoughtfully but the look of hope didn’t die in his eyes. I really hoped that this didn’t crash and burn around us.



## Chapter Twenty Six

The next day I was so nervous that I thought I was going to puke. This was the first time that we would be going into a fight on our terms, when we decide. Plus, it only had my mother's life riding on it. No pressure. None at all.

We left the rebellion mountain hide out just before the sun rose. There had been a few of Odin's scouting parties in the area. Nothing serious. They clearly still had no idea how to infiltrate the base, but we didn't want to raise any alarms before we planned on it.

I said goodbye to my father. He wrapped me in his arms and held me tightly.

“Not being able to watch you grow into this amazing woman will be the biggest regret of my life.” He told me and he held me firmly in his arms. I knew that he didn't want to let me go. We didn't know when we would be able to see each other again or if that was even possible. I squeezed him tighter. I had no words and I wasn't sure if I would be able to hold my tears at bay if I tried. It was strange. I had spent so little time with him, I hadn't even really had the time to speak with him properly, but my heart knew who he was to me and I felt like I was being abandoned all over again. I knew that he only did it to keep me safe, but it was still hard.

Kyle squeezed me tightly against him as we walked away. One tear slid down my cheek. It was all that I was going to let fall. We had a mission to complete and we finally had an idea about how we were going to do it. I would see my parents again, even if I had to ride that damn squirrel and

break back in to Asgard to do it. I felt my resolve slip down my spine and harden it to steal. No more doubts, no more second guessing. This badass bitch needed to get back in top form, because we were going to bitch slap some gods and smash some legendary bridges today.

We had moved through the mountain range and back through the forest by the time that the sun had fully risen in the sky. The city had come back into view and the glittering bridge which Braedon pointed out to us stood accusingly at the edge of the city. I kind of felt bad about our plan to destroy it. It was beautiful as far as bridges go. The city was almost built around it, like the buildings knew that this bridge was sacred and its space was not to be encroached upon. It also meant that the small army that was stationed at the start of the bridge had clear sight lines through the whole city. And I meant small army. There had to be a couple of hundred of them.

“Fucking hell.” I mumbled as I took in the number of soldiers we were about to piss off.

Braedon crouched down beside me, surveying the scene around the bridge. “We’re lucky. It looks like most of the forces are here. We need to move, we need to get to the water edge to see if we can bargain our way across.” He didn’t wait for an answer he just got to his feet and started to jog in the opposite direction to the bridge. We skirted around the edge of the city, it was almost like the outskirts were nothing but slums. Calling it a city was ambitious it was the size of a small town at best and you could see the class divides. The outer limits of the city looked like a shanty town. I wouldn’t let a dog live in these. Let alone the families that clearly did. The area was dead though. There wasn’t a living soul here. It was eerie to see the clothes still on washing lines, they must have been there a long time though because they were faded and ragged, almost rotting in place, barely holding on to the lines with the bleached wooden pegs. As we moved down the road, we came across a doll lying broken in the street. One of the arms was all but torn from the doll, as if someone had desperately tried to keep hold of it before it was torn from their grasp.

“What happened here?” I whispered. “Where is everyone?”

“This part of the city is a ghost town. It was the first area that was cleared out when Odin went on a rampage looking for dissidents. Those that survived live in the rebellion bases now.” Braedon’s voice sounds almost automated as he delivers the information to us. What the fuck is going on here? How could Geta not have been aware of all of this?

No one said anything else as we quietly moved through the shadows of the streets, down to the water’s edge. It was almost like this part of the city would have been a little fishing town. I could imagine what it would have been like when there was still life here. But now it was dead and rotting. It was not a place to linger. It felt like a place where only death came to visit and in a realm of gods and goddesses that couldn’t be a good feeling to have.

When we reached the water’s edge, we tracked it further out of the city limit until we reached a small sandy beach. I couldn’t help but look around me. This should be a happy place. A place where families brought young children to play, but it was so devoid of life it almost felt like it was sucking your own out from you.

Braedon walked down to the water’s edge, pulled something out of his pocket and then just flicked it into the water. We all stared as the ripples fanned out across the surface of the water.

“Well that was a bit anti-climactic.” Liam faux whispered to Virion who was stood next to him. The pair of them just started sniggering like children and I rolled my eyes, before turning my attention away from them.

“What was that?” I asked Braedon, nodding down to the water which was still just lazily lapping against the shore.

“It’s a fresh water pearl.” He said. “The Naiads like to collect them. It’s kind of become a universal call when you want to talk to one of them.”

“So, we just wait then?” I asked watching the water. There weren’t any Naiads in sight, not that I was entirely sure what one of them looked like.

Braedon dropped down onto his butt on the sand and braced his arms against his bent knees. “Yep.” He confirmed, popping the p.

I sat down next to them and the guys all just dropped where they had been standing. It was actually quite a nice day, so I tipped my head up towards the sun and basked on the sand. This would be nice, if we weren’t sat just outside some creepy ass ghost town, next to which a sadist’s army was camped out.

I don’t know how long we were sat there, but as I was sifting sand through my fingers, I felt a wave of magic creep across the water and slide across my skin. It didn’t feel malignant more like it was curious. I sat up and looked out to the water, but everything still looked the same.

“Did you just feel that?” I put out to the group.

“Like someone just stroked my junk, yeah I felt that.” Sykes muttered uneasily. I liked that I could always trust Sykes to just tell it to me straight.

“Yeah, that was ... intrusive.” Virion said uncomfortably shifting about where he sat.

Kyle was glaring at the water like it had personally offended him and I was starting to wonder if what I had felt was maybe a bit different from what the guys had and my magic was starting to get a bit pissy about it.

“There.” Kyle said pointing out to the water. “There’s something out there.”

The guys all jumped to their feet and were staring out into the water. I stood beside Braedon, squinting at the water. I caught sight of something bobbing in the water but then it disappeared quicker than I could catch sight of it. A few seconds later it popped up again a bit closer.

“Is that what we’re waiting for?” I asked Braedon.

“I think so.” He said squinting as he tried to focus on whatever it was getting closer to us through the water. “Maybe. I’m not sure.”

I pulled one of my throwing knives into my hand and held it behind my back. We couldn’t risk being discovered by the wrong person right now. The guys were shifting uneasily next to me. Something else popped up through the surface of the water and now that it was closer, I could clearly see that it was the top of someone’s head. They seemed to be approaching us just as cautiously as we were of them, which made me feel slightly less antsy. My magic though was not happy judging by the burn that was flooding through the system. I didn’t like that they were approaching us through the water. Not only were we blind to if anyone else was following them, but standing on the beach we were out in the open with no cover.

“I don’t like this.” I mumbled to Braedon. “How do you know that the Naiads won’t just turn us over to Odin.” I asked him quietly.

A woman's head broke through the water about thirty metres away from the beach. More of her body was revealed as she started to walk through the surf towards the beach. Of course, she was insanely beautiful, even when she was wet it was pretty obvious. Her long blonde hair flowed down her back, she was dressed in some kind of silky material which clung her body. She definitely wasn't hiding any weapons on her because that dress left nothing to the imagination. Her hips swayed from side to side as she slowly walked up the beach towards us. One of her hands ran down the front of her body before settling on her hip and she smiled a sultry smile at Braedon.

"Braedon," she purred "it's been too long. Whatever could make you put out a call for me?" She strolled right up to Braedon, not stopping until her body was pressed flush against him.

My growl started low and easily as I watched her dare to put her hands on my mate. I clenched the knife in my hand so tight that I lost the feeling in my fingers. It was only Kyle's hand on my shoulder that stopped me diving forward and ramming it through her eye.

Braedon, thankfully, took a step back from the Naiad. "Seraphina, this is my mate, Aria." He said pointedly.

"Mate? Well aren't you a lucky girl!" Seraphina said looking me up and down and from the look on her face, she didn't like what she saw.

"Yes, these are all my mates." I growled at her giving her an identical shit on the shoe look. Was it wise? Probably not. But this bitch needed to know where her place was and it was as far away from my men as she could get.

Seraphina's face broke into a blinding grin and I instantly knew that I had made a mistake. Maybe I should just stab her now and we could try chucking a few more pearls about and try and catch another Naiad. What

even was a Naiad? Stupid beautiful woman. I knew that I had one of those faces like I was chewing on a bee, but I wasn't going for attractive right now.

“Seraphina, we need your help.” Braedon said, drawing her attention away from me. “We need to get through the waters to the eye of the worlds without having to use the Bifrost.”

She reluctantly pulled her eyes away from me and sauntered the few steps back across the beach to Braedon's side. Running her fingers up and down his arm.

“So, what you are asking for is a favour?” She said slyly with that fucking smile back on her face. “A big favour as well.”

Braedon took an uneasy step away from her and his eyes flicked to me.

“We understand what we are asking ...” Braedon started.

“No. I don't think you do.” She interrupted gripping his arm and pulling him back to her, her teeth bared.

Shaking her head Seraphina took a step back, her fingers running across Braedon before she stepped out of reach, only to press herself up against Virion instead. The poor guys eyes just widened in alarm as he stumbled back away from her. When she turned and tried again with Liam, I lost it and pulled out of Kyle's grip, stepping in front of her.

“I think there is something that we need to make clear.” I said pushing up against her so that she took a step back away from my mates. “These are my mates, they are not here for you to rub yourself on. The next finger of

yours that touches them, is going to be taken as payment for the insult you are currently paying me. Now, we came here to ask you for a small payment. The polite thing to do is to tell us if you are going to be able to provide us with assistance.” I tell her, as calmly as I can manage.

Seraphina spins away from me with a laugh. “There’s no need to get angry Aria, I’m only playing with you.”

My eyes flick over to Braedon who is rubbing the back of his neck. He knows that he’s in trouble and I have a feeling that this Naiad is a well he’s been plundering.

“Sera,” Braedon stays, drawing her attention back to him. “This a personal favour for Thor. We need this for Myra.” He says seriously.

“You’ve found a way to reach her?” She asks cocking her head to the side, her playful attitude dropping away.

“We have. We’re going to draw the forces onto the Bifrost and then take it out to strand them on there.” He says quietly. I immediately want to reach across and slap him. Telling our plan to this woman is not the best idea, I definitely don’t trust her.

“I’ll tell you what, I will do this favour for you, but I have a price.” She says looking at me mischievously. “I will take you and your mates across the waters and all I want is one night with one of your mates.”

I didn’t even realise that I was moving until I had already knocked her to the ground and was straddling her, with my blade held tight against her throat. My wings had burst from my magic and my magic, which was as



pissed as I was, was flicking in flames across the surface of my wings. Seraphina's eyes were wide as she stared at my wings.

"You would dare to ask for one of my mates?" I say cocking my head to the side and giving her my best crazy person look. My knife digs angrily into her neck, but I haven't broken the skin just yet. "Perhaps you should tell me why I should let you live."

"I ... I ... I didn't know." Sera stutters still staring at my wings.

Braedon gently lays a hand on my shoulder and crouches down beside me. "This isn't the way, Aria." He tells me gently. "You need to pull in your magic, it's too dangerous to use it so close to the city."

Keeping my blade at Sera's throat I unfocus my eyes away from her and concentrate. Braedon is right. We want to draw Odin's forces, but we need to do it properly. My mother is counting on this. Going against all the training that I have had, I grab hold of the magic and force is back inside of me. There is no coaxing, no gentle request. I need it to move and I make it do it. My flames immediately quench and my wings snap back inside me. The force of them retracting pushes me forward a bit, pressing the knife harder to Sera's throat so that it just breaks her skin. I didn't mean to, but I'm not going to tell her that.

"You hold the power of the eternal flame." She says in awe.

This isn't the first time that someone has said this to me. I had forgotten to ask Braedon about it when he mentioned it before. I don't want to look like an idiot though so I just nod at Sera.

“I will help you do this.” She says looking down away from me. “Please accept my apologies for making advances on your mates. I did not realise what you were.” She definitely sounds regretful, but I’m at a point where I don’t trust her anymore. Nor do I give a fuck about her feelings. So rather than graciously accepting her apology, I just let her up and walk back to Kyle, leaving Braedon to deal with the Naiad.

Kyle wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me against his chest. I’m feeling a bit stupid for perhaps a minor overreaction on my part.

“That was so hot.” He whispered into my ear and I smile feeling the evidence of his arousal pressing against me.

I tip my head back and kiss the tip of his chin as he wraps me in his arms more tightly. Feeling him holding me close seems to be appeasing my magic. I can feel how much stronger it has gotten since we left the pack, but the way that it seems to be developing a personality of its own is starting to get a little disconcerting now.

Sera steps away from Braedon and walks towards the water edge. Instead of stepping into the water she bends down and touches the surface. It’s almost like the waves part and flow around her. As she steps forward the water continues to flow around her leaving her path clear and mostly dry. When she is about four steps in, she turns back to us.

“You will need to stay close to me. I am not able to hold a large area of the water open, but I will be able to do enough for us to walk together. I will lead you to the base of the eye. Once you climb the rocks there is a staircase cut into the pillar which you can use to climb up to the eye.” She tells us, waiting patiently for us to just walk into the water with her.

I cast a glance at Braedon. I don't know if I trust her enough to do this. He just gives me a small smile and a nod. We don't really know each other well enough to be able to do the reassurance thing but he is my mate and if he thinks that this Naiad can be trusted then I will trust him.

Braedon steps past the waterline first and I reluctantly follow him. The rest of the guys follow us, taking up the rear. It's not too bad until we get far enough from the shore that the river bed deepens to the point where the water closes in over the top of us. The bubble which we are now walking in completely encloses us under the water. Just as I'm starting to get antsy, Sera turns around and gives me a smirk. Part of me wants to launch at the bitch and kick the shit out of her. The sane, sensible part of me recognises that might not be a good idea. It's almost like Kyle can read my mind, because he steps up beside me and gives me a nudge to draw my attention away from her. I give him a smile, but turn my attention back to the water surrounding us. I once went to an aquarium where you could walk through this glass tunnel under one of the tanks and see the fish swimming all around us. This is absolutely nothing like that. To start with, there isn't any glass between us and the water, but mostly it's how dead the water is. Maybe there's just no fish around here. But there's not even any plants or anything. It's just cloudy, murky water and the silty dirt of the riverbed. It's eerie, I'm almost expecting something to swim out of the gloom and try to eat us.

When we draw to a stop about twenty minutes later, I'm still trying to stare out into the water to see what's going to be eating us.

"What's wrong?" Virion asks, looking out into the water. "You've been staring out into the water for ages, is something out there?" He looks just as uneasy about all of this as I no doubt do, but my staring seems to be putting him more on edge.

“No, but don’t you think that is strange. There aren’t even any plants.” I look down and scuff my feet along the ground and it’s the same dark silt that we’ve been walking on the whole time we’ve been under here.

“Nothing lives this far into the river.” Sera says from in front of us.

“Why not?” Liam asks. Everyone is staring out into the water now. It’s almost as if we want to find something out there just to prove her wrong.

“Mostly because the top layer of the water is so hot. Once you reach nearer the surface the water starts to boil. Many years ago, there used to be a lot of life in these waters. There were enough fish to sustain the people who lived near the shore but as the realm has deteriorated the fish, the animals and the plants have slowly started to go away.”

“So, the people are losing their magic and the plant and animal life is dying off?” Virion asked turning to Sera.

“Yes, this realm is dying.” She says sadly. Braedon looks at her in shock and she just shakes her head at him. “The Naiad are connected to nature so we can feel the loss of magic more strongly than you.” She tells him.

“What happens if the magic is completely lost from this realm?” Liam asks her.

“I do not know.” She says looking around. “I don’t think we will ever find out. Once the animals and plants die out the people will too. We may be gods, but we still need to eat.” She looks across and points are the rocks which are starting to form in front of us. “Be careful on the rocks they might be slippery and you don’t want to touch the water, it’s going to start getting hot.”

Sera starts climbing up the rocks in front of her and we have no choice but to follow her as the bubble seems to go wherever she does and I for one do not want to get left behind.

“Why have you not informed Thor of this?” Braedon asks Sera’s back. He seems more shocked about this news than anyone. I can see why though. It kind of makes the rebellion seem a bit pointless if you’re all going to die anyway.

“Thor is aware of our theories.” Sera says over her shoulder. “He has met with Poseidon.”

“I don’t understand why he wouldn’t tell everyone about this.” Braedon mutters. I don’t want to get involved in this. After all Thor is my father and I know nothing really about this realm or its problems.

“What would be the point in telling everyone?” Sera asks seeming genuinely confused.

“People need to know if the realm is dying. If we are running out of food. We need to put plans in place to preserve what animals and plant life that we have.” Braedon argued.

“There is no preservation that will stop this.” Sera explains calmly. “Magic is the problem. All you would do if you told everyone is take away what little hope they have left.”

Braedon just falls quiet as he follows Sera in the climb up the rocks. It’s starting to get steeper and we really should be concentrating more on the slippery rocks than the apparent inevitable destruction of this realm. I

wonder what happens when a realm dies? More importantly, although I feel like a complete dick when I think that, what happens to the other realms if one of them dies?

“We need like a list or something.” Sykes says out loud. “You know, to keep track of all of the problems we seem to be collecting.”

We keep climbing the rest of the way in silence and I can see just how much this information is troubling Braedon. It’s troubling me as well, but I’m starting to feel like my brain is just getting too full of problems right now. Sykes is right. We are going to have to start keeping a list.

When the bubble breaks through the surface of the water I almost sigh in relief. That is until I see the surface water boiling away, the sight makes us all climb just a little bit faster, wanting to get clear of it as fast as possible. The problem is that once we reach the top of the rock and the magic bubble is released, the boiling surface water is now only a few steps away rather than the couple of metres which Sera had it held back. The top of the rock which we are standing on is barely above the water level. Looking around, we appear to be on a small area of rock which is sitting just above the water level, on the centre of the rock is an enormous pillar. It looks more like a tower really given how wide it is. There’s only a couple of metres of rock between the pillar edge and the sea. We all climb onto the top and huddle together as the magic fades away and the surface of the boiling water settles back around the edge of the rock, which is far too close for my liking.

“This is where I must leave you.” Sera tells us. Turning to me she drops her gaze to the ground. “Aria, I would again apologise for my behaviour earlier. I did not realise what you were.”

“What do you mean what I am?” I ask her, wondering if it’s fairly obvious who my parents are once my magic is on full display.

“You are the Phoenix General are you not?” She says looking confused.

“Oh right, yeah, that. Yep that’s what I am.” I finish lamely.

She looks at me like I may have gone insane and then turns to Braedon. “Goodbye old friend.” She says bowing her head, then she just turns and dives into the boiling water.

At first, I just stand there and watch expecting her to pop back out screaming, but she doesn’t surface again. Kyle is the first to turn away and start examining the massive pillar behind.

“So, I guess we’re finding a way to climb this then.” He says walking up to the pillar as if waiting for it too to burst into bubbling lava.

Braedon is still staring at the water deep in thought when I walk up to him. “Are you still with us?” I ask him quietly. I know that what he has just heard must be affecting him on some level, but we are about to invite a massive army to come and fight us and I need to know that his head is going to be in the game. There is no turning back once we climb this pillar. The only way out for us once we reach the eye of the worlds is for Heimdellr to send us back to our realm.

“Of course.” He says, reluctantly pulling his eyes away from the water.

“It’s okay to be affected by what she said.” Liam adds. The other guys have all turned back to us and I kind of feel bad for Braedon being in the spotlight like this.

Braedon drops down to sit on the rock, a little too close to the water's edge for my liking. "I just didn't realise that everything was quite as dire as it is." He says sadly.

I sit down beside him, just further away from the water because despite what Sera may think, this bitch is not that crazy!

"I kind of feel like none of these realms are my home." I say honestly. "I grew up in the human realm and despite how shitty that turned out to be in the beginning, I think I will always think of that as home. But then I got thrown into the academy. Like quite literally thrown. And now I have all this expectation on me to save everyone. So we come here, to this place which apparently should have been home, to try and find a solution, and now everyone here needs saving as well." Braedon looks up at me expectantly, like I hold all the answers. I only wish I did.

"What I'm trying to say, is that it's okay to feel overwhelmed by all of this. But we have to start prioritising our problems, because we have soooo many of them." That at least gets a laugh out of him. "The demons are coming in less than three days. This realm is going to last longer than that. I'm assuming, she really didn't seem panicked enough for it to be an imminent problem and I feel like my father would be looking for a way to get people out if that was the case. So, let's kick this army's ass, head back to the magic realm, kick another army's ass and then figure out what to do about this mess." I suggest. I almost want to flop back in exhaustion. I need like a half day or something, maybe some time at a spa. There are only so many armies in all of the realms, surely I shouldn't be expected to take them all on.

"You're right." Braedon says getting to his feet with a determined look. "Let's do this."



“Just, like give me ten minutes. Now that I’ve sat down, I don’t want to get back up again.” I say waving an arm at him while flopping the other one over my eyes.

The guys just laugh and Virion grabs my waving hand and hauls me up to my feet. Rather than bitch about being serious about wanting those ten minutes, I turn to the pillar with an overly dramatic sigh and start looking for the staircase that Sera promised was here somewhere.

Liam disappears from view and I hear. “Oh for fuck’s sake! This had better not be it.”

We all wander around the corner and just stare in open mouthed shock at what Liam has found.

Sykes scoffs out, “fuck that” and disappears further around the corner, presumably looking for an actual staircase because the term loosely applies to this at best. This is just a spiral of bricks which are sticking out of the wall a couple of inches which look to spiral up and around the pillar. About chest height there is also a rope anchored to the brick face. The bricks aren’t even sticking out enough for you to be able to get your full foot on. Not even if you stood on them sideways. You would probably be able to get your toes and the ball of your feet on them, if you were lucky. Sykes reappears on the other side of us shaking his head. We don’t even need to know what he means because it’s fairly obvious. This is going to be a hard climb for the guys because I’ve got wings and I fully intend to use them.

“Maybe I could carry you all up to the top? Take like five trips up.” I suggest with a wince, craning my head back to try and see the top. Even I know that there is no way that I can do that. I could maybe get two of them up there but that would be pushing it.

The guys don't even bother to answer me, Kyle just gives me a 'don't be ridiculous' look and then goes back to staring at the column.

"How long have we got?" Liam asks looking up.

