

Chapter Seven

Cardan

My world f****g stills.

My hands loosen around her slowly, as the shock subsides.

She was pregnant.

She was pregnant... with my children.

"How many?"

She snies, her glossy eyes looking up at me in confusion.

"How many kids?"

Her expression is pained, as she whispers, "Three."

"f**k," The breath escapes me, and I let go of her completely, shoving my hands into my hair as I pace the room.

Three kids.

Three of mine.

"Boys?" I ask.

"Two... and a girl."

Goddess. The need to sit down hits me hard. I move to the sofa, letting my body drop as my head falls into my hands.

"I... I didn't know how to tell you, Cardan." Her voice is small, panicked. I want to reach out, hold her in my arms and take all that worry away. But I'm still as a f****g statue, trying to process all the new information I've been hit with within the last half hour.

I've been unable to take my eyes off her since she appeared here. And it's not just because I didn't want to, but because I physically couldn't.

Five years. Five years of searching for her with no results, and she suddenly shows up and throws my world into upheaval, disrupting my system, my life and my f****g mind.

Seeing her was too satisfying, like a starved man taking his next meal.

But f**k if it doesn't hurt.

She's still the most beautiful thing I've ever laid my eyes on, and now, her presence feels like an ache behind my ribcage I can't quite shake.

She can't feel what I do.

The moon goddess has to be playing some trick on me, some sort of f****d up form of revenge. Because I know damn well none of this is a misunderstanding. It's not some mistake.

I've only ever had this kind of reaction to a female ve years ago, when I found my mate, for the rst time.

Second chance mates are unheard of.

I never even thought it could be a slight possibility.

But it's taking everything in me not to merge my body with hers, not to sink my teeth deep into her neck and claim her again and again and again.

It's not normal.

None of this is. It wasn't this careless ve years ago with Abigail. It was nothing like this.

Sure the mate bond is potent, a wolf's damnation to be honest. But the anxious energy prickling at my insides, the way my wolf has risen, agitated, hovering at the surface, eager to mark, claim, take. My body thrums with the effort it's taking me to restrain myself.

Her scent is intoxicating, enough to bring any sane male to his knees, and I want nothing at this moment more than I want to bury my nose in her hair and take it all in. Become one with it.

Rid her of every other foreign smell clinging to her skin.

She can't feel it though.

She says she can't feel it.

Is she lying? Out of spite?

My head lifts, turning to look at her standing in the centre of the room. She's tense, but it's not because of me.

I'm not having the same effect on her as she has on me.

But... how?

How is any of this possible?

There's a naive voice in the back of my head, lling me with hope. Telling me that maybe this is fate. A second chance? To make things better between us?

Her hiccup sets me straight, shoving my head up from under the current of confusion. "I need your help, Cardan."

"Tell me everything."

"Everything?"

"How... how the hell did this happen?"

She looks taken aback, the tears forming harsh tracks on her reddened cheeks. "We... Cardan, the night of your coronation."

"No," I interrupt her carefully, closing my eyes for a brief second at the memory, "Tell me how they were taken."

Her lips form a silent