"Six hours." Braedon says with a frown. "Can we even climb that far in six hours?"

"Only one way to find out." Virion seems to be taking the positive approach and he strides up to the column and grabs hold of the rope, placing his foot on the first brick.

Virion slowly climbed until he was about chest height to the rest of the guys and then Kyle stepped up to the first brick ready to make the climb as well. I couldn't take my eyes off Virion. I could see just how hard it was for him to keep his feet on the bricks. They were hardly protruding out of the wall at all. I didn't see how this was going to be possible.

"Pretty scary." Came a voice from next to me making me simultaneously jump about four feet in the air and skate pretty close to the line on shitting myself.

When I turned to look at the mystery voice there was a giant standing next to me who apparently had the skills of a ninja. "Jesus suffering fuck! Where did you come from?" I shrieked.

He boomed a laugh and slapped me on the back like I had told him the best joke in the worlds. "The top!"

"Heimdallr!" Braedon sighed sounding relieved.

“You’re Heimdallr?” Sykes said cheerfully. “Dude, what the fuck with the stairs?”

Virion jumped down from where he had reached with the most relieved look on his face that I had ever seen. “Please tell me that there is a different way?” He said giving the stairs a slightly terrified look.

“Okay, don’t be mad.” Heimdallr laughs holding up his hands, then suddenly clicks his fingers. Thankfully everyone has come off the bricks because they suddenly shoot out of the walls until they are proper sized steps.

“Argh, that was just mean.” Sykes said, looking like someone had just kicked his puppy.

“Come on, let’s take the portal.” Heimdallr says waving us further around the column.

I drag my feet as I follow them all around the corner but as soon as I open my mouth, Kyle, Liam and Sykes all turn to me and laugh “I fucking hate portals.” If I had something to throw at them now, I totally would.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

The eye of the worlds is the weirdest place I have ever been. It's almost like it actually is a giant eye but one of those freaky ass dragonfly eyes, where they can see a million things at once. The eye is a sphere but rather than the surface being smooth, it's made of lots of tiny windows, or mirrors, or some kind of reflective surface. Some of them show the outside of the eye, others seem to just be dark and others look like they're watching random other places, there's even one which looks just like the coffee shop that I used to go near the college campus. It's trippy but cool all at the same time.

“We have five hours before you're going to blow up my home, so let's get some food in you so that you're in top form.” Heimdallr suggests going over to a table and with a snap of his fingers it's covered in platters of fruit, cheese, breads and meats.

We all sit down and everyone starts to load up their plates and dish out food and drinks. “How do you do that?” Liam asks, waving over the table.

“Heimdallr has retained most of his magic. He is one of the few who haven't seen a drop in their powers.” Braedon explains.

We all look across the table at Heimdallr and he just shrugs like it's no big deal.

“So basically Odin is scared of you?” I asked. “Is that why he has his army conveniently placed at the end of the Bifrost?”

Heimdallr lets out what I'm quickly thinking is his trade mark booming laugh. "He actually thinks those insignificant soldiers keep me in my place." He's laughing like it's the best joke in the world and it brings a smile to my face. His laughter is infectious even if I don't really get the joke.

"Don't take this the wrong way," Liam starts cautiously. "But, if you're so powerful why aren't you stopping him?" It's a question that needs to be asked, but I sure as fuck am glad that I wasn't the one to do it.

As it is, Heimdallr just sighs and sits back. "I am the watcher. It is not my place to interfere. There are events that have to unfold to protect the future. It is not an easy job." A look of sadness crept across his face and nothing but grief and shame radiated from his eyes. "Someone must watch and bear witness. Someone needs to make sure that we stay the course." He looked up at me, his eyes wet with unshed tears and I nodded. I'm not exactly sure what I was agreeing with. He had possibly the hardest job in all the realms. With all the shit going on in all of the realms, I didn't know how he could watch it all and keep his sanity.

We all sat in silence for a while and quietly ate our meal. I had no doubt that we were all considering what life for Heimdallr must be like. The first word that struck me was lonely. I knew how that felt. I had placed myself in a self-induced loneliness back in the human world. I found it hard to get close to people and keep my secret, but at least I had the gym, and I had Alfie and all of the fighters there. I hadn't realised it at the time, but they were my family. I wondered what they would be doing now. If they would have forgotten about me already. My life in the human realm was taken away so easily, like it had no worth to begin with. But it did. It was my life and I had fought so hard to get there.

"The windows will show you where ever you want." Heimdallr said interrupting my thoughts. I looked across at him as he stood from the table

and held out his hand, inviting me to join him.

He led me over to the wall made from the hundreds of reflective surfaces and held his hand over the surface. It glowed a bright white in response to his touch and he closed his eyes and smiled softly, it almost looked like he could feel through them. When he took a step back Heimdallr simply told me to touch the edge of the mirror and think of whoever I wanted to see, then he turned away and went back to the table. The guys were sitting around eating and flicking their gaze across to me every so often. They were trying to give me some privacy and I loved them all for it.

I gently touched the edge of the mirror and the surface began to ripple, almost like ripples across a pond. The clear reflection in the mirror clouded and it was like watching smoke ripple across the surface. When the image cleared I gasped in shock, it was as clear as a television screen. The gym was just how I remembered it. Alfie was stood leaning against the corner post of the ring shouting at a couple of fighters sparring in the centre. He was right, one of them was sloppy and needed to hold his left guard up more. It brought a smile to my face as I thought of the bitchy comments he would sling at them if he didn't think that they were making enough of an effort. Tiredness was not an excuse in Alfie's book. You gave it your all until you dropped to the mat and couldn't move any more. Anything less was unacceptable. The shot of the gym moved away from the ring and floated us through the side door into the training room at the side. There was one of the self defence classes going on for the kids which I used to run. Martin, one of the fighters who had helped me when I first showed up was leading it and he was taking the kids through a range of movements whilst they stepped and mirrored his movements back to him. I recognised some of their faces from when I would lead the classes. They were getting better. There were a few new faces too. One little girl only looked about seven, but she already had the face of a child who had seen too much and been able to protect herself far too little. Those were the faces that used to haunt me in my dreams, but they were always the ones who I was most proud of when they came back for every class. If any of them came into

class showing any signs of abuse I would always check on their homes, even if I never told anyone about it. I was pretty sure that Alfie knew what I did, but he never said a word about it. Who was looking after these kids now though? As much as I had to do here, I still needed to get back to the human realm to make sure that everything from my old life was tied up properly. I wouldn't abandon those kids. I needed to make sure to ask Dom when I got back what I needed to do to get a portal across, just temporarily. I had too much in the magic realm to be able to leave. My new life had started here without me even realising.

I startled a little as I felt an arm run across my front and I was gently pulled back into a strong chest. Kyle dipped his head down and kissed the side of my neck and I tilted my head so that I could lay my cheek against him. I hadn't even realised that I had been crying until I felt the moisture press against his cheek.

"We'll add it to the list." He told me quietly and I nodded turning away from the mirror. I couldn't watch any more. I didn't know how Heimdallr had the strength to do this for lifetimes.

I sat back down at the table and took a deep drink from the glass of water in front of me to try and clear my mind.

"You were never alone." Heimdallr told me quietly, he reached across and placed an enormous horn in front of me on the table and I stared down at it. It was beautiful. It must have been as long as my arm. It had a slight curve to it and was fitted with a leather strap. It was covered in engravings of Valkyrie fighting in battle. I ran my fingers across the surface and it almost felt like it sang to a part of me.

"I was always there with you. You went through more than any child should have to endure, but you bore it with honour and you used it to mould you into the strong woman that you are today. You were always meant for this

Aria. This was the path that you had to walk to reach this point. There were many, many times when I wanted to pull you off it. But we need you, the realms need you and this was the only way. Will you take the Gjallahorn? Will you take what you have fought so hard for and use it save the rest of us?" Heimdallr ended in a whisper.

I stared down at the horn in front of me. This is why we came here. This is what it has all been about. There was a part of me that wanted to say no. A part that wanted to get up from the table and demand that I be returned to my own life. I was too young for this. How could anyone expect me to do this? It was too much. But then there was another part of me. A part that burned with fire and magic. A part that thirsted for revenge and retribution. A part that knew that there was no turning back from this. I reached out my hand and wrapped it around the horn. The flames of my magic bled out of my hand and licked along its surface. I could hear its song now as it rejoiced at being reunited with the magic of the one that was made to hold it. The air whipped around me and my hair spiralled back from my face, caught in the breeze. I heard the sound of chairs being pushed away from the table, but I didn't lift my eyes to see them moving. I looked down at the horn and happiness struck my heart, but I could feel that it didn't belong to me, it belonged to the horn and whatever magic it held. My fire now completely coated the horn and it melted onto the table into a living pool of molten metal. It surged and flowed, dancing to its own song. My flames danced across the surface as my magic rejoiced at the reunion. As the song started to come to an end the molten metal flowed across the table before sliding up my hand and spiralling up my forearm. It burnt as it flowed across my skin, branding me, becoming one with me. Once laid even, almost touching my shoulder, the rest of the metal wrapped around my whole arm three times. As the last notes of the song flowed to an end, the magic flared hotter and sank into my skin, branding me with the image of the horn wrapped around my arm. It cooled almost instantly, leaving me with a perfect tattoo-like image of the horn and its engravings. The mouthpiece laid on the underside of my wrist and the spiral widened as it curled around my arm and across the back of my shoulder.



I looked across the table at Heimdallr who was the only one that had remained seated. “Thank you.” I told him.

“You do not need to thank me. It was always yours. I have held it for thousands of years, waiting for you to come and claim it.” He cleared his throat and his eyes became misty again. “You are more than I ever thought you would be.”

I looked around the room to see the guys all stood with various looks of shock on their faces. Sykes looked across at Braedon who looked slightly like he was going to throw up and just said. “You have to get used to shit like this around her, it happens all the time.” He dramatically rolled his eyes and then turned and grinned at me.

I startled as I felt Liam’s fingers run along my arm, I hadn’t even realised that he had moved to my side.

Kyle raised his hands in the air and dropped back down into his seat with a sigh. “Okay, I’ll admit it. I was started to think that we would never get this done.”

Everyone cautiously got back into their chairs now that the drama was over and looked varying degrees of tired.

Virion gave a tired chuckle as he reached out for his glass. “Is it just me or does it feel like the end might be in sight?”

“Yep” Sykes grinned popping the ‘p’ as he did. “I wonder what’s going to go wrong next?”

Everyone looked at him almost like they were getting ready to argue with them, but then we all just agreed. He was right. There always seemed to be something.

“How much longer do we have?” I asked no one in particular.

Surprisingly it was Heimdallr who answered. “Four hours, you should all get some rest and recharge for your next battle.”

“About that.” Virion said looking Heimdallr cautiously. “Are you sure that you are alright with us doing this?”

“Of course, it’s not like I can’t just rebuild it with a snap of my fingers.” He laughed. “It’s a fiendishly good plan and I’m looking forward to watching Odin’s face when he realised that not only is his army stuck on the Bifrost, but that your mother has escaped as well.” His booming laughter echoed around the eye. I kind of wished that I could see it too. Odin seemed like a dick and it would be nice to see his face when he realised that he had lost this one.

“So, you could like, snap your fingers and take it out as well then.” Sykes suggested.

“Alas, no. I can only watch. I cannot interfere with these events, not if they are to stay on course. We cannot risk derailing the chain reaction that your actions will spark. It is the only way to save everyone.” Heimdallr explained. How hard must it be to always sit back and watch life going on around you, but never be able to take part?

“Asgard?” Braedon suddenly asked straightening up. I knew what he was trying to ask and I already knew what Heimdallr was going to say, but I

couldn't blame him for trying. This was his home and of course he would want to know that there was a way to save it.

Heimdallr just smiled at him, but didn't answer. Instead he stood from the table and started to walk away. "Come, I have somewhere you can rest." He called over his shoulder to us.

We followed him over to an area in the eye which looked like it was set up like a roman spa. There were huge cushions laid all over the floor and short tables holding large jugs of what looked like wine. I sank down into the middle of a particular comfortable set of cushions telling myself that I would rest for three hours, then I was getting up to train and warm up for the last hour. As Liam and Sykes curled themselves around either side of me and my eyelids started to fall, I wished that we had longer and snuggled down into their comfortable warmth.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

Three hours had not been enough sleep, but now that I had warmed up with a bit of training and the adrenalin of an impending battle was starting to kick in, I was as ready as I was ever going to be. Heimdallr had already set up the portal just outside of the eye for us, so that when we were ready we could leave fast.

Thor and his team were just about to move into the cells, we had to distract the soldiers stationed at the end of the Bifrost for as long as we could and then blow the end of the bridge. It was simple. Or at least we hoped it would be. If we did it right, we may not even have that much of a fight on our hands.

“Does everyone know the plan?” Kyle said, checking his weapons for the ten millionth time, which coincidentally was also the number of times he had also asked us if we knew the plan. No one answered him this time and he just got a range of dirty looks from us all.

“Okay, so Aria one lap around and then straight down the Bifrost to where we will be waiting.” He went on.

“Kyle, honey, please, we got it. We didn’t answer because we’ve been through it a million times. You don’t need to go through it again.” I told him. I got why he was nervous. This was the first time we were going to actually start a fight rather than someone jumping out and trying to kill us. It was a bit weird and not at all what we were used to.

I opened my wings and transformed into my Valkyrie self, stretching my wings out wide I almost sighed in relief. I needed to make sure that I spent more time in this form. If I went too long, it was like trying to stand up suddenly after you'd been sat on your foot. My wings were a part of me and I needed to start acting like they were.

“So hot ... every time.” Sykes mumbled to Virion, who was stood next to him and just nodding with his heated eyes fixed on me. I'd complain but I loved looking at them in their fighting leathers, with blades strapped to them. I didn't want to be a hypocrite.

“Okay, don't let your magic flare until you're already over them. Once you're already on your way back to us.” Kyle added, still going on about the plan.

I wrapped him in my arms and he held on tight enough to cut off my air supply. I pulled back enough so that I could look at his face in concern. “What's going on?” I asked him.

“We don't have the time for this.” Kyle said shaking his head.

“Kyle, of course we have time for this. You're my mate, I will always have time for you. Fuck the realms, they can burn for all I care.” I tell him snuggling into his chest.

Kyle holds me tightly to him and nuzzles his face into my neck. “I can't lose you.” He whispered.

“I can't tell you that you won't because I won't make you a promise that I know that I can't keep. But trust me, anybody coming at me is being sliced in two. You've seen me fight. You know I have the necessary skills, but

there is always going to be a risk.” I snuggled against his chest. “I’m worried about losing one of you too.” I admitted.

All of the guys moved and so many arms wrapped around us, it was difficult to tell who was where. But it was nice. It would be nice to see where this went, once we had dealt with all of the shit we were currently wading through.

Kyle took a deep breath in and then blew it out as his arms loosened around me. The other guys took the hint and backed off as well.

“Let’s get this done.” Kyle said.

Just as I opened my wings wide and took the first flap, I heard Heimdallr’s voice boom out of the eye, “He has her.” I took to the air with a smile on my face. Now we just needed to make sure that they got to stay together.

I climbed into the air as quick as I could, whilst it wouldn’t be the end of the world if one of the soldiers saw me and set off down the Bifrost, it wasn’t the plan. The climb was easy, but as I levelled out in the cloud cover, I did feel ever so slightly out of breath. I needed to make sure that I kept up the flying so that I didn’t tire too easily.

I glided through the clouds until I had travelled far enough that I knew I was past the soldiers. I had considered the best way to do this, Heimdallr said that as soon as I ignited my magic it should be enough to draw their attention. It would be a huge release of magic which they weren’t used to having in Asgard anymore. It would definitely draw attention. But I wanted to get past them as quickly as possible. There was always the risk that I could get shot out of the sky and I don’t know about anyone else, but it didn’t sound all that fun or like something I was really excited about giving a try. Plus, this way was definitely going to be more fun.

A break in the cloud gave me the opportunity to set my eyes on where I was aiming, then with one last beat of my wings, I folded them tight into my body and I dived. It was such a rush and I fucking loved it. The air rushed past me, roaring past my ears as I plummeted towards the ground. I felt like laughter wanted to bubble up out of me, but I forced it down for maybe a slightly more appropriate time.

I could see the ground rushing up towards me and the soldiers gathered around at the base of the Bifrost. It was a full camp of the fuckers. How does Heimdallr cope with these guys camped out in his front yard? Fucking rude!

A couple of them started to notice me and I caught the pointing and shouting as they scrambled to find their weapons. They weren't even armed. They were amateur at best. Once I was close enough to start to worry about the ground, I spread my wings and ignited my magic at the same time. It flared higher and hotter than I had ever felt it before. My magic knew we needed to make a big splash and it was co-operating. I pulled up and levelled out so that I glided over their heads, just out of reach of anyone deciding to have a go at swinging a sword.

I turn towards the Bifrost and soared down it towards my guys, who were already making their way to me with their swords drawn. Kyle was hanging at the back of the group because we needed him to break the Bifrost for us. I can tell that everything about hanging at the back was grating against him the wrong way. His Alpha nature would be hating every second, but with his magic still being fairly new to him he needed the others to be able to cover him while he centred himself to release the wave.

I meet the guys about a third of the way down the Bifrost. The soldiers are running on mass towards us. I don't think anyone is organising them, they seem to have pretty much just seen me and took off across the bridge. I was

surprised that Odin had managed to inflict so much damage with such an incompetent army, but then when you are running a campaign of terror maybe logistics isn't as much of a priority. I would need to speak with Braedon about it more if we were going to come back here.

When I set down on the bridge, it was like I could feel the magic of it running up through my feet and shaking hands with my magic. I hoped it wasn't going to hold it against us when we broke a small piece of it off. We still had time before the soldiers reached us. I didn't want to move too far down the bridge because I wanted them stranded as far up the bridge as I could get them. My magic died down to a gentle simmer of flames around my wings and I stood my ground in all my fiery glory while I waited for them to come to me. The guys stood clustered in a loose semi circle at my back and Kyle hung back behind them.

“How long are we engaging them for?” I asked. I knew the plan, but I felt like I needed to kill some time. Waiting for them to come to us was a huge change from the ambush type scenarios that we had always fought in the past.

“If we can keep them busy for ten minutes before we blow the bridge, I think that should give the other team more than enough time.” Braedon said.

“And where do we stand on killing these guys?” I asked. It was easier to take down the demons there was enough disconnect between them and us for it to not feel like you were killing a person. But these soldiers were very much people shaped and I wasn't sure on the politics of whether these people were being forced to do this, or if they just down right fucking enjoyed slaughtering innocent people. We definitely should have covered this before now.



“They’re all here of their own freewill. They knew what they were doing.” Braedon growled. “We pulled the rebellion spies out yesterday.”

My magic flared at his response. I was almost happy that he had said that. I do love to fight a cause for the little guy.

“Hang back for now.” I told the guys. “I need to work through some stuff.”

I heard Sykes laugh and I knew that they would be a second away if I needed them. I could see the whites of the eyes of the first line of soldiers now. The grit of their teeth and, most importantly, the hate burning in their eyes. These were definitely the guys that had drunk the Kool-Aid and I was going to enjoy this so much.

I ripped the short swords from my back and my flames blazed down the blades. Letting out a laugh which was leaning on the side of insanity, I surged into the first of the soldiers who had managed to break ahead of the pack. They didn’t even have the sense to look afraid, if anything I think they were as excited as I was. I could feel my magic simmering towards the edge of bloodlust and I made sure to pull it back just a little, there was no time to slip into the bloodlust and I didn’t have Geta to save me from it this time.

I began the dance of death as I twirled my swords around myself, my magic lashed out from my wings at anyone who dared to try and come at me. I sliced through flesh and blood flew in arcs, splashing the Bifrost which should have been sacred ground.

I lost myself to the fight around me. To the joy of seeking retribution from these men who seek to oppress those around them. My magic sings a song of blood and it covers me so completely that I can feel it starting to run

down my arms. It isn't my blood though. None of them have even landed a single hit on me yet.

“Aria!” I hear someone shout behind me. I whip around expecting a blow to come from behind but there are no living soldiers behind me. Only my mates. They look like they have taken a few soldiers down themselves, but I doubt that many of them made it past me.

Virion is looking at me in concern. I don't know how long they have been shouting for me. Liam and Sykes surge past me and take up the fight as I take a moment to look around me. The bridge is covered in the bodies of fallen soldiers. Most of them are dead, but a few are still holding onto life, trying not to succumb to their wounds. One of them locks eyes with me and I snarl at the audacity that he has to continue breathing. But the fear in his eyes holds me back. I take a step back towards my mates and I realise that maybe I hadn't held the bloodlust quite as far back as I should have. Virion pulls me behind him and Liam and Sykes start to move back towards us. I don't know how much time I lost but looking at the number of dead and dying on the bridge is was more than the ten minutes we had intended. Glancing over my shoulder I can see that Kyle is practically shaking with the amount of magic he has pulled and is frantically trying to hold inside him. Tears spring to my eyes as I take in his scrunched up face and his laboured breathing. He's hurting and I did this to him because I lost control, again. I stumble back towards him. I know that the plan is that we are all behind him before he releases the wave. We are all moving as one with Kyle holding his position. His fists are clenched at his sides and I can see he's gritting his teeth against the struggle of holding in his magic.

The soldiers are obviously stupid because as we pull back, they seem to be regrouping and beginning to advance on us. They haven't realised that there must be a reason for us to pull back. Maybe they think that someone got a hit in on me and I'm injured.

As soon as we have all moved past Kyle, Liam gives him the word and he releases the magic inside of him with a sigh of relief. His legs wobble and he started to collapse to the ground, but Liam and Sykes caught him under the arms and pulled him back to us.

The magic leaving Kyle was magnificent. It's the most powerful that he has ever released. The surface of the Bifrost actually rippled like it was nothing but water. The soldiers in front of us all fell and a great cracking sound broke through the air. We can't see where the bridge is breaking because the soldiers stand between there and us, but now isn't really the time to be standing around watching what is happening. Braedon grabs hold of my hand and starts to pull me backwards, it's hard to take my eyes off the scene in front of me. I take a second to commit it to memory. I need to remember these men, these lives that I have taken. Braedon's insistent tugging finally draws me away and we all take off down the remaining section of the Bifrost towards the portal. Liam and Sykes reach it first, holding Kyle between them and leap through, Virion stops at the edge and looks back to make sure that we are following. I hear Braedon shouting for him to go as we run closer, but it's almost like I'm hearing his voice through water. Virion dives at the portal and disappears. Just as Braedon pulls us closer, just as we are about to leap, my eyes focus behind the portal and I catch a glimpse of Heimdallr who just smiles and gives me a thumbs up. A relieved breath that I hadn't even realised I was holding wooshes out of me. They made it. I'm grinning like an idiot and just as Braedon pulls me through the portal and I feel the wet slipperiness of it slap me in the face, I have one final thought in Asgard ... "I fucking hate portals!"

## Chapter Twenty Nine

### Heimdallr

The guilt had ridden me hard through the day as I sat and spoke with Aria and her mates. She was not only a beautiful young woman, but she was intelligent and selfless. Meeting her was making me have doubts in the plan.

The only hope I had was how capable she was in her own magic. Watching her embrace her magic and cut through Odin's soldiers gave me a ray of hope. Maybe she and her mates would make it through all of this.

I knew that we were doing the right thing, but I still didn't know how I was going to live with myself afterwards.

## Chapter Thirty

### Sykes

By the time we step through the portal, Kyle is a dead weight between us. Liam and I pull him away just in time for Virion to dive through it head first. The sight of him coming through at speed sets my heart running, I have a split second to freak out about where Aria is before Braedon appears, pulling her along behind him. They land in a heap, on top of a grumbling Virion who didn't have the sense to move when he hit the ground.

“You see, this is why I hate portals.” Aria grumbles, trying to unwrap herself from the heap of people on the ground. I'd go and help her, but Kyle weighs a tonne and I'm not sure that Liam will be able to hold him up on his own.

The portal flickers a few times and I find myself bracing expecting someone else to come through, but it slowly fades away leaving us alone in the forest.

“Where are we?” Aria whispers looking around, her hands have drifted back to the knives sheathed at her thighs. She is so fucking beautiful when she gets that warrior look on her face. The new tattoo of the Gjallahorn wrapped around her arm is doing things for me too.

A cold breeze tickles across her skin and I can see the goosebumps flicker across her skin in a wave. Turning my face into the breeze, I take in the

scents of the forest around us, scenting home my back straightens and I look more carefully at where we are.

“We’re back at the pack.” I say slowly. I’m not sure if this is something that we should be happy about, especially with a passed out Kyle between us. “About half a mile out I think.”

Aria looked around us cautiously. She was still riding on the adrenalin from the fight back at the bridge. She was going to crash pretty hard when she came out of it. I almost feel like I should feel bad at what happened back there, but I had heard the stories from the rebellion base of what Odin’s soldiers did. She gave them a far quicker death than they deserved.

“Do you think you can find someplace safe for us to hold up?” She asked us as she ducked down to check on Kyle who was hanging limply between us.

“There’s nowhere close by around here.” I said looking around us. I had a pretty good idea of where we were and we had no convenient caves or hollows to hide out in.

“Why are we not going to your home?” Braedon asked no one in particular.

“Last time we were here, we ran from there and Kyle’s father who is the Prime Alpha sent someone after us to kill us all. I’m not so sure we would get much of a welcome back and Kyle is in no state to challenge his father right now.” I filled him in quickly.

Braedon cocked his head to the side and frowned as he thought. “I don’t think Heimdallr would have placed us so close to your home if it would have been too dangerous for us to return.”

“We should have asked him for an update on the pack when we there.” Liam said staring off in the direction of the pack house. “We’ve been away for a while, who knows what’s been going on here while we were gone.”

He had a good point. The demons had attacked the pack before we left. They could have done so while we were gone. Fuck, the entire pack could be dead for all we knew.

“Okay, Virion come take Kyle from me. I’m going to shift and go and scout around the pack house, then I’ll come back and update you. If I’m not back in half an hour, move back through the forest away from the pack house and I will find you when I can. Try and keep Kyle up in case you need to move fast.” I instructed them getting ready to pass Kyle’s dead weight over to Virion.

“No.” Aria said forcefully. My wolf’s head reared up in a bit of annoyance at the tone in her voice. I was beta in this pack and I may not assert that as much as I should do, but I was in control of this pack when Kyle was indisposed.

“Excuse me?” I said lifting an eyebrow at her.

“I just mean that I think I should do the scouting and you should stay here with the others. I can fly over, no one can really do me any harm when I’m in the sky, my feet won’t even touch the ground. Plus, I can do it quicker.” She reasoned cautiously.

My wolf was feeling a bit giddy. Aria had never challenged our authority before and whilst I wasn’t going to fight her for dominance, my wolf was very interested in play fighting with her right now. He was flashing images of Aria pinned beneath us, flushed and panting and it was doing all kinds of things for me.

I growled in the back of my throat and shook my head. I knew how it would look to the others, but I needed to get my arousal under control. I caught Liam smirking next to me and I would bet that he was the only one who would know that Aria was turning me on right now. Thank god.

“Name me one time you went off to scout saying your feet would never touch the ground and actually did that.” I challenged her, clearing my throat to try and keep the growl down that wanted to come out.

“Well ... that’s not the point.” Aria said crossing her arms.

“And what is the point?” I asked with a smirk.

“I don’t know yet.” She said looking a bit confused. “But it’s still a valid point.”

I cock an eyebrow at her like I don’t believe her, even though I already know that I’m going to let her go. She’s right that it’s the best option, I just hate standing here while she runs into danger alone. She’s my mate and I’m supposed to protect her. It’s hard to balance that need into a sane person’s feeling so that I don’t just wrap her up in a blanket, tie her to the bed and never let her leave. My wolf would be more than happy for us to enjoy her like that, stretched out before us and all of our brothers. Clearing my throat, I pull my attention back to what we are actually talking about. My cock is rock solid and I desperately need to adjust myself, but I know Liam will just give me shit about it so I’m going to try and ride it out.

“Fine, but those dainty little feet do not touch the ground or when Kyle wakes up, we are all going to spank that perfect little ass till it glows.” I growl pulling her against my front. Her scent envelopes me and I can smell the arousal raging through her. It seems that our little warrior likes that idea.



“Please be careful.” I whisper to her with my face buried in her hair. My arms tighten around her on reflex and I don’t want to let her go.

When Aria pulls back, she looks confused for a moment before she gently runs her hand down my cheek.

“I promise.” She says locking eyes with me and I can see the sincerity there.

I give her a nod. I don’t have any more words and the others just watch her warily. Aria takes a few steps back away from us and then she opens her wings and soars up into the sky, heading towards the back house. Every time she does, it’s like I can feel a piece of my heart physically rip out of my chest and go with her. My wolf whimpers and I feel him retreat inside me.

“Does that ever get any easier?” Braedon asks quietly.

We all turn to look at each other and Liam just shakes his head. “Never. In fact, it gets harder every time.” He mutters, crouching down to check on Kyle.

## Chapter Thirty One

### Aria

It felt strange flying back here. It was almost like the air felt different around me. Thinner maybe. The forest, even though I hadn't spent much time here, kind of felt like home though and it was nice to get a bit of peace and just fly. I needed to make more time for this.

I saw the pack house peeking through the trees on the horizon and I climbed up into the clouds for some cover as I went to scout the area. It was mid afternoon and I couldn't afford to be spotted if someone happened to look up or if my shadow caught someone's eye. I was soaring through the clouds when a gap gave me a glimpse of the pack house and the surrounding area. I was so shocked my wings stuttered around me and I almost dropped out of the sky. It looked like a full blown military camp had been erected around the house. There were huge military style tents and training areas set up. A couple of training sessions were under way and it looked like the Elite girls were leading them. My heart soared when I caught sight of them. Tears trickled across my eyes. I was so proud of them. Everyone was hanging on their every word and they looked like they were working them hard. I spotted Nix straight away overseeing two others sparring with swords. There were so many people here.

I wasn't sure what to do at first. I should either go down and get a closer look, maybe speak with Nix. Or, go back to the guys and let them know what I had seen. With Kyle out for the count I really needed to know the situation on Marcus, his father. It didn't seem likely that he would have let my girls lead the training if he was around, but I didn't think I was lucky enough that someone would have taken him out for us. With a groan of

frustration, knowing that I was never going to live this down, I circled the house in the clouds and then descended down towards the training area where I had spotted Nix. Before I could rethink just how good an idea it actually was, I folded my wings behind me and dived.

“Incoming!” I heard someone shout from below. Well I suppose I was committed now.

I saw several people in and around the training area draw their weapons, I spread my wings to slow my descent and pulled up to hover about eight feet off the ground in the centre of the training ground. A wave of shifters turned and then surged towards me with their weapons drawn, a grin stretched across my face and my magic roared in joy. Just before I was about to draw my swords and meet them head on, a voice shouted, “Hold!”, and all of the shifters stopped, holding their ground and snarling at me.

The grin didn’t leave my face at the sight. They were at least ready for some sort of fight. Nix pushed her way through the crowd, and I let myself drop to without about a foot from the ground, when she launched herself at me.

“Thank fuck you’re back!” She laughed as she wrapped her arms around me. I managed to keep hovering with my wings as I embraced her back. It was so good to see her again.

There was a scuffle behind us and Trent, Wyatt and Caleb pushed their way through the crowd.

Wyatt looked around him in panic. “Where are the boys?” He asked frantically.

“I came ahead to scout, they’re close enough.” I said cautiously shifting my eyes from him to Caleb.

“It’s okay, Marcus is in chains in the basement. We have control of the pack for now.” Caleb assured me.

Nix unwrapped her arms from me and took a step to the side. The shifters who were gathered around started to creep forward, curious about what was going on.

Caleb pointed at me, moving his finger up and down. “Why are you being weird?” He asked.

“I’m not being weird!” I said indignantly. “You’re weird.” I muttered quietly.

“Why are you doing that?” Trent asked. “What’s wrong?” He surged forward and started looking me over like he thought I was injured or something. Maybe I was being a little weird, but I had a point to prove.

I flapped my wings and surged up into the air. “I’m going to get my guys.” I shouted behind me as I flew away. I wanted to get them all safely back at the pack house so we could finally rest. We had two days before the shit was going to hit the fan and I for one needed to just sleep.

It only took me a few minutes to find them again, in the same spot where I had left them. I touched down lightly and went straight to Kyle’s side. He was sitting up with his back against a tree and thankfully wide awake. He looked tired, but he was alert and back with us. He reached up and cradled my cheek in his hand and I leant into his touch. We needed to get him somewhere he could rest. None of the other guys jumped up to find out

what I had seen and they let us have this moment. When I straightened up, I looked around them all and smiled.

“Come on, we can head over to the pack house. You need to see it. Shit is weird over there. It’s basically a training camp for an army.” I shook my head as I said the words. I knew that we had been gone for basically a couple of months, but the change was honestly unbelievable. “Oh, and apparently your Dad is chained up in the basement.” I added, I can’t believe I didn’t lead with the most important thing.

“What happened to not setting foot on the ground?” Sykes growled, I’m pretty sure it was a playful growl.

“I can honestly say that my feet did not, at any point, touch the ground.” I said solemnly, placing a hand over my heart.

Sykes scowled at me and growled, clearly not believing me. He and Liam helped Kyle up off the ground and Virion and Braedon crowded around me. I leaned into Braedon and he kissed the top of my head.

“You should keep the wings out more,” He whispered to me. “They’re doing all kinds of things for me.” He ran one of his fingers down the tip of my wing and it made a shudder run across my wing and straight down my spine.

“Come on,” Virion said laughing at the panting, drooling mess a single touch from Braedon had turned me into. “Let’s find somewhere we can all at least rest for a while.”

His head tilted to show that Kyle had set off walking towards the pack house. He was moving slowly, but he only had Liam helping him and Sykes

had taken up position at his side. It was almost like I could see his wolf vibrating inside him as he stood by protecting his Alpha. The three of them must be going through a lot now, returning to the pack house, a place that they had grown up in and considered home, only to be run off under the threat of death. I also couldn't help but think that all of that would never have happened if they hadn't met me. The changes that were being made were ones that needed to be made, but I knew how good my guys were and they would have made them on their own when the time was right.

We hadn't been moving for long before the sound of movement came ahead of us. Sykes moved in front of Kyle and Virion joined him. Both drew their swords ready to fight. I would have rolled me eyes if I hadn't been impressed by their protectiveness of each other. I had after all just told them that it was safe to head back. A moment later Trent and the rest of our new pack members burst through the trees.

Trent's eyes quickly ran over everyone, before settling on where Kyle was leaning against Liam. "Alpha," he stepped closer almost unsure of himself. "What can I do?" He asked genuinely. I liked Trent, he was a good fit for our weird little pack.

"I'm good." Kyle told him. "Just tired. We just need to rest."

Whilst his colour was starting to come back, he did look a bit like crap. Not that I was ever going to say that to his face. Also, because it was slightly my fault that he was feeling this way.

Trent just nodded then he and the newest members of our pack fell in around us and started to escort us back to the pack house.

When we broke through the tree line there was a crowd waiting for us.

“Holy fuck, you were right about there being some changes.” Sykes muttered.

There must have been hundreds of shifters here now. Wyatt pushed through the crowd and ran his eyes over the guys, clearly trying to find any sign of injury. Kyle pushed away from Liam and stood tall as all of the other shifters looked on at him. I understood his need to not come across as weak and I hadn't, until this moment, considered the potential danger of him being challenged while he was in this state. I started to look at the gathered crowd with suspicion. Maybe we should have camped out in the forest for the night. We had abandoned our packs at the Bifrost and had no supplies, but what if that would have been the safer option. My magic started to hum inside me as it registered the perceived threat to my mates and my wings which were still open behind me seemed to quiver in anticipation of a fight. I slowly pulled one of the daggers from the sheath at my thigh and Braedon, having caught my subtle movement, shifted his feet, readying himself to back me up.

*“I don't like this.”* I whispered out into their minds.

“Stand down, Aria,” Kyle ordered me. “They are just feeling us out. Nothing is going to happen.”

My magic roared inside me at his dismissal of the threat and I felt the flames bank in my eyes, I was holding it back from flaring down my wings for now. I almost felt like once it was set free, I would be fighting the bloodlust the same as I had earlier. We appeared to be in a silent stand off.

Suddenly the Elites pushed through the crowd. “Why are you all standing around? Training isn't over.” Nix roared. She slapped Liam on the shoulder and nodded in deference at Kyle. Then her, Echo and Aeryn pushed through the guys and all came to give me a hug.

It was like the tension in the air just snapped and the gathered crowd of shifters started to move away, back to whatever they were doing. I silently slipped the dagger back into its sheath and Nix cocked an eyebrow at me when she caught the movement.

“I’ve missed you.” She laughed. “You and your stabby attitude.”

“I only stab the people that need it.” I laugh with her and then sling an arm around her and Echo’s shoulders. “So, you seem to have picked up a few more fighters.” I said looking at Wyatt.

“You have no idea, we have a lot to catch up on.” Wyatt sighed.

He looked exhausted and something was off about him. If they had Marcus in chains, I needed to know what had happened about the situation with his mate. He didn’t look like a man who had been reunited with the other half of his soul. He actually looked like shit, but I didn’t want to point it out. I was totally growing as a person.

“It wasn’t a walk in the park for us either.” Kyle sighed. “We need to rest though. Can we get a few hours and then catch up at whatever time it is going to be in a few hours?”

I knew how he felt, it was hard to keep track of where we were, let alone what time it was. The mere mention of sleep though was like a subtle reminder to my body that we had been fighting off an army not even an hour ago and I had used up a lot of magic for the day.

“Of course.” Wyatt said striding forward. He placed a hand on his shoulder and bowed his head before quietly adding. “I’m so glad that you made it



back.”

We all started to head up to the house and I could feel my feet starting to drag.

“We’re not going to mention the fact that Aria is covered in blood then and you guys aren’t exactly squeaky clean.” Nix wondered out loud.

I looked down at myself and realised that she was right, I had a bit of a Carrie vibe going on and the guys had a fair amount of splatter on them as well.

“I think I’m just getting used to it and I forget sometimes.” I mutter.

“Babe, that’s really not a good thing.” She says squeezing me against her. It’s nice that she’s not shying away from me right now.

“It’s been a long few months. Lots of fighting.” I sighed. The weariness was really starting to set in and the front door of the pack house had never looked so good. It always had more of an ominous, enter at your own peril, kind of feel to it before.

“We had to rip out the carpets in your room, but I’ll explain it all later.” I heard Wyatt telling Kyle as he led us all to the stairs.

The chatter of the camp outside died away as we moved into the house and as soon as we made it to the foot of the stairs, Kyle sank against Liam again. Wyatt took a step back to let Sykes come under Kyle’s other arm, with a worried look on his face. As the guys started up the stairs I stopped by Wyatt.

“He’s just tired.” I told him.

Wyatt was watching Kyle struggle up the stairs with Liam and Sykes, Virion had their back and Trent and the others were leading them. He was closed in by his pack offering him safety.

“You look pretty beat yourself.” He said turning to me. “Please Aria, at least tell me that you did it? We really need some good news around here.” He told me quietly.

“Yeah, we did it.” I said placing one foot on the bottom step and then looking up the staircase which felt like a mountain at that moment. I pulled my wings back in and shuddered at the drain it felt like it had on my magic. It shouldn’t be that hard to just shift my wings. I’d used more magic in the fight than I had realised. This was going to be a problem in the battle that we had to come, if fighting at full power was going to drain me that quick.

Wyatt looked at with me concern. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re not looking too good.” He said reaching out for me.

I tried to lift my other foot to take a step up the stairs, but my knees just gave out even attempting to pretend that I wasn’t exhausted. Braedon thankfully had stayed by my side and caught me as I fell back into him. He swept me up into his arms and started up the stairs, Nix walking protectively at my side.

“You had barely recovered from shattering your wing and then you took on an entire army, you need more rest my love.” He murmured to me.

“I cannot wait for this story.” Nix said skipping up the steps ahead of us excitedly.

Wyatt just chuckled, shaking his head at her antics. “Show him where their suite is Nix and then let them rest. I’ll arrange for some food to be sent up to your rooms.”

Nix just rolled her eyes and sighed in exasperation. It was easy to forget that we were all basically just kids sometimes and it was nice to see that she hadn’t let this situation change her too much. We needed to hold on to who we were otherwise, when we finally made it out of this, it was going to be so much harder to pick up life where we had left off.

Braedon carried me up to our suite under the direction of Nix. We couldn’t have been that far behind the others but by the time we got there, they were all sprawled out across the sofas and chairs in the living room area.

“What’s wrong?” Liam said, leaping to his feet. I had no idea how he still had the energy to move that quick. Kyle was completely flat out asleep face down on one of the sofas. His arm was hanging off the edge and he was softly snoring.

“Just tired.” I yawned.

“She’s used too much of her magic.” Braedon muttered, narking on me to the others. “She didn’t sufficiently recover from shattering her wing before we leapt into the last fight.” It would seem that my newest mate was a bit annoyed with me.

Braedon gently placed my feet on the ground and whilst I really wanted to shove him just a tiny bit for what he had said, he was also kind of right and I was too tired to lift my arm and then push. It felt like it would be a massive achievement to just get through a shower at this stage. Instead I

patted him on the chest in a confusing almost grateful way. I suppose I was grateful though, he had just carried me up the stairs.

“I’m going to shower, then I’m going to sleep.” I mumbled. My mouth didn’t quite feel like it was up to working properly at the moment and I didn’t want to pass out until I was at least clean of the blood. “Wyatt is sending food up.” I said walking towards the bathroom.

The shower was scorching hot and thankfully quick. Once I got my clothes off, the blood situation wasn’t actually that bad and I only had to wash my hair once to get it all out. I towel dried it as much as I could and then put it in a side braid to try and limit the amount of water that would come out while I slept. Thankfully one of the guys had dropped off a tank and some sleep shorts while I was in the shower and I gratefully pulled them on.

Outside of the bathroom I found all of the guys silently eating. Trent and his guys were hanging out and they seemed to be reminiscing about something from when they were all kids. Virion passed me a plate with a sandwich on while Liam and Sykes both went into the bathroom to clean up.

“You need to eat something before you sleep.” He told me quietly, passing me a bottle of water as well.

I downed the bottle in one go, I couldn’t remember how long it had been since I’d had a drink but apparently it was too long. Once I started in on the sandwich I noticed that Trent was shuffling on his seat, casting looks across to me. Ellis was nudging him clearly trying to get him to do something.

“Just say it.” I sighed wearily with a mouth full of sandwich. “You’ve got about five minutes until I pass out.”

“Could we, erm, maybe sleep in here?” Trent asked awkwardly. “Not in the bedroom with you guys.” He rushed out quickly. “Just on the sofas.” He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. “It’s just been hard, being away from the pack so soon after we joined.” He said looking at the ground like he couldn’t face looking me in the eye in case I said no.

“Sure.” I said, shoving the last of my sandwich in my mouth.

“Really?” He said snapping his head up.

I shrugged. “Yeah, why not?” I didn’t really see what the big deal was. It’s not like they wanted to climb into bed with us. Once the doors were closed, they wouldn’t even be in the same room as us. Plus, it would kind of be nice knowing that they were out there while we were all asleep, almost like we had someone watching over us when we were vulnerable.

“The last time we were here we literally had to run for our lives. I’m seconds away from passing out. It would make me feel better if you were all out here looking out for us while we sleep.” I said with a yawn, struggling to my feet. I wasn’t kidding about the passing out part. I really needed to make it to the bed and I needed to do it now.

Trent mumbled a thanks, but I wasn’t paying too much attention. My focus was on the bedroom door and what lay beyond it, being the sweet oblivion of sleep. I heard the bathroom door open and Liam and Sykes came out and roused Kyle to take him to clean up. “The guys are going to sleep on the couches.” I said over my shoulder to no one in particular as I leant on the bedroom door with my shoulder and stumbled slightly when it opened quicker than I thought it would.

“I got you kitten.” I heard Liam rumble behind me as he caught me and swept me up into his arms. I snuggled in against his chest with a sigh of

relief.

Someone pulled the covers back on the bed and Liam gently tucked me in. “We’ll be with you soon.” He whispered to me as he pulled the covers over me. I heard him walking out of the bedroom and quietly pulling the door closed. It only took a few more seconds for my eyes to close and sleep to take me.

## Chapter Thirty Two

I woke up on fire, or at least that was how it felt. Craning my neck up, because I was basically pinned to the bed, I saw that we had all ended up in one big puppy pile last night to sleep. It was nice, but it was really fucking hot. Like sweaty hot, not let's roll around the sheets hot. Although, now I was thinking about it, I wouldn't say no to a quick, or better yet a very prolonged, roll around these sheets.

“Stop fidgeting.” I heard Kyle growl from some to my left.

“I need to pee and I'm pinned down.” I complained. I didn't really, but I was too fucking hot and I really wanted a shower.

Slowly bodies started to roll and lift away and I sprung up out of the bed as soon as I was free. When I burst through the bedroom door I all but fell over Harrison who was asleep on the ground in front of it.

“Gargh! Dude, what the fuck?!” I griped, rubbing my toe where I had just stubbed it on his bony ass shoulder.

I hopped over to the sofa and dropped down on the arm, barely missing Trent's head as he quickly sat up. Liam and Braedon both rushed into the room, having heard my shout and Liam went flying as he tripped over Harrison as well.

“I know right!” I said pointing down to Liam who was lying on the floor still sleepily trying to figure out what was going on.

“Man, you kicked me in the head.” Harrison complained sitting up from his position in front of the door.

“Why are you lying on the floor in front of the door?” Liam laughed.

Harrison looked a bit embarrassed and just shrugged. “You were all wiped out and we wanted to make sure that you were safe while you slept.” He mumbled not looking anyone in the eye.

I looked down at Trent who just grinned and shrugged at me.

“Thanks Harrison.” I smiled at him. You have to admit it was kind of nice of him to do that. “How long were we out anyway?” I asked no one in particular.

Trent looked at his watch. “Only about five hours. It’s just coming up to eight now.”

My stomach growled at the thought that it was basically time to eat again and Trent looked at me in alarm. I grimaced and the guys just burst out laughing.

“Oh, please! It’s not like you’re not all starving as well.” I huffed as I got up and headed towards the bathroom.

“She does have us there.” Kyle chuckled. “Can someone sort out some food for everyone and then I think we need to speak as a pack before we go and update everyone else. There are some things that we need to decide if we are keeping them to ourselves or if we are going to let them become public knowledge.”



Trent and Ellis jumped up and offered to sort out the food and I slunk into the bathroom to have another shower. I'd only had one a few hours before, but I felt all sweaty and gross and if I was honest, I was never going to take hot showers for granted ever again. By the time that I was done and came out of the bathroom, towel drying my hair, Trent and Ellis had returned with a couple of trollies of food and drinks. There were platters of roast meat with gravy, baked potatoes and roasted vegetables plus, and I nearly dropped to my knees as it was love at first sight, an enormous chocolate cake. Being a grown up I ate my dinner first, but my eyes barely left the cake the whole time. As soon as Kyle passed me a slice, laughing at how ridiculous I was, I curled up on the sofa hoarding the enormous slice that he had given me.

“Okay, I can't take it anymore, what happened and how did you have time for Aria to get a massive tattoo?” Trent said, pointing his finger at me almost like he was accusing me of something.

“It's not a tattoo.” I said raising my arm and looking at it. I kept forgetting that it was there. It did look pretty cool though. “Or maybe it is, I'm not entirely sure. It's the Gjallarhorn. It will summon the Valkyrie army when we need them.” I said with a smile. Then just because I wanted everyone to know how much of a badass I was, I added. “The magic melted it down into molten metal and then it flowed across my arm and branded itself into my skin.”

It had the desired effect, Trent's mouth dropped open in shock and the others just stared at my arm in alarm as if it was going to leap off me and do the same to them.

I was actually looking forward to seeing everyone again and there was a very, very weird part of me that was looking forward to fighting with all of them at my side. I could feel my magic rise to a simmer at the thought. I felt

it's heat in my eyes and I knew that the flames danced there. Trent gasped in shock for a second time.

“Yeah we've all had an upgrade.” Kyle murmured. “But first, this is Virion and Braedon, they are also Aria's mates. Virion is Fae and Braedon is a Demi-God.”

Trent and the others looked at the latest additions to my mates with their mouths hung open in shock not saying a word. This was starting to get funny.

“We won't have long before the others want to speak with us, so the whole story is going to have to wait until then, but we need to decide how much we are going to tell the others.” Kyle said frowning in thought.

“You're reluctant to tell them about your magic?” I asked him. I didn't see what the problem was. I thought it was a good thing.

“Yes, I don't want others to think that they can try and take you from us Aria to try and get the same for themselves.” Kyle said meeting my eye. He held so much vulnerability in his gaze that I almost felt bad for laughing. Thankfully he gave me a soft smile and I knew that I hadn't hurt his feeling.

“Try being the operative word. Have you met me?” I laughed and at that everyone laughed while I tried to decide if that was a good thing or not.

Trent shifted in his seat. “A lot has happened here while you were away as well. We found out who opened the portal at the academy. We had another attack here. Most of the pack were killed. Your father was basically arrested.”

Sykes cocked his head like he was listening to something and then turned to the group. “We don’t have time, Wyatt is on his way.” Damn shifter hearing. “Kyle, ultimately I’m happy to go with whatever you think. But I think that we need to show a strong front, especially when you take the challenge against your father in front of the other packs.”

There was a loud knock at the door. No doubt Wyatt would know that we were all awake because we had raided the kitchens and there would be no more hiding up in Kyle’s suite. It was time to go and find out who the fuck had opened the portals, and if for some reason they were still alive, I was looking forward to rectifying that. My magic flared again at the thought and I caught Trent and Ellis watching me in fascination.

“Okay, let’s do this.” Kyle said getting up and going to the door.

We all followed suit and then followed Wyatt down to the library of all places. There were quite a few people there that I didn’t recognise. As soon as we walked through the doors, one of the them was watching me with far too much interest and not in a good way. It made my magic want to flare at the challenge. My wings were itching to come out, but I held them back for now. I hopped up onto the monstrosity of a desk that Marcus had always favoured and sat on the top with my legs crossed. Everyone else seemed to be avoiding it, but it seemed like a good fuck you to Marcus to sit my ass down on it.

“Perhaps we should make some introductions.” Wyatt suggested. There was definitely some tension in the air. “Kyle, Liam and Sykes you may already know.” Wyatt said pointing out the first of my mates.

“This is Virion of the Fae and Braedon of Asgard.” Kyle said introducing the last of my mates. I was glad that he had not outed Braedon as a Demi-God. My father was one thing that I didn’t want to touch upon for now. It

seemed to personal. When I whispered that out into the guys mind's they all agreed.

Wyatt turned to me with a grin. "And this is Aria." He said. I gave one of those awkward waves that you do when you don't really know anyone enough to know what to say.

Wyatt turned back to the other side of the room. "On this side we have the other Alphas. Trace, Alpha of the Felidae Pack which governs over the cat shifters. Sawyer, Alpha of the Fox Shifters. Hunter, Alpha of the Bear Shifters. Parella, Alpha of the Eagle Shifters. Rebekah, Alpha of the Coyote Shifters. And finally Grant, Alpha over the prey animal shifters."

"And what exactly are you?" Trace asked, standing from his seat and pacing across the room towards me. He was the one who had been watching me earlier and I could already tell that he was going to be a problem.

I saw my mates start to shift to stand between us. "*Don't*" I whispered into their minds and they all stayed in their original position.

I leapt off the table finally letting my wings free and the change flicker across me. Letting my magic simmer higher, the flames flickered across my wings and shimmered in my eyes as I took two steps towards the Alphas.

"I am the Phoenix General of the Valkyrie army." I said proudly.

Caleb and Dom who had been sitting quietly in the corner, smiled wide at the display of my magic. There was a part of me that wished there was a mirror in here somewhere. I hoped I looked as awesome as I felt. Trace just squinted at me in annoyance and I gave him my best 'fuck you' smirk in return.

“You really did it.” Wyatt sighed in relief.

We spent the next hour going over what had happened on our journey and then Wyatt and Caleb filled us in on what had happened back with the pack. We skirted over a lot of what had happened in Asgard, because there were details that we didn’t want to reveal or rather details I didn’t want to reveal that were personal to me, such as my mother and father. They hadn’t mentioned the guys magic yet either.

“Wow, Sex Shop Barbie I get, but Professor Octavia? She was so nice to me when I got here.” I said in surprise.

“It seems like they are working for a goddess.” Dom interrupted. “She spoke of the witches worshipping someone and that they had been made a promise for balance to be restored. She wasn’t making much sense towards the end.”

I frowned in confusion. “No, the gates of Asgard are closed, they can’t be working with a goddess.” It was the word balance though that had me thinking. They were right that there was something wrong with the realms and that seemed to be having an effect on magic everywhere.

“There is one outside.” Braedon reminded me. It was hard to forget, but it just seemed so obvious.

“If Hel is responsible for this, why would she need the help of the witches to open the portals? She would be able to do that herself surely.” I reasoned.

Braedon shrugged. “Heimdallr would be the better person to ask.” He supplied. Except we didn’t have access to him anymore.

“We have another pressing issue before we can move any further forward.” Rebekah stated, watching Kyle in a way that I did not fucking like at all. “The challenge must be issued or Marcus must be set free.”

Kyle turned and started to stride out of the room, Liam and Sykes fell in behind him. “Bring him out to the training ring.” He called over his shoulder to no one in particular.

“*We’re doing this now?*” I whispered out into their minds.

“*No time like the present.*” Sykes answered, inappropriately cheerfully.

“*She is right that it needs to be done. Might as well get it over with.*” Kyle added. I could feel his unease through the bond so I directed my next question to Kyle directly.

“*Are you going to be okay doing this? I will gladly kill him myself if this is going to be too difficult for you.*” I offered with perhaps the worst of intentions. Best of intentions? It’s hard to say really.

“*Aria, he hasn’t been my father for a long time. The things that he has done are unforgiveable. I probably should feel something more than I do about this, but I genuinely don’t. I hope you aren’t disappointed with me for that.*” Kyle whispered into my mind.

We had reached the training ring which was already packed with shifters stood around waiting. It seems like word had already got out or maybe they had just been expecting it. Kyle stalked onto the sand and walked to the opposite end so that Marcus would be brought in front of him. We all stood behind him in support. I couldn’t take my eyes off Kyle as he stood proud

and tall on the sand, waiting for his pathetic excuse of a father to be brought out.

*“I could never be disappointed with you. I’m proud of you for doing what is right and if after this you feel more than you expected to, I’ll be here for you.”* I told him. He didn’t answer me. I could feel his resolve wrapping around him through our bond.

When Marcus was brought out it was Trace and Rebekah who had hold of him and walked him over to the sand. They were surprisingly gentle with him and I was worried about which side they actually stood on. They unclasped the chains from around his wrists and left the sand, leaving Marcus to face his son alone.

“You finally decided to show your face then, worthless pup.” Marcus sneered.

“I challenge you for the position of Alpha.” Kyle called out, not even bothering to respond to his taunts.

Wyatt stepped onto the side of the ring. “A challenge has been called and will be met. Does the defending Alpha wish to put any restrictions on the challenge?” He asked loudly so that everyone could hear.

“No.” Marcus responded.

“Does the challenger wish to put any restrictions on the challenge?” Wyatt asked.

“No. Natural magic and human forms will all be permitted.” Kyle confirmed.

Wyatt nodded. "Once the challenge for Alpha has been met, any challenges for Prime will be heard." Wyatt confirmed.

"*What does that mean?*" I whispered to Liam who was stood next to me.

*"Marcus holds the position of Alpha over the Canidae Pack, but he is also the Prime Alpha, reigning Alpha over the others. If Kyle wins against Marcus the other Alphas could challenge him for the position of Prime if they want it, but Kyle would still be the Pack Alpha if he lost."* Liam clarified.

Now I understood why he hadn't said anything about his magic before. There would be no one to be able to tell Marcus so that he could place limits his own challenge, but he also needed to keep it from everyone else in the room in case they were to make a challenge themselves. He needed to make an example with Marcus and show his full force to prevent any further challenges. I didn't want him to have to go back to back with challenges until he eventually lost.

Wyatt stepped back off the sand and with a stern face shouted, "Begin!"

Marcus started to change and Kyle followed suit, the change taking over him much quicker than Marcus. Kyle paced the ground his top lip raised and growling while he waited for Marcus to finish shifting. Murmurs ran through the crowd, as people began to question why he wasn't just attacking Marcus while he was weak. I knew why. It was because Kyle was better than that. His jet black wolf was huge. Marcus in comparison was a dark grey and smaller than Kyle, which I found surprising. I had always thought that the reason why Kyle's wolf was so big was because he was an Alpha but apparently not. Marcus took a step forward, snarling and snapping at his son. Kyle didn't flinch, he faced his father, raised one front



paw in the air and when he slammed it down, the ground around them shook.

The crowd immediately started murmuring and all of the attending Alpha's straightened as they started to pay more attention. Marcus looked unsure for a moment, but then he started to circle the sand. Kyle mirrored his moves calmly circling with him. Marcus looked almost feral in the way that he was snapping and snarling. Kyle was clearly showing that he didn't see him as a threat, but a deep growl rumbled around him. The ground quivered in response to his rage and the sand in the training ring started to move. It almost looked like water as it flowed in waves from Kyle, gaining in height as it reached Marcus before it crashed against him, raking against his skin. There could be no argument that the magic was Kyle's and the crowd seemed confused, until I heard a familiar voice say, "He is the return of Shifter Magic." I looked up and saw Francesca moving around the crowd in her usual gleeful way.

The crowd had never been on Marcus' side, but as soon as they started to whisper about his son being the beginning of a new era, he lost it. He surged towards Kyle teeth bared. Kyle met him head on snapping his jaws at Marcus. Being the larger wolf, Kyle easily knocked Marcus out of his way. Marcus spun as he hit the ground, snapping his jaws and coming up from the ground, he surged towards Kyle's throat.

My heart felt like it was in my mouth. I didn't realise how hard it would be to stand by and just watch. I wanted to rip Marcus to shreds. Not just because he was a threat to my mate, I just fucking hated him and everything he stood for. I wanted to shove my magic down his throat and watch him burn from the inside, which was a gruesome thought even for me. The blood lust might be reacting to the challenge going on in front of me.

Kyle dodged Marcus' jaws as he surged up from the ground and he raked his claws down one of his sides, blood splattered across the sand and Marcus yelped as he tried to dodge out of the way. Kyle circled around to the other side and repeated the action. Marcus was spinning on the spot trying to get Kyle in front of him, but Kyle was constantly moving and drawing blood from Marcus where ever he went. There were a few opportunities when he could have gone in for the kill but Kyle chose to dodge around and inflict more pain on his father instead. I knew that there had been a lot from Kyle's childhood that he hadn't told me yet and it was clear that this was more than just a challenge. Kyle was getting his pound of flesh at the same time. I just hoped that he wasn't going to get too cocky.

Almost like he heard the thought come from my mind, Kyle surged forward one last time and collided his shoulder into Marcus' side, making him fall to the sand. Marcus was bloody and tired and he struggled to get back up to his feet. I suppose in some fights you would give him the opportunity to surrender at this point. It was clear that Marcus had little to nothing left in him. Kyle had been right when he said that Marcus was out of practice and untrained. Even without magic, he hadn't stood a chance.

As Marcus flailed on the ground, Kyle leapt forward and closed his jaws around his father's throat. There wasn't any noise from the crowd and the pop and rip of Kyle ripping out his father's throat echoed around the training ring. Marcus flailed down on the sand, blood splattered out of his throat and his muzzle opened and closed, almost like the bastard was too stubborn to die. But even his stubbornness wouldn't be able to save him from this and his eyes grew vacant as the bastard finally died.

Kyle shifted back into his human form. His father's blood still stained his chin and he wiped it off with the back of his arm before spitting whatever was left in his mouth on the ground.

Everyone was quiet. No one said a word. I suppose seeing a wolf finally displaying magic, which had been lost to them for generations, was probably a bit of a shock. Even Wyatt seemed surprised. Taking matters into my own hands, and hoping that I was about to commit some kind of social faux pas that sparked a civil war, I strode out onto the sand, took Kyle's hand and lifted it into the air. A shockwave of cheers rippled through the crowd.

Turning him towards the collection of Alpha's I shouted. "Does anyone dispute that he is your Prime Alpha? Do any of you wish to make a challenge?" I shouted with confidence, I was his fierce mate and I was standing by his side. Inside "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit" chanted on repeat in my mind.

Trace walked out onto the sand and the crowd immediately fell into a hush. He stared at Kyle before speaking. "I had intended to make the challenge. I did not think that you were strong enough to stand for us all. But you represent the old magic. Perhaps fate will grant us all the same by recognising the true Prime Alpha in you." He dropped down to one knee in front of Kyle. "I will follow you and recognise you as my Prime."

The other Alphas walked out onto the sand and dropped down to one knee in front of Kyle as well. There was a ripple through the crowd as they all knelt.

*"Holy shit, is this what you felt when we got to Valhalla?"* Kyle whispered into my mind. Trust him to see the humour in the situation. *"Hopefully this is going to go down well."* He added.

Before I could ask what he meant, Kyle took a deep breath and addressed the crowd. "I stand before you declared your Prime Alpha and my first act as such ... is to abolish this position." There were confused gasps through the crowd and the Alphas before us looked between themselves in

confusion. Kyle forged on. “We are one race, but we are made up of many different kinds of people. The position of Prime Alpha has been abused and it is too easily used to create discord and unfairness amongst our people. I am no better than any of you, just because I am a wolf. I am no better than any of you, just because I am a man. As my first and final act as Prime Alpha, I will be creating the Alpha Council and I would invite the other pack Alpha’s before me to stand with me. To bring the problems and needs of their people to be addressed and determined fairly. We face a battle for our very existence in one day time. If we succeed, we need to make changes. Our very survival could be dependent on it.”

There was silence as everyone absorbed his words. There was even a moment when I thought that it was all about to go horribly wrong. My hand even dropped down to the knives sheathed at my thigh. I saw Trace eye the movement with a flicker of a smile, before he stood up and held out his hand to Kyle.

“I will accept your offer.” He told Kyle, shaking his hand.

All of the Alpha’s stood and did the same. The air was thick with tension, the other shifters’ excitement building along with the whispers between them.

“Tonight we celebrate!” Kyle roared. “Tomorrow we prepare for war!”

Everyone cheered and started to drift off in their own groups, excitedly talking amongst themselves. I saw the Elites gathered at the edge of the ring, dressed in their fighting leather and I smiled. My girls, this was something which I knew many of them had dreamed about when we first started training. Equality for women. Now two female Alphas would be sitting on the Alpha Council. It was a massive step forward.

Then my eyes fell on Margie. I dropped Kyle's hand and walked over to her. She cradled my cheek with one hand, tears in her eyes. "I knew you would bring about the change that we needed." She told me. "I just wish that my Britt would have been here to see it."

I reached inside my pocket and pulled out the now slightly crumpled note that Britt had given me and passed it to her. "She asked me to give this to you." I told her. I could see the confusion in her eyes. "She lives in Valhalla now. She will be here when I call the army on the Blood Moon, but I don't think she will be able to stay for long."

Tears fell from Margie's eyes as she clutched the note to her chest. I knew that it was a note saying goodbye. A note telling her all the things that we all wished we had the opportunity to tell someone when they were lost to us. I was glad that I had been able to bring it for her. It didn't alleviate the guilt that I still felt for Britt's death, but at least I was able to do this one small thing.

Margie held me tightly and then she left with some of the other women to start making preparations for tonight.

## Chapter Thirty Three

There was a massive bonfire lit up in one of the training rings that was outside of the pack house. Several smaller fires were also lit which were roasting entire animals on them, apparently it took a lot to feed this army. Everyone was dancing and laughing and generally just celebrating. There was something about it all that just wasn't sitting right with me though.

Kyle, Sykes and Liam had wandered off to go and speak with the other Alphas about their plans to form the Council. Virion, Braedon and I had left them to it, because it was basically boring.

Everyone around us was celebrating, but I was finding it hard to get into the spirit of things. We only had tomorrow to get ready for the fight and then the day after it would be upon us. I suppose this was their last chance to let their hair down and enjoy living. Some of us weren't going to make it back from this.

I found my wonderful Elites surrounded by a crowd of shifters. As I walked closer to where they were sitting next to the bonfire, I could see that they were having fun, laughing and joking with the shifters who were sitting with them. They had come so far since the academy and I was so proud of the way that they had jumped into training the others while I had been away. I hesitated for a moment about joining them. I was feeling a bit like a party pooper at the moment and probably wasn't going to be good company, but Echo made sure that I wouldn't be able to get away.

“Aria!” She shouted across to me. “Come join us.”

All of the Elites cheered and raised their glasses to me. Clearly whatever was inside them was affecting them. I couldn't help the smile on my face as I walked over and sat down with the girls. Braedon sat down behind me so that I could lean back against him and Virion dropped down at my side.

The group of shifters fell quiet when we joined them. I knew that this was going to be awkward. I didn't know these people and the first introduction that they had to me was when I swooped down into the training ring, covered in blood. In retrospect that perhaps hadn't been my best idea. I genuinely did keep forgetting when I was covered in blood, I'm not sure what that really said about my life at the moment.

"I can't believe how long it has been since we saw you last." Nix sighed sagging against the man sat next to her. He got a dopey grin on his face and wrapped his arm around her shoulder in response. "You've had such a mad adventure!" She giggled and then hiccupped.

"That's one way to think of it." I couldn't help but laugh at the state of her. She couldn't have been drinking for that long, but she was definitely toeing the wasted line.

"And you got an enormous tattoo!" She laughed throwing her hands up in the air causing whatever was in her glass to slosh all over everyone sat around her.

"I think we might need to cut you off." The man sat next to her laughed, pulling the glass out of her hand. "At least wait until you've eaten something."

"So, are you going to be training with us tomorrow?" Echo asked with a glint in her eye.

“I don’t know, from what I saw, you seem to have that pretty much covered yourself.” I said smiling at her. I hoped that she could see just how proud I was of her, of all of them.

“Oh my god, you should have seen this lot when they turned up.” She laughed poking fun at the guys sat around her.

“We weren’t that bad.” One of the others laughed.

“Dude, I don’t think any of you had even held a sword before.”

“Don’t let her start on you. Has she told you about how they all ended up training with me?” All of the guys were laughing now.

“That was all Britt’s idea!” Aeryn laughed, but then they all looked sad and deflated. I knew they missed her just as much as I did. “How is she?” She asked quietly.

“She’s Britt!” I laughed. “She’s fine. She’s loving it over there. She’s like a little mini celebrity because she was the first to be reaped to Valhalla for so long.” I smiled just thinking about her.

“I can imagine, nothing could ever keep that girl down for long.” Echo smiled sadly.

We all gazed off into the flames of the bonfire for a while, thinking about the friend that we had lost. I knew that she wasn’t completely gone, but she belonged her with us and it was hard to think of her living her life somewhere else without us. There never would have been a team of Elites if it hadn’t been for Britt and her inability to take no for an answer. Still, there



was something weirdly comforting to know that she would be running into battle at my side when the time came.

“If anyone could find a way out of being dead, it was definitely Britt.” Mae laughed.

We all fell into easy conversation reminiscing about our days training at the academy and the girls filled me in on the shifter’s attempts at learning how to fight with swords. Funny stories were swapped and even Virion told us some of his own training stories. Braedon held me and laughed with everyone but didn’t speak much. Those times for him hadn’t been like it was for the rest of us, but I could feel him through the bond and he wasn’t sad listening to all of us talk. If anything, I could feel how happy he was being here with us all.

Kyle came and pulled us away later into the night, when he appeared with a massive platter of food. If there was something that was going to grab my attention, it was definitely going to be food. The roast venison was amazing. It wasn’t something I ever had back in the human realm. It seemed like something that only rich people had, but it was the complete opposite over here. It did make me miss the little campfires we had when we were trying to find Valhalla and our nights of roasting rabbits over the fire. Virion and Braedon had never got to do that with us.

“We need to start making a list.” I told my mates suddenly.

Sykes frowned. “Let’s just have a night where we forget about all the problems waiting for us.” He suggested.

“No, not that list.” I said, shaking my head. “I want to make a list of all the things that we want to do together.” I picked up a piece of venison and studied it. “I want us all to go out camping and have roast rabbit over the

campfire again. When we can all be there together.” I smiled, thinking about how nice it would be for all of us to just be alone without something chasing us for a change.

“There’s a waterfall in Galvinae that is amazing to swim under in the summer.” Virion said with a smile.

“I’ve always wanted to go on a rollercoaster in the human realm.” Sykes added.

“Braedon and Virion need to try pizza!” I laughed.

We all settled in making suggestions about what we wanted to do and places that we wanted to go. It was nice to sit back and dream for a bit. I didn’t let myself think about the uncertainty of that future for us. We deserved to have that future together and I was going to do everything in my power to make sure that it happened.

## Chapter Thirty Four

I jogged down the front steps of the pack house at 5:30am the next morning and laughed at the sight before me. Even though it was around midnight before most of us had started to turn in, all of my Elites were standing at the bottom of the steps, warming up, ready to go on a run.

All five of them grinned up at me from the bottom of the steps.

“You didn’t think that we would let you go without us, did you?” Harmony smiled.

A felt my eyes tear up a bit and I cleared my throat and looked up at the sky to stop them from falling. Footsteps behind me, had me spinning around and I saw all my mates file out the door followed by Trent and the other guys from our pack.

“Did you guys plan this?” I asked turning around.

“No,” Aeryn laughed. “We actually kept up with the runs while you were all gone. We had a bet on about whether you would show this morning.”

I didn’t know whether to laugh or be vaguely upset that someone must have bet against me. In the end, I just shrugged and started to stretch to warm up. I listened to the shit talking going on between my guys and the others about who was going to be able to keep up and everything in between. It had been so long since I had been able to train alone and before, that had been what I had preferred, but I could see now how group training could call to people.

I enjoyed being around these people. I felt like after all this time I had maybe found my place in the world. Having said that, I still pulled out the ipod and earbuds that Kyle had found for me and set off on my own with the music playing loudly. It was a bit anti-social, but I still needed the space.

I set off through the training camp, I had a route in mind, but I had no idea how far it would be. I figured that I could do three of four laps and then I was going to stretch out and go for a fly as well. I needed to make sure that I was working my wing muscles too.

As we ran through the training camp, I noticed a few of the shifters fall into the running pack behind me. It seemed like the Elites really had got them whipped up into a proper training programme. Not everyone joined us, but I figured most people were probably still sleeping off last night.

Once I ran through the camp, I entered the forest. This was new to me. I usually ran on treadmills or tracks and I wasn't one for off road running through terrain like this. But, that was just because I grew up in a different world to this. There weren't any running tracks around here. I looped wide through the forest and came back to where I knew the little cottage Frannie and Madame Nines lived in was. I skirted the back of their property, before looping wide again through the forest and then ending back at the pack house. All in all, I think we had run a good five kilometres on the route. It helped having the two landmarks to measure it out from.

I caught a few of the shifters dropping down to the ground when we got back to the pack house and during a well timed break between songs caught the groans of a few of them when they realised that I was going for another lap.

Kyle and Virion ran up to my sides as I started out on the second lap and I pulled the earbuds out of my ears. Kyle gave me a big grin. He was panting

very slightly but other than that he seemed to be enjoying the freedom of running as well. Virion didn't even look tired yet and I was impressed. But it also kicked into gear my competitiveness and I picked up the pace a bit.

We pulled ahead of the pack a bit, but they all put a burst of energy on as we were on the straight back towards the pack house for a second time. As we pulled into camp again I couldn't help the little evil snicker as I picked up the pace again and went in for the third lap. We lost even more of the running pack this time as they dropped to the ground. I sneaked a glance over my shoulder, just as we were pulling out of the training camp and saw that the Elite girls, my guys, Trent and the others were still hanging on in there with about ten other shifters. I gave them a smile, Echo burst out laughing because she knew what was coming, then turned around and picked up the pace even more.

I could hear everyone around me panting heavily this time as we came up to the last stretch and I knew that it would be cruel to just run straight through and make them go for another. I was impressed with the handful of shifters that had made it round the three laps with us. I didn't expect anything less from my Elites. I was proud of them for making sure that they kept up with their training while I was gone.

As we pulled back into the training camp this time. I came to a stop next to one of the training rings where most of the running pack who had already dropped out were now lounging stretching and drinking water. The others dropped to the ground with a groan and gratefully accepted the water bottles from the others while I skipped from foot to foot keeping my heartrate up.

“Be gone with you woman and stop showing us up!” Echo laughed as she started stretching her legs out while she sat on the ground.

Virion and Braedon looked confused before I cackled my evil laugh and then took off at a sprint out of the training camp. I was alone for this lap. I always ended up doing the last lap alone, but I preferred it that way because it meant that I could put on more of a sprint.

When I came back into the camp after my fourth lap, racking up a nice twenty kilometres, I was surprised to see that everyone was still lounging around the training ring. I hadn't expected them to have started training or anything, I was just surprised that they had all waited for me.

As I came to a stop, Sykes tossed me a water bottle and I gratefully chugged it down. While I had been gone, somewhere had pulled a couple of tables over and they had obviously had breakfast picnic style while waiting for me. There was still a tonne of food left over and Liam told me to stretch out while he grabbed me a plateful of food.

I dropped down onto the sand where my mates were gathered and Liam handed me some breakfast. It was just coming up to 7:30am and it seemed like most of the camp was only just starting to get up.

"I can't believe that you went at that speed for a fourth lap." Virion laughed. "You were totally holding back for the first three, weren't you?"

"She always does." Mae said dropping down to the ground with us. "When we were back at the academy, even on our very first run together, she held back to run with us and then would sprint off once we dropped so that she could run at her usual pace. Once you get used to it, it's not quite as soul crushing."

Everyone laughed, even the shifters who seemed to be looked at me with a bit more interest than they had last night. I think that a lot of them were

either wary of me because I had shown up covered in blood. Or, they just didn't see what all the fuss was about.

“What sort of training routine do you have set up for today?” I asked Mae.

“We start hand to hand at 9:00am for a couple of hours to warm them up. Then we move on to weapons training until lunch. Because we have so many here now, we've had to break them down into groups to get everyone out onto the sand. We tend to break for lunch for an hour and then we run the next group through the same routine, then the first group comes back for a second round of weapons training and then we do one final session with the second group.”

I looked at Mae as she described the routine and I could see that she was tired. This sort of training was a lot for them. I was surprised that the Alphas and the other packs had laid such a heavy burden on their shoulders, but then I suppose there wasn't really anyone else to go through weapons training with them. Shifters didn't fight with weapons and no one else would have the experience.

“You should knock the afternoon sessions off the schedule for today. I can't have my Elites burning out before tomorrow.” I told her playfully even though I was deadly serious. I wouldn't see my girls hurt for the sake of everyone else getting a few more hours training under their belts. If they didn't have it by now, they still wouldn't have it by tomorrow.

Mae nodded seriously and then she called Echo and Harmony over to let them know what the know plan was.

“Or you know, you can just do whatever you want. It's not like I'm in charge or anything.” I suddenly added feeling a bit awkward.

Echo just laughed at that comment and threw an empty water bottle at me and went back to discussing training plans with the other Elites. I had forgotten how easy it was to just be with them.

I turned to find Kyle watching me carefully. “It won’t be much longer until we’re past this.” He said, almost like he knew what I was thinking.

I sighed. Right now, it felt like an age away. It was like we had this impossible mountain to climb if we wanted to get to the life that we wanted, which was standing on the other side. Unfortunately, it was a mountain which tried to kill us at every given opportunity.

“So, it all kicks off at midday tomorrow.” I clarified and Kyle just nodded soberly at me. “Have you spoken through any tactics with the other Alphas yet?” I asked him, figuring that the Alphas would be the take charge kind of group.

Kyle nodded. “I filled them in on what you and Geta had planned out. They were of course of board with it. I’m not sure how on board I am with it though.” He said looking me square in the eye. I could see how much he was struggling with it. They all had to varying degrees.

“What’s the plan?” I heard Echo ask. When I turned to find that all of the Elites had stopped to listen, I saw that she was frowning in concern. They weren’t going to like this either.

“Simply put, I will call the Valkyrie army and form the front ranks with them. We will take the first charge. Once we punch through their lines, Kyle and the other Alphas will lead the shifter army as the second wave to take out anything that survived the first charge and prevent them from closing ranks at our rear.” I explained.



Echo's frown deepened as she thought through what I had said. "Where are we going to be?" She asked.

I knew where this was going and we couldn't do it here. I stood up from the sand and dusted off the remnants that were clinging to my ass. "Come walk with me." I told her, waving all of the Elites to come with me.

They all got up off the ground and followed me silently as we headed out of the training camp and into the trees. We walked for a few minutes as I didn't want the rest of the shifters to be able to hear what I was going to say.

"I think we've gone far enough away from everyone for you to be able to break up with us quietly." Echo said sullenly.

I turned around and saw that they had all stopped behind me. They all had the same look of loss and pain on their faces and I sighed because she was right, it weirdly did feel like I was about to break up with them.

"I need you to take position at the front of the shifter army and head the second wave." I told them getting straight to the point.

I could see from Echo's face that she was angry. Mae, and Harmony looked like they were going to cry and Aeryn and Nix just looked shocked.

"You've done an amazing job of training them, but you've fought the demons more than once and you know what it's like. Most of them aren't at a point in their training where they are going to survive this. The only way we can see any number of them coming out of this alive is by putting more skilled fighters at the front of their ranks. Kyle is going to work with the Alphas to push those most at risk toward the back." I told them honesty.

We were in a situation where the shifters could go the same way that the Fae had. If tomorrow went as badly as we were all praying that it wouldn't, we could see their species edging towards the brink of extinction. The wolves were already in serious trouble from the last attack of the pack house.

I could see that most of them were in agreement with me but Echo still looked pissed. "You're going to be at the front of the ranks, with my mates." I told her my voice catching a bit. "I need you to ..." I couldn't even finish the sentence.

Echo strode towards me, her frown dropping away in sympathy as she pulled me in for a hug. When she pulled away from me she told me. "Am I pissed that I'm not going to be by your side? Absolutely. But I get it and I can do this for you. Also, you know, maybe I'm a little bit relieved that I'm not going to be running in first." She smiled at me and I knew that she was lying, but I was grateful that she was.

"This goes no further than us." I told them and they all nodded and agreed.

The shifters would be pissed if they found out that we were trying to set up as much protection for them as we could. I was hoping that my mates however would understand if they found out that I had asked the Elites to watch their back.

We started to head back to the training sand and I was actually surprised to see that they were all filled with shifters who were taking the opportunity to stretch out and warm up. Nix must have seen the surprise on my face because she laughed.

"When they first got here, they basically refused to do any training with us, until Echo kicked someone's ass." Nix snickered. I had actually heard this

story and it made me feel like a proud momma. “Since then they’ve got more and more into it, until they basically turn up early and then hound us for pointers every second of the day. It was flattering at first, but now it’s just exhausting.” She joked.

“Do you want to join us?” Harmony asked, pointing over to the sand.

“Do you want to do something this afternoon like old times? I want to stretch out my wings this morning.” I told them, almost like it was listening in on me, my magic did a lazy stretch through me and my wings exploded from my back, the change to my Valkyrie surging across my body.

“Show off.” Echo laughed.

I smiled at them all and then strode over to my mates to let them know where I was going. Kyle was heading back inside to go over the battle plans and maps one more time with the Alphas. Sykes was being dragged along with him, but the others were thinking about checking out some training sessions. We arranged to meet up for lunch and I took to the air, relieved to actually be back flying again.

The air in this realm feels different to Valhalla and Asgard, but I can’t figure out why. It’s one of the things that kept my mind the most occupied while I was flying. That’s how I ended up half way to the old academy before I realised where I was heading. I could see the burnt-out building sitting out on the horizon. It was covered in shadows and the clouds seemed to hide the sun from it. It looked exactly like it should. A burnt-out place, hidden away from the world. Almost like it was warning the world away from it so that they wouldn’t have to remember the horrors that had taken place there.

I turned back around and headed back to the pack house. I didn’t have time to fly all the way to the academy and then back again, before I was due to

meet up with the guys. I didn't have it in me emotionally to be able to process that place today anyway. I would go back though. One day. When all of this was over. I'm not sure why, but I almost felt like I owed it to the people who had died there.

When I landed back at the pack house, I'd managed to think myself into a bad mood. I sneaked back into the house, before anyone could intercept me and quickly showered and changed before throwing myself on the bed and deciding to wallow in my depressing ass thoughts for a while.

At least tomorrow, one way or another, it will all be over. I can't even bring myself to think of the possibilities because there are too many that end with me wanting to tear my heart out.

Unfortunately for Sykes, that's how he found me. Laying across the bed, with one arm thrown across my eyes, feeling sorry for myself.

"I thought I smelt you up here." Is the thing that he seems to think is the best to lead with.

"That's just all kinds of wrong." I mutter back at him.

Sykes just laughs and jumps on the bed, making me bounce on the spot. "What's got you all grumpy? I thought you went out to fly? You usually love flying."

"I nearly ended up at the academy before I realised where I was going and then I made myself grumpy thinking about everything." I told him honestly.

Sykes pulled me against him for a hug and snuggled his face into my neck. It was hard to feel bad when he was here with me. My fun, light hearted

mate. I found myself rolling onto my side, throwing one leg over his hip and snuggling closer to him. He sighed happily, wrapping me in his arms and holding me close.

We must have laid like that for about ten minutes before he suggested. “You want to sack it all off and hide up here and watch movies all day?”

I couldn’t help but smile at him. “We can’t, we’re supposed to be eating lunch with all of the grumpy Alphas and then joining the Elites for training this afternoon.” I groaned. I didn’t want to do either of those things now. I had actually been looking forward to the training session, but now I’d managed to put myself in a bad mood.

“How about we watch a movie and have lunch up here, because no one wants to really have lunch with the grumpy Alphas. Then we can catch the Elites late afternoon for a short training session, because I know once you feel better, you’re going to wish that you had done it.” He suggested.

I snuggled deeper into him. “How did I get so lucky to have a mate like you?” I sighed in exaggeration, even though I did actually mean it.

“Well, I’m just about to make even more of your dreams come true, because with our handy little mental link, I got Liam to sort us all out burgers, fries and milkshakes and all of your other mates are in the process of sneaking away to join us.” I laughed at that. He really did know the quickest way to my heart was with a burger and a milkshake.

We quickly moved the furniture around in the sitting room and threw all the cushions and blankets on the floor before the others made it up to join us. Sykes was just queuing up the movie on the tv when Liam arrived with not just a burger but an entire platter of them, together with an enormous platter of fries and milkshakes of just about every flavour he could manage.

## Chapter Thirty Five

When it came time to go down for the last training session, I really did not want to go. Usually, this was my jam, but I found that being curled up in this room, hiding from the world with my mates, was turning out to be far more fun.

I had gorged myself on burgers. I'm not going to lie. I had three. And I'm not even fucking sorry about it. Virion and Braedon had both never had the pleasure of a cheese burger or a milkshake and I felt like we had just rocked both of their worlds. We had added getting burgers from this amazing place that I knew in the human realm to our happy to do list.

The Elites had cancelled all of the training sessions for this afternoon, agreeing with my suggestion that everyone should just rest. My guys and I, however had decided to get one last round in. We weren't going to spar, we were just going to go through some of the combination movements. I felt like I needed to move about and do something with my body. There was no way that I was going to sleep tonight unless I wore my body out more.

It was because I already knew that the training sessions were cancelled that I was so confused when he walked down the front of the pack house. The training sand was absolutely packed. The Elite girls were all hanging out at one side, talking quietly between each other. Trent and his guys were there as well. The Alphas appeared to be haughtily lording it over everyone over by the opposite end of the training sand. I wasn't too sure how I felt about them just yet. There's even a collection of about thirty shifters milling about on the sand.

I feel like I just walked in on the world's worst surprise party because I'm pretty sure there's not any cake here. Plus, everyone seems to be ignoring each other and looking at me with finely veiled contempt. When did I become the object of everyone's annoyance?

"What's going on?" I ask as I approach the group of Elites.

"Well," Mae starts looking around awkwardly. "Everyone seems a bit annoyed that there isn't going to be any training."

I turned around and survey the moody bastards behind me. The buzz from my cheese burger heaven has just been totally demolished. This is like getting thrown back into school, for a second fucking time! Best go and appease the children I suppose.

"You can have a training session if you want." I announced loud enough for everyone to hear. "I'm not your mother, I'm not going to forbid. I just thought that you all might want to rest before tomorrow." Okay maybe that bit was bit pissy but honestly, they're all supposed to be adults.

One of the shifters opens his mouth like he's about to argue with me, then he closes it and just frowns. Yeah bitch, make your own decisions, is what I want to say, but don't. It's almost like I'm nearly an adult. Or maybe that's a bit of a stretch, let's just go with, I'm growing as a person.

Trace, the Alpha for the cat shifters strides across the ring towards us. "I think that they were hoping to have a session with the infamous Valkyrie which we have heard so much about." He sneered, looking down at me like I was beneath him.

I cocked my head to the side. He was clearly challenging me. Now wasn't really the time. We couldn't afford for there to be discord between us when the fight was tomorrow.

"Why do you have a problem with me?" I asked him. It probably wasn't appropriate to do this in front of everyone, but time was really a problem for us and we needed this sorted out now rather than later.

"You're not one of us." He tells me simply.

"You have a problem with me because I'm not a shifter?" I wanted him to clarify this point and I wanted him to do it in front of everyone.

"Yes." He doesn't have an ounce of shame as he tells me in front of everyone.

"You don't think I'm worthy to be around you, in all your superior shifter glory?" He's really stupid if he doesn't see where this is going.

"No, I don't. I don't think that you should be giving orders to my shifters. I don't think that you should have any say in what is going to happen tomorrow and I don't think that you should be mated to an Alpha." He tells me honestly.

"Well, I can't do anything about the mate issue because fuck you when it comes to that. But I can easily assuage your other worries. I'll step back from tomorrow and leave you all to it." I tell him, taking a step away from him as if to prove the point. "Best of luck with it all." I tell him turning my back and walking away from him.

"Where are you going?" Trace yells at my retreating back.



“I think maybe Valhalla, but I haven’t decided yet. I’ll check back in with you all in a few days and see who survived and what not.” I tell him cheerfully over my shoulder.

*“You realise that he may actually call your bluff on this.”* Kyle whispers into my mind.

*“Yeah, it’s going to get awkward pretty quick if he does.”* I respond, making sure that all of my mates can hear me.

Because they’re all the super supportive bunch that they are, my mates all turn and walk across the sand with me. Then Kyle really goes to twist the knife.

“Sykes, inform the pack to gather what they need, we set out for Valhalla within the hour.” He tells him seriously.

*“I’m not sure if I’m enjoying this or if it’s just a bit too cruel.”* Sykes laughs into our minds.

I look across the sand at the Elites, hopefully they will understand what is going on and not think that we are actually about to abandon everyone here. “As my Elite Guard, you are of course welcome to come with us.” I tell them. I don’t miss Echo trying not to laugh as she raises one fist to her mouth and coughs.

“We don’t have much. We’ll meet you back here in ten minutes.” Harmony manages to get out with a straight face.

“Wait, what is happening?” Trace shouts, stepping forward. The other shifters have gathered at his back and are looking fairly fucking terrified right now.

“What do you mean?” I ask him, cocking my head to the side. “You just told me that you have a problem with me being here so I am withdrawing from the situation. Obviously, those who are here with me will be withdrawing to the safety of Valhalla with me. I’m not going to just leave them here to be slaughtered with the rest of you.” I tell him honestly.

I need him to pull his head out of his arse and see what his prejudices are going to cost him and those around him. The Fae were nearly wiped out because of these people’s inability to be able to play nicely together. This needs to end and if I need to crush it right here and right now, then so be it. This man is supposed to be sitting on the newly formed Council if we make it out of this alive. And I do mean we. Obviously, I’m not petty enough to leave everyone here to die just because this one fuckwit has pissed me off. Although stashing my mates and the rest of the pack in the safety of Valhalla and then taking the army to fight isn’t such a bad idea now that I think about it.

I can see that Trace is struggling with what he’s going to say next. He clearly knows that he’s got some serious back tracking to do and maybe even an apology to make. As he casts his eyes around at the terrified shifters surrounding him, I can tell that he doesn’t want to have to say them in front of these people.

“You would refuse to bring the Valkyrie army to aid us in this fight?” He asks me, choosing to go with an option of making me out to the bad guy. Fucking amateur.

“Of course not! But you’re right. I just came in here, telling you that I would be bringing my army, stomping all over the place with my ideas and

forcing my assistance on you. You didn't ask me for that, I wasn't invited. You were right to point that out to me and now I will graciously step back and get out of your way. After all I'm not a shifter and you don't think I'm worthy of standing in your ranks. It's okay, don't worry about us. We'll just meet them at the gates of Valhalla after they've already moved through the realm." I tell him as sweetly as I can.

"And you would just abandon your people?" Trace asks turning to Kyle, trying to pass the blame on to him.

"No, I'm taking my people with me." He said with a smile. "As you pointed out I'm mated to this female and I even have others in my pack who aren't shifters. Anyone who wishes to slump down to our level, is welcome to come with us. Anyway, if you recall I abolished the position of Prime Alpha when I took the position." Kyle told him.

The other Alphas moved across the sand to stand at Trace's back. At first, I thought that it was a move of solidarity and that they were going to kick us out, but then I got a look at their faces. They were pissed. And, judging by the glares they were sending Trace's way, it wasn't at us.

We all waited, standing silently on the sand. Trace doesn't seem like he's going to break, or at least not until the Elites turn up with bags slung over their shoulders.

"Do we need to get some food together or will we be there by tonight?" Echo asks me in earnest. Well fuck me, the girls are with me either way and I love them for it.

"I think we should ..." I start but then I'm cut off by one of the Alphas next to us clearing their throat in a not so subtle way.

I turn to look at them, but they are all stood together looking at me with blank expressions so I can't pinpoint who exactly made the sound. I wait a second, but when none of them say anything, I raise one eyebrow and turn back to Echo. As soon as my mouth opens, there's another delicate cough. This one is very ladylike so I can at least narrow it down to two of the Alphas. Trace is shuffling uneasily on the spot.

I'm really having to hold in the giggles by this point. The others are making it clear that he needs to clean up his own mess and I'm finding it difficult to not let them on that I have no intention of abandoning them tomorrow when they need me the most. Even if some of them don't want to admit it to themselves.

"Fucking hell." Trace grumbled and I just couldn't hold back the smile now. I think everyone was probably aware of what was happening. I blamed Kyle for his sub-par acting skills. Mine were flawless.

"I apologise for speaking out of turn. We would be grateful if you would be able to assist us tomorrow?" He mumbled.

I wasn't going to embarrass him by making him speak up. I'm pretty sure that everyone had heard him speak anyway, that of course didn't mean that I was going to completely let him off the hook.

"But what about my undesirable mating, I would hate to upset your delicate sensibilities by flaunting it in your face." I said in the sweetest voice I could manage. I think it came out a bit more pissed off than I intended though.

One of the female Alphas laughed out loud, unashamedly. I think I'm going to check in with her after all of this, she seems pretty cool.

“Perhaps, I may have misjudged your ... mating.” Trace grumbled.

“Then I will graciously accept your invitation to stay.” I told him with a beaming smile.

Trace shoved his way through the Alphas at his back and stormed off.

“You haven’t made a friend there.” The laughing female Alpha said to me. I’m pretty sure that her name was Parella, she was definitely the eagle shifters’ Alpha.

“Probably not.” I agreed.

“It troubles me that someone with such open prejudices will be a member on the Council.” Kyle said with a frown.

We were still standing on the training sand with quite a lot of shifters milling about and subtly listening in. This wasn’t really the place to be having such a conversation.

“You won’t change the old attitudes in just one day.” Parella said wisely. “But the Council is a good idea. If we can hold it, it will be a big step forward.”

She was right. These next few months would be crucial in making sure that there wasn’t an uneven distribution of power when the Council was formed. That, however, was definitely something to go on the list for later because we had other things that we needed to concentrate on now.

*“We need to make sure that the shifters here don’t walk away with a negative impression of us after this.”* I whispered out to my mates.

They all responded with a round of agreements.

“I’m sorry if I stepped on any of your toes over the training issue,” I told the group which was still around us. “I genuinely did think that you might just want to rest with the fight being so close. If there is anything that you would like us to help with, if you have any questions, or if there is anything that you want to work through, please just ask.”

The Elites, like the brilliant wing women that they were, filtered through the group, talking to the groups of shifters, giving advice and soothing nerves. My mates and I followed their example and we moved through the group, speaking with most of them. It was actually pretty nice. We didn’t have much chance to get to know these people before. Virion and Braedon were talking with a group of them about the differences of fighting in a group rather than as an individual and had gathered quite a few interested people to listen.

The Elites bugged me until I worked through some movements with them, because they missed our old sessions. Several of the shifters joined in with us, once we encouraged them to, after seeing them watching interestingly from the side lines.

Tables were dragged over and fires lit when the sun started to go down and everyone started bringing food and drinks out. We spent the evening in the same way, just being together, talking, laughing with some weird little training groups going on around the side lines.

At around ten everyone started to filter away to rest. My mates and I stayed as long as we could, wanting to show these shifters that they had our full

support and we were one of them. Trace never came back and that fact wasn't missed by a lot of people. I caught quite a few conversations where the shifters were upset with him. There were a few who still seemed to quietly agree with him, but Parella was right. We couldn't change everyone's attitude in a day, but we seemed to have taken strides towards it already.

By the time that we all made it back up to our suite of rooms, we were exhausted. Part of me felt like we should have spent the night naked and screwing our brains out. But I didn't want to have a desperate, just in case fuck. We were going to make it through this together and then we had the rest of our lives to fall asleep sweaty and spent in each other's arms. Tonight, I curled up on the bed, all of my beautiful mates surrounding me, and I fell asleep in the warmth and comfort of their presence.

## Chapter Thirty Six

Kyle

The next morning the house was quiet as I slipped out of our suite of rooms. Trent and the other guys had fallen asleep in our sitting room again. I couldn't blame them for it. Being close to pack was comforting. It made me feel better knowing that they were there when I slipped away. I'd heard a few of the shifters complaining about the fact that Aria was my mate and she wasn't a shifter. I had thought at the beginning that it could be a problem, but I hadn't realised that at this stage when she was so crucial to our survival, that people would still feel that animosity towards her. Trace had surprised the fuck out of my last night and I knew he was going to be a problem.

I went down to the library and found Wyatt and Caleb pouring over the maps again. Coffee and breakfast had been laid out on one of the tables and I grabbed a cup before I joined them.

"I don't like the blind spots that we have from these hills." Wyatt said pointing to the high sides of the valley that we knew we would be fighting in the bottom of.

"The eagles have scouts arranged to watch them." I told him, for the millionth time.

He frowned and turned back to staring daggers at the map.



“There is nothing further that we can plan or prepare for. We have done all that we can.” I told him trying to reassure him.

I knew how he felt. It was 7:00am and we were about to fight for our lives in five hours. It would take about an hour to get the shifters to the valley that Frannie had pointed out as the battlefield to us, and get them all in position. We wanted to be there well before the portals were supposed to be opening so that the scouts could make sure that there wasn't anything waiting to surprise us. That meant that we were moving out in three hours.

My stomach felt like it was full of cement, but I knew that I needed to eat something. I made myself a breakfast sandwich from the food that was on the table and forced it down. I needed the protein as a shifter, so even though I felt like the first one was going to make an appearance again, I forced myself to have a second.

Aria walked in just as I was finishing off. She had her wings out and she was looking hot showing off all her Valkyrie glory. She dropped a quick kiss on my cheek telling me that the others were finishing up getting dressing before descending on the food.

“How can you even stomach eating right now?” Caleb groaned looking in fascination as Aria loaded a plate high.

“My magic burns through me fast and I felt drained too quickly when we faced Odin's army on the Bifrost. I need to make sure to load up so I don't burn out too quickly.” She told him, shovelling food in her mouth. “If it makes you feel better, I totally feel like I'm going to barf.” She added honestly.

“It does actually.” Caleb said grumpily. I knew that he would normally want to laugh when he admitted something like that, but no one was in a laughing

mood this morning.

The other Alphas joined us about the same time as the rest of my brothers. The library was pretty packed and most were huddled around the map. No one was really touching the food, but Aria made sure that all of her guys loaded up as much as we could stomach. She was right that we needed the energy if we were going to use our magic, but the nerves were really starting to get the better of us.

As we got closer to leaving, she left the library to check in with the Elites and make sure that everyone was gathering outside. I caught Trace's glare at her back as she left.

"We need to draw up a contingency in case the Valkyrie either fails or betrays us." Trace said sharply once the door closed behind her. He didn't have the balls to look me in the eye as he did it. I was actually surprised that he had the balls to say anything when he was shut in a room with so many of her mates.

"What the fuck did you just say?" I growled at him.

He glared at me, refusing to back down and that just pissed my wolf off. "We don't know her, we can't allow the survival of our species to hinge on her." He said stabbing a finger at the closed door.

"Firstly, she is my mate." I couldn't suppress the vicious growl that followed that statement. "Secondly, what do you suggest? You're shit out of luck and the fuck out of time. You better start praying to whoever the fuck you whinge to every night, because without Aria we all die." I told him simply.

“Exactly, that’s what I mean. We need a plan to pull out the shifters. Even if the Valkyrie do show up, if the tide turns against us, we need a plan to save as many shifters as we can.” He shouted.

“Just to clarify.” Dom hissed, stepping forward. “What you are suggesting is running and abandoning the Valkyrie army.”

Virion bristled next to me and I couldn’t blame him. This was exactly the attitude which had caused the near extinction of his own people.

Before I could let loose the anger building in side of me Rebekah stepped forward and put a hand on Trace’s shoulder. “I know that you are scared. I know this because I am absolutely fucking petrified. I also know that what you are saying is coming from the fear of letting your pack down and the fact that some of them could be hurt or even die today. But the Valkyrie are stepping in to help us in a fight that they don’t have to fight. There is no escaping today. If we run now, we may as well just throw ourselves at the feet of the demons, because without our honour we are not worthy of calling ourselves shifters.”

Trace visibly deflated under her touch and his chin dropped to his chest. “How can this be it? How can I be the Alpha that led my pack to death?” He said sadly. “They’re not ready. We all know if.”

All of my anger slipped away when I realised why he was saying the things that he was. I knew exactly how he felt. Being an Alpha is a hard position to fill. It sets you aside from the pack. It’s a lonely place to be. The responsibility is a heavy burden to bear. None of us want to be the Alpha that leads their pack to death. It goes against our very Alpha nature, our need to protect.

I stepped up to Trace and I put my hand on his other shoulder. “I know how you feel. The only way we are going to get through this is if we stand together. We’ve done all that we can. We’ve prepared them as much as we can. We’ll face the aftermath together, as a Council, supporting our people.”

He nodded and looked me in the eye for the first time since he walked into the room. “I’m sorry.” He told me earnestly.

“It’s forgotten already.” I told him and I meant it. We were all riding high on our fear at the moment.

We silently filed out of the room and out of the pack house. Aria was at the bottom of the steps making sure that a group of shifters had the correct weapons. She was swopping out swords for something better weighted for one of the guys and reassuring them as much as she could. She was everything that I had ever wanted in a mate and I was still in awe of her every day. Trace watched the way that she moved through the crowd, speaking to the shifters as she went, and I saw the look of guilt in his eyes.

“She’s better than any of us.” He said quietly.

“Yes.” I agreed. There was nothing else to say.

Aria made her way back up to the steps and I pulled her into my arms. I needed to just feel her against me. I never wanted to let her go. This was insane. Why were we doing this again? I could feel myself starting to panic and Aria squeezed me harder against her. The others gathered around us and joined in, until we were one big weird group hug in front of the small army we had cobbled together. I wouldn’t be embarrassed though. I was lucky to even be able to be in this position. To have found her.

Aria pulled away from me and ran her hands up and down my arms. I knew that she would be able to feel my panic.

“I need to scout ahead.” She said quietly. I nodded silently. I didn’t want her to go on her own. “I’m going to make sure that there are no problems along the route you’re going to take them down. I’ll double back if I find anything, otherwise I’ll see you there.”

She stepped back cautiously and I knew that she was finding it just as hard to leave as I was.

“We’ll be with you as soon as we can.” I told her. What else was there to say. I was burning to tell her that I loved her, but I didn’t want to taint it by making it sound like a goodbye.

Aria nodded and spread her wings, taking to the sky. Everyone silently watched her go.

“Anyone else having flash backs of running for our lives from the academy.” Echo joked.

I looked at her like she was crazy to even be joking about such a thing but she just shrugged. “Just saying, Aria always seems to be flying off to protect us.”

The shifters turned and watched Aria go once they heard Echo’s reasoning. Maybe it was a good thing to remind them of everything that she had done for us. They hadn’t been with us in the early days. They hadn’t been through this already. Echo was right, as we set off walking through the trees towards the Blood Moon fields, it was far too similar to that day when we had been running for our lives.

## Chapter Thirty Seven

### Aria

We had reached the Blood Moon fields without any problems. I was in a world of my own as everyone filed in and formed their ranks. I couldn't take my eyes off the field in front of me, visualising the battlefield and how the tactics which we had planned would play out.

It was almost like the world knew what was about to happen. Grey clouds covered the sky casting the entire field in shades of grey. The weather was gloomy and the sun couldn't break through. It made the situation feel all that more hopeless. A full moon hung high in the midday sky, stained red by the still present sun. It seemed ominously appropriate for the day.

I stood at the front of the shifter army. My mates at my side. They all reached across and laid a hand on me. This was the hardest part. Moving away from them and leaving them to fight alone. At least they would be with the shifter army, which wouldn't close in before the Valkyrie arrived, unless they didn't get there in time. Then the shifter army would be the first wave, my mates would be the first wave. I just prayed that didn't happen. They might have trained, but their skills were nothing like those of the Valkyrie.

The portals were already opening up at the other end of the fields. The demons flooded out of them on mass. What was even more disturbing were the lumbering figures moving between them. They looked wrong, disjointed almost. They didn't move how a normal living person did. That was when

the horrific realisation hit me. That was because they weren't. We'd finally found the missing bodies of the students from the academy.

My teeth gritted in anger and my magic flared hot and insistent at the audacity of it all. I may not have grown up with them, and I didn't have the time to get to know them, but these were my peers and I would not allow them to be used like this.

I spread my wings, looking back only once at my mates stood behind me, and glided down to the lower level of the field. There was a slight decline down to the other side where the demon army was now gathering. The shifter army stood on higher ground behind me. This whole place was like a bowl. The battle predetermined to take place in the bottom. The sides held hills high enough to give someone an advantage if the demons were clever enough to open the portals up there. The eagle shifters were flying reconnaissance around them to make sure that didn't happen without us knowing about it. So far, they only seemed to be entering the realm exactly where Francesca had told us they would.

More portals started to open in front of the demon army and human looking figures moved through. These must be the witches who were helping them. Hel's minions, or at least that was what we assumed. Those who had decided that sacrificing all of the students in the academy was worth them getting a bit more magic to help them through the day. They would be the ones to die first, if I had anything to do with.

My magic was insistent. I held it back from letting the flames burn though. I knew that the blood lust would follow close behind and I couldn't afford to give into it just yet. The Gjallarhorn practically buzzed against my skin, almost like my magic was feeding into it. Maybe it was, I had no idea how it actually worked. I ran my fingers along the mouthpiece which was tattooed against the underside of my wrist. As my magic wrapped around my fingers and the horn, I found that I could slip my fingers underneath the

mouthpiece. Once it was in my hand it was easy enough to just pull it away from my arm, it reformed into the horn as soon as it peeled away from my skin and was in the air.

The demon army was still flooding through their portals. Their witches shouting directions at them. They weren't even paying any attention to us. It was almost like they had decided that we were so insignificant they didn't need to worry about what we were doing. I almost laughed at that thought as I brought the horn to my lips. I filled my lungs with as much air as I could and blew. The deep bass note that rumbled out of the horn shook the ground that I stood on. It reverberated through the air and every head turned to stare. That's right, look at me, I hope the sight fucking terrified them.

A shard of sunlight broke through the clouds and hit the ground next to me. A pulse of magic filled the air and Geta landed beside me in her full Valkyrie armour. She slapped me on the shoulder, a vicious grin formed on her face as she laughed in glee. It was a little maniacal, but she was making it work for her. I could hear the murmurs of hope coming from the shifter army at our back.

The clouds almost seemed to dissolve above us as shard after shard of sunlight fell to the ground, each followed by a Valkyrie landing swiftly behind me and forming ranks. The entire legion was coming and I hoped those bitch witches were watching.

Portals opened at the sides of us and the warriors marched through in their ranks. Britt broke formation and ran to my other side, slinging one arm around my shoulders as we watched the rest of our army file into position.

Another portal flickered open on the top of one of the hills to our left. My wings pulled up, readying to take to the air and take down any demon that dared to try and flank us. I almost fell over when I saw Aubron and Tasar step through both of them fitted with gleaming gold armour. They both held



a large bow and a quiver of arrows was strapped to each of their backs. A squad of what looked like twenty archers filed through the portal after them, all taking up position at the edge. I couldn't believe it. The Fae had actually come. They stood on the brink of extinction, they were betrayed at the last battle they fought in this realm, but they had still come. I slammed my right fist to my chest and bowed my head in thanks to them all. Aubron actually looked shocked when the entire Valkyrie army mirrored my movements to him. His eyes widened in surprise before he and the other Fae bowed their heads back to me.

Looking up I saw that the demons were still filtering through, but the flow was starting to lessen. It wouldn't be long before they were all here and the fight would start. I strode forward a few steps from my position and then turned to face the army at my back. The Valkyrie stood tall and proud in their battle armour, a few who I didn't know walked forward to me and started to strap armour to my body. It was light weight but I knew without a doubt that it would be strong. The burnished gold gleamed in the sunlight which had broken through with the Valkyrie. The chest piece had red flames which entwined together and crept over the shoulder pieces.

Geta caught my eye. "This was your mother's armour, but we made a few adjustments." She smiled. Turning back to the army before us she murmured. "It is time to address them."

No pressure.

## Chapter Thirty Eight

Kyle

Aria had been fitted with gleaming armour and with her white wings on full display behind her she looked like a warrior goddess. The Valkyrie and the Warriors stood in front of her, watching her in awe. We had actually done it, we brought the army. Now we just needed to win the fight.

I looked up at the Fae archers on the hilltop. I couldn't believe that they had actually come. Virion shuffled next to me.

“If you want to fight with your people, no one will think any less of you.” I told him. And I meant it.

If I could persuade Virion to take position with the archers, I would at least be putting one of Aria's mates a little further out of danger. I was under no illusions that the chances of all of us making it out of this were almost impossible. As I looked at Aria, stood at the front of the army, in the most vulnerable position which she could be, my wolf growled and surged inside me. He did not like that our mate was here. That she was in so much danger. But this was the army which Aria had to lead. Without them, there was no hope for any of us. I just had to trust her to make it through this. And I did. If anyone could do this it would be her. My fierce warrior mate.

Virion just shook his head. “I am where I belong.” He said patting me on shoulder.

Once Aria's armour was in place and the other Valkyrie had moved back into position, Aria started to speak. Her voice carried on the wind and was impossibly clear to even the shifters at the back. Every shifter had come to fight, even Margie. We had made sure that the most vulnerable were at the back of our army, as far away from the danger as we could. We would not have been able to make them stay behind for anything. This was their fight too and who were we to tell them that they couldn't have it.

"We do not fight for wealth. We do not fight to merely take something which does not belong to us. We are not under any misguided impression that the lives of others mean any less than ours. We fight for our way of life. We fight for the lives of our friends and family. We fight for our very right to exist. They," She screamed pointing at the demons and witches behind her, "believe that you should roll over and die so that they can wield a bit more magic. They believe that your lives are insignificant. They have taken the lives of the students from the academy, your children, and desecrated their bodies so that they fill the ranks of an army they would send to fight you. I will not lie to you. Blood will spill today. Lives will be lost. And while we will mourn any we lose, we will know that they sacrificed for our freedom, and they cry no tears for us because tonight ... they feast ... in the halls of Valhalla!" She roared as flames leapt from her wings.

The entire Valkyrie and Warrior army raised their swords in air and roared. "Valhalla!"

Aria whipped around and pulled her swords from her back which were immediately covered in flames, the shifters behind me gasped in surprise as the sight. Then she charged towards the demon army in front of her, Britt and Geta remained at her side, the Valkyrie army were four steps behind her.

It had begun.

## Chapter Thirty Nine

### Aria

I wish someone had told me that I was going to have to give an awesome rallying speech before now. Never mind, I'll just have to prep for the next battle ahead of time. Maybe I could get some speech writers to do me a collection just in case.

I focused on the demon army ahead of me. That was what I should be focusing on, whilst running to meet them in battle, rather than the inadequacies of my impromptu speech skills. The stampeding sound of the Valkyrie and the Warriors behind me almost felt like they went in time with the beats of my heart. The demons had started their charge as well. The witches seemed to be hanging back like the cowards they were. Well, even if I had to fight my way through an entire army to reach them, they were definitely going to die today.

The Fae sent the first volley of arrows ahead of us and a section of the demons fell before us. We only had twenty archers though and the army in front of us had hundreds more charging towards us. Several more volleys hit the advancing army as we charged. Every arrow seemed to hit a target.

They were so close that I could almost smell them. My magic roared out of me, the flames blazing from my swords and wings. I could feel the blood lust tickling at the back of my mind and I let myself sink down into it.

## Chapter Forty

Liam

Aria was charging towards the demon with the Valkyrie and Warriors were charging at her back. The distance between the lines was closing and my Panther was stripping apart my insides in desperation, wanting to be by her side. All of the shifters were shuffling uneasily behind me. I should have insisted that I fight with my mate, why did I agree to stay back here with the shifter army.

I could feel my own magic responding to my distress, it was like it flowed through and around me. My mind flowed out of my body with the magic and I could feel the water as it ran through the land in front of me. I could feel the water droplets in the air, the underground Aquifer that ran through the area. Then I realised that I didn't need to be by Aria's side to be able to protect her. I had all of the skills that I needed with me already.

My magic tapped into the underground water source, I could feel the flow and I pulled it up towards the surface. I could feel the water bubbling to the surface, it was playful and eager. It wanted to move, it hated being constricted to an underground source. It embraced my magic and welcomed it.

I drew the water up, pulling away at the rock and the soil, letting it flow away. It rushed between the cracks in the ground, finding a path and pushing its way through. I could see now how Aria could get lost into a blood lust. Magic was addictive. It was almost like it wanted me to reach out and become one with the water. My awareness expanded and I could

feel the water, the blood, running through everyone around me. It would be so easy to just pull, pull it all from them. But that thought scared me. It would be too easy to get lost inside of it and I pulled away, not wanting to embrace that part of me. I concentrated on the water in the ground. It was nearing the surface now nearing its goal.

I let my attention fall back to the group of witches that remained behind the lines of the demon army. They were supposed to be one with the magic around them, but they clearly had no idea what was going on.

“What are you doing?” I heard Sykes ask me. “I can feel your magic, but I can’t figure out what you’re doing.” He was squinting at the battlefield.

Sykes gasped in surprise as the water finally did what I wanted it to do. An enormous sinkhole opened up underneath the witches and four of them fell inside. The others unfortunately managed to scramble out of the way.

The water wasn’t done yet. It welcomed the addition of the fallen witches and it embraced them, dragging them down into the watery depths. There would be no escape for them now.

I let the magic go and felt the energy drain that it had caused. I stumbled slightly, but Sykes caught me with a hand on my shoulder. Feeling a little light headed I looked up at him, expecting to see some kind of horror on his face but he just smiled down proudly at me.

“That was a good idea. I don’t like the way those witches are hanging back. They are a risk to Aria that we hadn’t considered.” He frowned as he took in the sight before him.

The two armies were so close, they would clash in a matter of moments. The shifters behind me were moving uneasily. We had our orders from Aria. We were going to be the second wave. The Valkyrie and Warrior armies were the first wave, then Kyle was to give the order for when the second wave would hit.

I couldn't draw my eyes away, Aria was still at the front. Her, Geta and Britt would meet the demons seconds before the others. It made my Panther uneasy. We wanted her to be at the back, sheltered behind the others. Or better yet, not here at all. But that would never have been in Aria's nature. She was a warrior through and through. She would never hide while others fought for their lives. She would always help them. That's just who she was.

I held my breath watching and I knew that my pack mates did the same. She was only steps away now.

## Chapter Forty One

### Sykes

When the two armies crashed together the sound reverberated up through the valley as we heard armour hit flesh.

At the last second Aria had let out a war cry, before throwing herself at the demon in front of her. The fight was brutal. If not for Aria's flaming wings, I would have lost sight of her in seconds. They were like the immovable object meeting the unstoppable force. Apparently the outcome was that they just fucking slaughtered each other.

The Valkyries and the Warriors were efficient in their battle rage as they slashed their way through the demon army before them. Black demon blood arched in all directions, but some of our own were taking hits as well. It was hard to watch. We may have had the skilled warriors, but the demons definitely had the numbers. They were outnumbered down there. At least four to one. When the shifters joined them, it wouldn't improve the numbers much. There just weren't enough of us. And half of those who stood at my back had not trained for long enough. It was the only reason why any of us had agreed to let the shifters be the second wave. We would have been slaughtered otherwise.

The Fae were still standing on the hill side taking shots and felling demons where ever they could. I can't believe that they actually came. It didn't matter that they weren't on the battle ground below. They were still taking down more than I think most of us would.



Liam was on to something though. Those witch bitches were hanging back for a reason and we needed to take out the threat. I glanced across at Kyle and Virion who were both eying the sinkhole in thought. I knew they had the same thought.

I tapped into my magic, not waiting for the others. It didn't come as easily to me as it seemed to with them. I think it was because my affinity ran with the wind. It didn't like to be tied down. It liked to be free. But that just made it hard to control. There is something about it that feels different today though. It's almost eager to help. I threw my awareness out on the wind and it was like I could feel everything around me. If I wanted to, I knew that I could reach out and caress Aria. Run a cool breeze across the flames of her wings as easily as if it were my own fingertips. But I wouldn't do that today. I couldn't afford to distract her.

I pulled the wind up above the fighting armies, it was hard to take my mind away from Aria, every part of me wanted to protect her and be fighting by her side.

I gathered the wind together, wrapping it over and over itself. Twisting and turning it until it formed a funnel. A force that nothing in nature could stand against. Then with a smirk on my face I let it fall. Liam had already created the sink hole. It was too easy. Scarily too easy. A part of me was enjoying this, a part that I didn't want to look too closely at. But these witches were endangering my mate and there was nothing that I wouldn't do to see them torn apart.

They fought me. They lashed out with their own magic, trying to capture the wind as it battered against them. But this was mine. They would not take it from me. Just like I wouldn't let them take my mate, our mate.

I felt Virion's hand clasp my shoulder. "Let me add something to it." He simply said.

I didn't know what he meant, but then I felt his magic run through my own. It was hot and almost spicy as it raked across my senses and blended in with my own. We had talked about combining magic before, but we had never done it. There was something strangely intimate about it.

I felt the heat twist and turn with the wind that I had formed. The wind welcomed him, unlike the foreign witch magic that was trying to seize control. But Virion wasn't trying to control the wind, he was just coaxing it along, adding to it and the wind welcomed his addition.

Virion's magic suddenly sparked and flames spiralled through the wind funnel that I had created, turning it into a fire storm. There was no standing against it now. I think I actually saw one of the witches jump into the sink hole to escape it. There would be no escape through. The wind lashed out. Gathering the witches within it. The flames leapt and curled and caressed their skin, like a lover's embrace. Their screams rang through the air as their flesh blackened and sizzled against their bones. I was glad that the fire storm was contained to where the witches were behind the enemy lines, I wouldn't want Aria anywhere near this, even though I knew that our magic would never hurt her.

As the screams of the witches started to die down, I let the wind pull back before surging forward, flinging the remains of the dead witches down into the sink hole. They wouldn't be a problem for anyone else. Virion's magic slowly withdrew from mine and the wind whispered away, going back to play around the hills as it always did. Kyle's magic filled the air and the sink hole closed over, sealing the evidence of what we had done inside.

We all looked to each other, nothing needed to be said. I knew that none of us held any regret for what we had done. This was a war. A war that was caused by them. They had only got what they had asked for.

## Chapter Forty Two

### Aria

Blood ... Fire .... Death .... Rage. That was all that I had become.

The blood lust had closed over me, before we hit the advancing line of the demon army. I let it sweep me along with it. The fire raged through my veins and I revelled in it.

My swords moved swiftly through the air as I sliced and hacked my way through. This was the plan, push through as hard and as fast as we could. Cause as much damage as we could. Then the second wave would come down and clear up what we had left behind to make sure that they couldn't close and reform their ranks at our rear.

The air smelt like it was saturated with blood. There was just so many of them. I didn't even see the individual demons any more as they closed around me. All I saw was flesh that needed to be torn away from whatever body housed it. And blood that I needed to set free to drip across the ground.

I could vaguely feel a few injuries to my body. I didn't think they were bad. Minor at best. But at the stage that I was, even if I had suffered a fatal blow, I don't think I would have been able to feel it straight away.

I had lost sight of Britt and Geta almost as soon as the fight had started. I could hear the clash behind and around me and I knew that I wasn't the

only one fighting. I could also hear the cries of pain and I knew that some of the Valkyrie and the Warriors were falling as well. The blood lust took away the emotion. I didn't feel it yet, but I knew that I would when this was all over. If I survived that long.

I ducked down under the swipe of a set of deadly claws and brought one sword up into the throat of the demon who dared to even think he could touch me. I heard the faint pop as the blade pushed out the top of his head. Yanking my sword free I span and took off the arm of another demon at my back. My wings beat and the flames wrapped around another, before I turned and took one of his legs off at the knee and then took his head with my other sword.

My life broke down to the slashes and stabs of my swords. Death. Death is all I see as I cut down everything that stands in my way as I push through the army that dared to come for me and mine. That dared to threaten this realm.

An arrow skimmed over my shoulder and embedded in the neck of a demon which was coming at me from the side while I was busy taking the head of one of his friends. These Fae were damn good shots. Or at least, I hoped that they were. Otherwise that was pretty close.

## Chapter Forty Three

Braedon

So much death. I watched the battle unfold in front of me, feeling sick to my stomach. So many were dying. The Valkyrie had taken some losses but only minimal, the Warriors were taking more. Aria was cutting through the demons like she was just dancing through the cold winter air. Fighting seemed effortless to her. I could feel the rage of her battle magic buzzing in the back of my mind. I don't think that the others felt it as keenly. They had their own magic now. I was still the weak magic Demi-God. The freak. Aria had never looked at me like everyone had for my entire life. She didn't see me as damaged. Defective.

I wrap my fingers tighter around the hilt of my sword, unwrap and wrap. It's a motion that always calms me before a fight. I've seen the shifters at my back training. They don't have enough skill to all survive this. I know that is why Aria wanted them as a second wave, regardless of how much sense the tactic was. If I had to guess, that was part of the reason why she was cutting through the demons now like a woman possessed. The more they fell as they make their way through, the less they leave in their wake for the shifters coming in on the second wave. The Fae archers are doing a pretty good job of taking some out as well, although it's difficult not to notice that a few of them seem to be concentrating their fire around Aria, helping her to clear her path through. I didn't know their motives, but I would be eternally grateful for it.

## Chapter Forty Four

Kyle

Watching the battle below had my wolf on edge. I was barely keeping him contained. Our mate was down there. I watched the fighting carefully, I couldn't afford to miss the point where the second wave was needed. I couldn't let the demon army reform at their backs while they were pushing through, it would leave them vulnerable if they suddenly found themselves surrounded.

They were so close to punching through. My pack mates, shuffled uneasily beside me. The army at our back was nervous, I could smell it coming from them. They were too inexperienced, too untrained. But we were committed now. We couldn't afford another Battle of Galvinae. We had to make sure that Aria's army had the backup that they needed.

I turned away from the battlefield and my fighting mate to look at the army at my back. It was time. I didn't have any inspiring words prepared, I was woefully unprepared for this, even though we had known it was coming for so long. Wyatt, Caleb and the other Alphas stood immediately behind me. Wyatt caught my eye and gave me a proud smile and a nod.

“We are on the edge of a new age for all shifter kind. An age of equality and justice. But if you want it, then we have to fight for it. We have to cut down those that mean to take it from you. Those that see you as less than, that dispute your very right to live. Will you fight with me?” I roared at the shifter army. They roared their agreement at me.

“Will you bleed with me?” The roaring got louder and louder.

“Will you die with me, not just for yourselves, but for your mates, for the generations that will follow us?” The roar of the shifters reached a deafening level. They were shuffling now but with eagerness to run into battle.

I tipped back my head, filling my lungs with air and released a howl, pushing all of my Alpha power into it. It echoed across the battlefield and all of the Alphas around me joined in my cry.

Turning in the direction of my mate I put all the power I had into my legs, sprinting towards the fight. The few demons who had been left alive when the first wave fought through turned towards us and started to run towards us to engage us in a fight. There weren't that many of them, they wouldn't make it pass me and the line of Alphas to the other shifters, but once we were in the main group of their fighting force there would be no protecting the others. It would be every fighter for themselves and I just prayed that they would all make it through this. We had lost so many wolves in the last demon attack.

The demons rushed towards and I raised my sword, screaming out my rage at it. But just as I brought my sword down to take off its arm ... it disappeared.

I looked around me in confusion to see everyone else doing the same. The demons were gone. I crouched, putting my weight on the balls of my feet. This had to be some kind of trick, preparation for another attack.

I sent my magic out across the ground, but I couldn't feel any demons anywhere. I could sense Aria's magic further across on the other side of the field and I could feel her own confusion in the back of my mind.

*“They’re gone.”* I whispered out to the group. *“What’s happening near you Aria?”* I asked.

*“They just disappeared.”* She mumbled back to us. I could feel her suspicion mirroring my own. *“Mother fucker.”* Aria gasped before our link slammed closed.



## Chapter Forty Five

### Aria

The demon that I had been about to separate from his head, rudely disappeared just before my sword was about to sink into his neck. At first my blood lust roared in outrage, but then I was able to reign it back in. I knew that I needed to be aware of what was going on in my surroundings. Because if demons were disappearing from in front of me, then something was definitely going on.

All of the demons are gone, even the dead that should have been on the ground. Looking around I can see the other Valkyrie and Warriors are just as confused as I am.

“It could be a trick.” Someone mumbled from beside me as everyone braced themselves for the fight to suddenly start again.

Without being able to see the amount of dead demons I had no way of knowing if we are even winning. There are a lot of our own soldiers lying dead and wounded on the ground.

“*They’re gone.*” I heard Kyle whisper into my mind. “*What’s happening near you Aria?*” He asked.

“*They just disappeared.*” I mumbled back to him. I cast my eyes around suspiciously.

I didn't trust the strange quietness that had fallen over the battlefield. It was almost like all of our fighters were holding their breath waiting for whatever was going to come next. I was still at the front of our fighters, set slightly more forward than everyone else. I suppose it was because I had not only led the charge, but then I had lost myself to the blood lust with only one thought in mind, punch through to the other side.

When the portal shimmered open in front of me, I won't lie, it took me by surprise.

*"Mother fucker."* I gasped through the connection before slamming it closed as I saw who walked through. I was going to need all of my wits about me if this was going to turn into a fight and I couldn't afford to have the guys distracting me by panicking and shouting in my head.

You could tell just by looking at her that she was a goddess. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Her long black hair gleamed like a starless sky and hung in soft waves all the way down her back. She had ice blue eyes that were so light they almost seemed white, it was freaky as fuck. The dress that she wore was sheer and I could see all the lady parts if I wanted to. It clung to her like it was welded to her skin, draping all the way to the ground. The split that ran up to her hip seemed almost unnecessary but maybe it was for air circulation or something? Her skin was white, there was probably some beautiful poetic phrasing for it, but fuck me if I knew what it was. She was white, like white white. So white that I could see her blue veins lacing underneath her skin.

While she was shocking to see step through the portal, it wasn't as shocking as when Heimdallr followed her through. If I wasn't such a badass warrior Valkyrie I might have cried. Okay, so I did tear up a little, but who wouldn't.

“You have become quite the thorn in the side, young Valkyrie.” She said giving me a creepy ass smile. I had already decided that I didn’t like this chick. “But you have exceeded every expectation that we could have had for you.” She laughed, clapping her hands together in joy.

“Lady Hel,” I heard Geta say as she stepped beside me. “Odin decreed that you were not to enter this realm.”

So, this bitch was Hel.

Hel turned to Heimdallr, completely ignoring Geta. “I don’t see why I had to pull my babies out so soon. They didn’t even get to play with the shifters.” She pouted.

“You did this.” I seethed, not waiting for Heimdallr to even respond to her. “You had them slaughter all of these people for what? Your own entertainment?” In retrospect I probably should have been a little bit more respectful when addressing a goddess.

Hel turned and looked to Heimdallr again. “I thought this one was supposed to be smart. Don’t tell me the worm is just like the rest of them!”

“In her defence my love, even Odin was unaware of the issue and the steps you were taking to rectify it.” Heimdallr said, sliding to her side and putting an arm around her waist. He gave me a look that I couldn’t quite interpret. What the fuck was going on? “And we pulled out your children because you had already achieved your aim my love.”

“I have only done what was necessary. I am setting right the wrongs that you ‘people’ have set in motion.” She spat. People was clearly a hard word

for her to apply to us. Heimdallr even gave her arm a little pat like he was congratulating a child for saying thank you.

“You worms, people, I mean people,” She sighed “You people flitter around like your actions hold no consequences, closing gates, fighting feuds, thinking that your existence is something other than the inconsequential annoyance that it really is. But then the consequences slap you in the face and you are too stupid to even realise that they are there.” She huffed throwing her arms up in the air in exasperation.

I looked across at Geta to see if she understood what was going on, but she was just frowning at Hel and, hopefully subconsciously, playing with the hilt of her sword. I could feel the magic radiating off her. There was no way that we could take her.

“I can’t find a mate, my magic is too weak. Whinge, whinge, whinge. That’s all the worms do. They’re like annoying little gnats, whinging their prayers into my ears.” She said pacing up and down. Heimdallr looked like he wanted to hold her still, but sensibly let her rant because this bitch was a crazy bomb that was about to explode. “Then, I decide to graciously assist them, I answer their prayers and I show them the way and then what happens?” She screams. “You slaughtered them, you’re evil, why would you do this? The incessant whinging, it never stops!” She screamed, her magic slammed out of her, felling the army behind me. I staggered backwards from the impact, but I was too stubborn to let this woman knock me to the ground.

“You need to be calm my love. They do not understand the lengths you have gone to so that you could save them, so that you could save us all.” Heimdallr told her softly, trying to placate her.

I felt my mates gather at my back. Geta and Britt were both at my sides now. This crazy bitch was going to have to make it through us if she wanted

to get to the rest of them. But I was hoping it wasn't going to come to that, because if it did, we were definitely going to die.

Hel just burst into laughter. It was that light tittering kind that beautiful women do and you aren't quite sure if it's genuine or not.

"You're right my love. How can they realise what someone so far above them is doing to save all the realms." She ran one hand down Heimdallr's cheek and he looked lovingly into her eyes. Had Heimdallr played us all this time? What the fuck was even going on?

"Lady Hel," Geta cautiously spoke, "Perhaps you could take pity on us and enlighten us with what you have done for us." She spoke softly like she trying to talk down a wild animal.

"I have restarted the flow of magic." She said smugly. "I told them, raise the army, bring the demons, attack the realm and you would either die out, releasing your unnecessary drain on what remains. Or you would fight back, open the doors and the flow would start again."

Heimdallr frowned slightly, but the look wiped off his face when Hel turned towards him. "Are you proud of me my love? I have saved them all."

"Of course. I had not realised that you had been so busy." He said to her charmingly. Well at least that solved the question of if he had been involved.

"Don't you think I deserve a reward for all of my good work?" She wheedled.

"Of course, my love." He said smiling at her.

“I’m so glad you agree.” She suddenly turned cold and then her arm whipped out towards me and she clenched her fist in front of me.

I immediately felt the excruciating pain in my chest. I couldn’t breathe and it felt like I was being ripped apart. I could feel something squirming and rummaging around in my chest like it was burrowing into me.

“A tasty treat.” Hel grinned, licking her lips.

“My love, you are forbidden to take the souls of those who have not yet passed.” Heimdallr reminded her, looking at me in shock.

“No one will know.” She shrugged. “Her magic is strong, she will be so tasty.”

## Chapter Forty Six

Braedon

Aria cried out in pain as Hel's magic reached into her, searching for her soul.

Rage flared through me at the sight of my mate in pain. It flared hot through my system and my eyes filled with white light. When it faded, I could see a white glow around Aria, it flickered and shimmered almost like a flame. I could see something searching inside her, trying to grab hold of her white light. Not of my fucking watch! I didn't know how I knew what to do, but I reached out and wrapped my arms around Aria's chest. Closing my eyes, I concentrated on the feel of her, her warmth and the way that she radiated magic from her without even realising it. I could feel the mate bonds running through her to all of us. I took hold of the bonds and I wrapped them tightly around her white light, encaging her soul in the bonds of love that she held with her mates. I felt the others reach out and lay a hand on her, each bond flaring stronger.

Hel hissed and her magic suddenly pulled out of Aria. "Soul Whisperer." She hissed at me.

I pulled Aria back a step with me. Taking her further out of the reach of Hel, not that she needed to be able to touch her. Hel bared her teeth at us. Just as she stepped forward a huge bolt of lightning burst out of the sky and struck her in the chest, causing her to fly backwards away from us.

The sudden use of what was apparently my magic had drained me and I felt like my limbs were full of stone. I knew that I was leaning too heavily onto Aria as I felt the drain of overused magic. I shifted to the side and Virion ducked down under one of my arms, taking my weight as Aria stepped clear. She ran one hand down the side of my face.

“Thank you.” She whispered to me.



## Chapter Forty Seven

### Aria

As soon as Braedon pulled me into his arms the pain immediately lessened. I didn't know what he was doing, but it was almost felt like he was replacing the pain with something else, something warm and happy was taking its place.

Braedon pulled me back a step and I sank into his embrace as I felt the last of the foreign magic leave me.

“Soul Whisperer.” Hel angrily hissed at Braedon. I shook my head. We didn't have time to deal with whatever this was now.

I turned to Braedon and whispered my thanks to him. If I hadn't turned my head back straight away, I would have missed the lightning as it struck Hel in the chest and threw her away from us. Heimdallr took a step back as she went flying. Surprisingly he didn't rush to her side immediately, as she growled and clawed herself back up from the ground. That was one weird relationship I did not want to spend the time trying to understand.

“Stay away from my daughter.” A voice boomed from beside me.

I looked over my shoulder and saw Thor standing next to me. “Hey Pops!” I grinned.

He gave me a look like he wasn't too keen on the pops name, that just meant it was definitely staying.

Britt was stood to the side and when she caught my eye, her mouth fell open like a fish and then she starting pointing between me and Thor. She looked crazy but at least she was my crazy.

“Heimdallr, I never thought you would be one to betray us.” Thor said sadly. I remembered that he had mentioned before that Heimdallr was his friend.

“I haven't.” He said quietly as Hel slinked over to his side, almost proving Thor's point. “It had to be this way. It was the only way to save everyone.”

“Save everyone!” I screamed, finally losing it and confused out of my mind. “You've murdered hundreds! Or by save everyone do you actually mean everyone in Asgard, because that's all that you care about.” I seethed angrily. Heimdallr looked down at the ground and I knew that I was right. This was all about them. They didn't give a shit about this realm.

“The magic must flow.” Hel said haughtily which only enraged me further.

“You have two minutes to explain what the fuck is going on, or I'm going to separate that bitch's head from her body.” I said pointing a flaming sword at Hel.

“You may be strong Valkyrie, but you could not strike down a goddess such as I.” Hel shouted back at me as Heimdallr held her back from charging me.

“Try me!” I shouted, only to find myself restrained by my father.

“Enough!” Thor bellowed. I stopped struggling as did Hel. “Heimdallr, explain.”

“The realms are dying we all know this. Too many doors have been closed, the races have been segregated. Your own hate drives you apart. Magic cannot survive like that. It has to flow. If it cannot follow the paths that it needs, it diverts off to other places. It’s like a river. You placed dams against the flow by closing the realm gates and now the flow is filtering away. We cannot exist without the magic Thor, you have seen what is happening in Asgard. We are dying and the realm is on the verge of collapse.” Heimdallr explained in exasperation. He truly felt like they had done the right thing.

“So, all of this was just to save Asgard? Don’t you care about all of the people in this realm that you killed?” I asked him. I was trying to reign in my anger, but it was so closely linked to my magic that I was finding it difficult. I didn’t understand how they could so easily sacrifice so many.

“No. Not just for Asgard. All of the realms are in the same position. It’s why you have less access to magic, why some races have lost nearly all of their magic, why you can’t find your fated mates anymore. Asgard closed its gates first. We are just further on than the rest of you. What you saw in Asgard, was an inevitability for you here.”

“So why not just open up the gates? Why did you have to start a fucking war to try and deceive us into doing it for you?” I tried not to shout at them, but I was finding it so difficult. So many of the people stood behind me had lost loved ones because of this. Fuck, we still had dead lying on the ground.

“It would not have worked.” Came a quiet voice from behind me.

Francesca slipped past me. She didn’t join Hel and Heimdallr, but she stood in front of us. It was almost like she didn’t want to be seen to be taking a

side.

“Frannie, tell me you aren’t involved in this.” I heard Wyatt gasp.

“No, no, no, not involved. Not started. But see.” She said tapping the side of her head. I knew it was hard for her to explain what she meant and she struggled to stay lucid.

“But why?” I whispered. I didn’t know how much more of this I could take.

“No trust.” Frannie said, shaking her head. “Always fighting. Always separate. Never working together.”

Heimdallr looked at her curiously. “You are the one that has been aiding them.” He stated. “I owe you a debt, a life debt.” He said dropping to his knees in front of her. “The version that I saw, so many died, so many more.” He had actual tears running down his cheeks as he confessed to her. It was clear that the burden of so many deaths lay heavily on him, but I couldn’t find it in myself to feel any sympathy for him.

Francesca awkwardly patted him on the head and then she leant forward, booped him on the nose and danced back off through the shifters.

“So, this is the end?” I asked Heimdallr. He got to his feet, confused and nodded at me.

“The gates that can be opened are opened, but the races will have to learn to mix again.” He said thoughtfully.

“Well you burnt that bridge.” Sykes said bitterly. “No shifter is going to want to go anywhere near a witch after this.”

He was right. We may have the Valkyrie and the Fae back on side, but no one would be trusting the witches any time soon.

“They sacrificed many of their own to open these portals.” Heimdallr said almost as if that was supposed to make it alright.

“They tried to wipe out my people.” Kyle said stepping forward. The magic radiated off him now. He had fully embraced his Alpha heritage, even if he was going to step down from the Prime Alpha position. I was so proud of him for suggesting a Council to govern them. “If the witches wish they can seek an audience with the Council when it is set up, but they had better come forward with answers and reparations if they wish to be heard.”

Kyle turned his back on the gods before him, effectively dismissing them. “If any of you have medical experience, we need to triage the wounded. Everyone else return to the pack house.” He said raising his voice to the shifters behind us. I heard the scuffle of feet moving behind me, but I didn’t take my eye off Hel. She was eying Kyle like she was going to try something and if I was completely honest, I was itching for an opportunity to stab her.

“I love it when you get that stabby look in your eye.” Sykes said pressing himself against my back and whispering in my ear. “But come on, let’s go home.” He said gently tugging my hand.

“I can’t just yet, I need to speak with Geta and my father. I need to help with the fallen. You go with the others. I’ll fly back to the pack house as soon as I can.” I told him, not taking my eye off Hel as Heimdallr quietly whispered in her ear.

Thor stepped forward in between the two parties and I was glad to have him as a breaker. Whilst I wanted to stab Hel through the face, I didn't truly think it would be the best idea I had ever had.

"It's time for you to return to your realms." Thor told them sternly.

Hel just waved her hand and a portal appeared in front of her. She didn't even look back as she stepped through. Heimdallr just turned around and then he was gone. I didn't even see a portal appear before him.

Everyone seemed to wait with baited breath. It was almost like we were waiting for them to jump back out and surprise us. When nothing happened for a moment Thor turned back to us with a sigh.

"You came." I said with a smile.

He smiled back at me and threw an arm around my shoulders. "I had a feeling that I was going to be needed."

I looked back at the Valkyrie and the Warriors stood behind us. Britt had wandered into the group and was talking to the other Elites who had hung back to see her. They were all laughing and crying, wrapping her in hugs. When Margie rushed through the line of them and tackled Britt with a hug, everyone laughed and smiled. It may or may not have brought a tear to my eye.

Geta was stood surveying the battlefield. We had lost quite a few of the Valkyrie and the Warriors as well. The others were stood with the bodies of their fallen friends. We didn't have that many wounded that weren't able to

stand on their own feet. Perhaps it was the adrenalin or perhaps the demons were just too efficient to leave any wounded behind.

“What happens now?” I asked Geta.

“We will take the bodies of our fallen back to Valhalla and light the pyres. Then we will feast in their honour.” She said sombrely.

I looked over the battlefield at the dead and tears coursed down my cheeks. It could have been a lot worse, but we had still lost too many.

“How am I any better than Hel?” I asked her. “They’re dead because I made you come here and fight for us.” I said realising how selfish I had been.

“Once we have come down from the rush of battle, we will have much to think about what has happened here today. But, you did not do anything wrong by calling on us to join you in this fight. This is what the Valkyrie were made for. This is what we were born to do and we have missed the lure of battle for so long. All Valkyrie have a choice, they do not have to remain in the ranks if they do not wish to. No one forces them to fight. To fall in battle is a great honour to us.” She explained to me.

I shook my head. I couldn’t think about it now. She was right that I needed to wait until I’d had a chance to get past today before I sat and thought about what had happened and what was going to happen next. There were too many feelings now and now that my magic was beginning to settle I was starting to feel the drain.

“Are you leaving now?” I asked her with a frown when I saw the Valkyrie start to gather the bodies of their dead.

Geta nodded as she watched. “We cannot stay here.” She said. “We have to return to Valhalla.”

“I feel like I should be coming with you.” I told her honestly. These were my people and I wanted to stand by the pyres and honour those who had sacrificed their lives here. Those who had given everything to save people that they didn’t even know.

“I understand.” She said bracing my shoulder with her hand. “But you have much to do here. The gate for Valhalla is now open and you possess the Gjallarhorn still. Even if the gates were to close once more, they would still open for you as long as it remains in your possession. Any way, you gave a lot in this battle. I don’t think that you will still be standing tonight.” She laughed.

Thor came over and joined us. “I have to return to Asgard too. I need to check on your mother.”

I immediately felt like a massive bitch for forgetting about her. “How is she doing? Did you have any problems getting out?”

“She’s healing. She will need time. And no, we didn’t have any problems, apparently a one-woman army laid waste to most of Odin’s soldiers.” He laughed. “I will come and see you soon. We have much to discuss.” He drew me into his arms and gave me a hug. I felt myself sag against him. I was fast running out of energy and I was wishing that I had asked some of the guys to stay behind with me.

“You need to sound the horn again to open the portal for us.” Geta told me. “I will return in a few weeks and we can speak further then.”



I looked down at my arm and concentrated on my magic so that I could reach under the tattoo image and pull the horn from my skin. Once I had it in my hand, I blew it one last time and the portal reopened for the Valkyrie as they carefully and quietly carried their dead through. When I released the horn, it wrapped back around my arm and settled back against my skin. I hadn't noticed it do that when we were charging into the battle.

Thor stood by my side as we watched until the last Valkyrie stepped through and it closed behind them.

"You did well." He told me as he watched the portal close.

"I don't feel like I did." I told him honestly.

"I know." He said. "It is rare to after such a fight. Go home to your mates and sleep, daughter. I will see you soon." He told me, taking a step back.

I looked up at him. My feelings about him were confusing and I was too exhausted to try and sort through them now. I nodded in agreement, then spread my now aching wings and took to the sky.

It was only about a ten-minute flight back to the pack house. It would have taken them longer to walk back, but I had lingered on the battlefield while I kept watch over the leaving Valkyrie. It wasn't until I was already in the air that I realised I hadn't seen what had happened to the Fae who had come to our aid.

I dropped down in front of the pack house and it was the least delicate landing of my very short flying life. As soon as my wings folded back into me and stopped taking my weight, my knees gave out and I dropped down to the ground. There was already a group of shifters surrounding me as I

collapsed, so it was only slightly embarrassing. I don't know if my knees had even touched the ground though before Liam was there scooping me up and carrying me back into the house. I looked over his shoulder, while he cradled me against his chest, at the shifters who were milling around the pack house. They had rushed into a battle and then it was suddenly over. I wondered how they were all feeling about what had just happened.

“Where did the Fae go?” I asked Liam as I sleepily laid my head on his shoulder.

“Virion is setting them up with somewhere to sleep. They're going to stay until tomorrow and then set off back to Galvinae. Apparently, Aubron heard the call of the horn and brought the archers without the King's permission. I don't think he's too keen to head back straight away.” Liam said rubbing his face along the top of my head. It had been so long since he had done that. I can still remember the way he used to do it to me when we were back at the academy.

I smiled and closed my eyes as I let him take me up to the suite. I was too exhausted to even pretend that I would have been able to do it myself. My magic had receded and I needed to eat and sleep. I opened one eye and looked down at myself. Okay maybe, shower then eat and sleep.

## Chapter Forty Eight

Kyle

Aria had fallen asleep on one of the sofas as soon as she had finished eating and Virion had carried her into bed. No one had spoken while we ate. I think we were all in shock from what had happened and we just needed time to process first. As soon as Aria was in bed, we all climbed in and curled around her, soaking in the relief of having our mate safe and sound with us. I had let myself sleep for a couple of hours, before dragging myself out of bed. There was much to do and I knew that I was going to need to meet with the other Alphas. Getting out of that warm bed where Aria had been curled up against my side had proved harder than I had thought though.

I walked down to the library after showering and dressing and found Wyatt and Caleb stood talking quietly. I couldn't concentrate on what they were saying though because as soon as I had walked into that room all I could look at was that fucking desk. The desk that he always sat behind to make us feel less than him. I suppose I should have asked what they did with his body. I couldn't make myself care enough to even open my mouth. I felt Virion and Braedon come into the library behind me. It was strange to have relied on just Liam and Sykes for so long and now know that I could trust these two just as much. They had fallen into places in our pack that I didn't even realise had been open, but they fit with us seamlessly. They may not have been with us for long but they still felt like my brothers in the truest sense of the word.

“Would you mind helping me carry this outside?” I asked them. I couldn't even drag my eyes off it to look at them.

Braedon clapped me on the shoulder as he wordlessly walked past me and grabbed one end of the desk while Virion took the other. I lead them out of the library and down the steps where we dumped it on the grass outside. We all took a step back, just looking at it. The man who had loved it so much was nothing but a stain on this pack's history and it was time for us to eradicate it.

I looked at Virion who stood at my side and he nodded at me before focusing his magic on the desk. The flames crept over the surface, covering it quickly. I stood there silently watching it burn. Maybe it was childish to want to burn something that had meant so much to the monster that was apparently my father, but it was making a small part of me feel a bit better, so I didn't really care.

Virion and Braedon backed away and sat down on the steps behind me, keeping watch over me while I did what I needed to do. Some of the other shifters from our pack came to silently watch it reduce to ash. I know a lot of them would have hated this thing just as much as I did. I hoped it was as cathartic for them as it was for me.

After a while I realised that Wyatt was standing beside me.

"I probably should have emptied it first." I said quietly.

Wyatt chuckled beside me. "Don't worry we did that when we first chained him up and were trying to figure out ..." He drifted off.

I put an arm around his shoulders. He tensed at first, but then he relaxed beside me. I hoped that we could get back the relationship that we used to have. I didn't blame him for any of the things that he had done, but I knew

that he blamed himself. There would be no point telling him not to. That was just the type of man that he was.

“How’s Aria?” He asked.

“She’s still sleeping. I haven’t seen her use that much magic before. I suspect she will be out of it for a while.” I told him.

“She saved us again.” He said with a wry smile. “She’s starting to make a habit of it.”

“Something tells me that she always will.” I laughed.

“Well she did have a shady career as some kind of thieving, rescuer of women before all this so I suppose we should have expected it.” Caleb laughed coming up on my other side.

“You might need to tell me that story later.” Wyatt laughed before quietly adding. “I can’t believe we actually won.”

Everyone fell quiet. Someone had to say it. It didn’t even feel real. I felt like I was still waiting for another hoard of demons to descend on us at any moment.

“Did we though?” I asked them honestly. “We barely did anything. The Valkyrie rode in and saved the day. They took all the losses. None of us did anything and the witches still got what they wanted in the end anyway.”

Silence fell around me. I hadn’t realised how many shifters had gathered around the impromptu bonfire that we had going on. Most of what was left

of my own pack was there. The Elites had gathered around and the other Alphas had joined us as well.

“So, we lost then?” Someone asked confused and no seemed to want to answer them.

“We survived.” I finally said. “In the end, I suppose that is all we could really have hoped for.”

We stood in silence until the flames had died down and the embers of the desk gently smouldered away in the grass in front of the pack house. Now was not a time to celebrate, it felt like it was a time to mourn. We had lost so many just to get to this point, even if we didn’t lose any in battle.

I looked up and met the other Alphas’ eyes. “I’m going to go and check on my mate and then I’ll meet you in the library to discuss where we go next.”

They nodded in agreement, but they didn’t really say anything. I think we were all still reeling and it was going to take some time before we even had the energy, let alone the desire, to discuss any of what had happened today. I turned around and headed back up to the suite. Virion and Braedon silently trailed behind us and I could feel the Elites following us as well. They had wanted to stand watch over Aria when she first got back, but I had sent them away to rest first. There would be no turning them away this time.

I walked into the bedroom and looked down at Aria, curled up fast asleep in the bed with Liam and Sykes on either side of her. She was so beautiful. She was everything to me. I knew that I wouldn’t be able to go on without her. I didn’t know how Wyatt had made it this long. He was a stronger man than I was. There was so much to do now to try and piece our way of life back together, but I had to make sure to make him a priority. He had

sacrificed so much for us, without us even knowing, and there had to be a way to find his mate. Caleb had mentioned that they had found some coded journals of my father's, maybe that would be a place to start. I reluctantly left Aria's side after gently laying a kiss on her forehead, at least now she could rest. Now it was my turn to look after her.

## Epilogue

### Aria

I slept through the entire first three days following the Blood Moon Battle. In the three days that followed most people were still lingering in a state of shock. Not really knowing what to do. Then the shifter packs started to leave to head home. Virion's brother stayed on longer than they had originally thought. It was obvious that they had a somewhat rocky childhood relationship, but they seemed to be working on it. Virion had promised to visit Galvinae soon to check in with them soon.

Now it was just what was left of Kyle's pack. He had taken to the position of Alpha well and all of my mates were working alongside him.

Marcus had let this place fall apart, all he had done was have the others maintain his own house. The cabins had been left to go to ruin. Most of the pack was living in the pack house now while Kyle and the others were arranging for each of the cabins to be renovated. Some of the satellite packs had chosen to stay on, but I think that was more to do with the higher ratio of females that we now had. Either way, at least we had the workers that we needed for now.

It was a week later when my father turned up again.

I was digging behind the pack house in a pasture that had been left to overgrow. It was a south facing sunny spot and I was determined to start a vegetable garden. One of the other female pack members, Lily, had found a



whole load of seeds the other day in a storage cupboard and we were going to see what we could grow. First though there was the backbreaking work of digging the pasture over and putting in the growing beds. Everyone else was busy with the cabins and I was working on it alone. I'd spent a lot of time alone since the Blood Moon, apart from when I was surrounded by my mates. I knew that I should be trying to gel more with the pack, but I was finding it hard to move past the events of the battle and I needed to work through it by myself before I could really tolerate being around people. I hadn't spent much of my life around people, or at least not happily, and it was a lot to get used to, suddenly being thrust into the pack environment. They all seemed to understand though and everyone was giving me my space.

“Do you have another spade?” My father asked from behind me.

I whirled around and found Thor leaning against the back of the house with his arms crossed and a big smile on his face. I hadn't seen him since the battle. He had said that he would come back in a few days but he didn't. I couldn't be mad with him though. I had seen how bad my mother's condition was when we escaped the cells and I knew that he had been caring for her.

Ignoring his question, I dropped my tools and walked over to where he was leaning. It just so happened to be next to where I had a drink waiting for me and I scooped up the water, downing half a bottle before I spoke to him.

“How is she doing?” I asked.

His face darkened. “She is recovering well physically, but she is finding it hard to accept a life without her wings.”

“Maybe you could bring her with you next time?” I suggested.

“I think that she would love that.” Thor said, dropping down to sit in the grass. “You don’t want to come to Asgard?”

“No.” I said, thinking carefully to try and explain myself without upsetting him. “I don’t know if I can bring myself to go back there after everything that has happened.”

“The people of Asgard can’t be blamed for the actions of Hel and Heimdallr.” Thor said softly. “They may have benefited from their actions, but they were never consulted or given an option in what happened.”

“I know.” I sighed. “But it’s hard when I live here and can see how much everyone lost. I don’t know how to explain how I feel.” I whispered.

Thor gently placed his arm around my shoulders and pulled me closer so that I was leaning against him. “I don’t think that any of us know how to feel. There is still much happening in Asgard. It is probably safer if you stay away for now anyway. We may have solved our magic problem, but everything else is still as broken as it was. The resistance still continues to fight against Odin and even though his army has diminished. He still holds a lot of power over our citizens.”

“You see that’s the thing. I feel like I need to help. That I should be doing something to help you back in Asgard, but I also feel like my loyalty should lay here with the shifters. It almost feels like if I went there to help, I would be betraying them.” I tried to explain.

“Aria, not every fight is yours. Asgard and its people are not your responsibility. I think you probably have enough going on here, don’t you?” He laughed.

I cocked my head to the side and thought about what he had said. It went against every part of me to even consider not helping them but he was right that there was too much to do here.

“There will be another.” A voice said singingly from around the corner. “And another, and another, and another, and another.”

Frannie danced around the corner spinning in circles, chanting ‘and another’ over and over again. Thor gave me a worried look, but then went back to watching her. She was surprisingly co-ordinated with her spinning and chanting. She didn’t seem to be getting dizzy at all.

“Is she okay?” Thor whispered out of the corner of her mouth to me while Frannie continued to spin and giggle.

“Yeah, I think so.” I laughed. “Come sit with us Frannie.”

Frannie sat down in front of us and Thor kept a leery eye on her. I couldn’t help but laugh at this giant of a man seemingly worried about this little woman sitting crossed legged on the grass in front of him. Although Wyatt had told me about how she had cut her way through the demon hoard that attacked the pack house, so maybe we should be a little scared of her.

Frannie looked me in the eye and took a deep breath. I could see that she was trying to centre herself. She had trouble centring herself in the present and I waited for her to get her thoughts into some sort of order.

“You are the beginning. Not the end, no, no, no. Your turn is done.” She said with a big smile, seemingly happy with herself. “First in the line.” She clapped and giggled.

“The line of what?” I asked her, I hated doing it. I know that questions made it harder for her.

Frannie’s face scrunched up as she thought of how to respond. She looked worried for a second, but then she jumped up to her feet and started to spin again giggling.

“Heroes!” She cried, spinning away from us and back around the corner of the house

I watched Frannie go with a smile on my face. I could work with that. The first in line and my turn was done. Well maybe not done, I realised as I looked around. I still had a lot to do here and if others were going to go on from here, then I would make sure that we had everything we would need to support them.

“She just called me a hero.” I pointed out.

“She definitely did.” Thor said, leaning his head back against the brick wall of the house and closing his eyes, enjoying the sun shining down on him.

“That’s cool.”

Thor laughed and nudged me with his shoulder. “Now tell me about this movie they made about me.”

“There’s actually a few.” I told him and he laughed.

We settled in, talking about movies and just generally spending time together. It was nice to have a moment of normalcy together. These were what we needed to make time for and what we had been fighting for all along.

## ARGH! DON'T HATE ME!

I know, I know! There are some points which haven't been closed off in this series. But, don't panic! There are more books coming which are set in this universe, Aria and her mates will even feature in some them. In fact, they're in the first chapter of the next book.

Whilst the story closes here (in the most part) for Aria and her mates, it will be picked up again by the next set of characters. I know it's annoying, but I felt like it was their story to tell and it would have been weird to, for example, tell the story of how Wyatt finds his mate again, from Aria's perspective. So, (in case that isn't a big enough hint for you) yes, Wyatt's story is coming up next in the new Revelations series. There are some fairly strong hints in this book about who will be taking that journey with him. Or, you can just check out my website because it tells you for definite on there.

There are also some other books planned. If you have a particular character you want to see have a whole book revolve around them, let me know! If the people speak, I will try and work it into my schedule.

ALSO BY CJ COOKE

**Destiny Series**

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**Revelations**

Escaped – anticipated August 2020

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**The Stoneridge Wolf Pack**

Book 1 - The Wolf Hunts – anticipated 2020

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CJ Cooke lives in Nottinghamshire England, with her husband and son. She drinks more tea than could be possibly healthy for you and dances to her own internal song. She swears more than is probably socially acceptable and yes, she's a bit of a weirdo, but as her husband always says, she's his beautiful weirdo.

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You can also contact me on the website, via the contact form, if you would like to sign up to beta read one of the next books (a secret perk for all those people who actually read this part of the book!).

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## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

It really helps me if you write a review for the book, so that I can make sure that you all like what I'm writing. Constructive criticism is just that, constructive. It helps me to get better at what I do. Just try not to be too mean because I totally will cry if you are ?? Also, on a purely selfish note, the more reviews you kindly write for me, the further the books can reach.

It also helps motivate me in the middle of the night when I'm on my millionth edit and close to pulling out my own eyes.

In terms of thank you's, I have to give a massive thank you to my Beta Beauties, Jen and Karen. This was the longest of all three books and it was hard to get through! Thank you for your help and support when I was at the point of just jacking it all in.

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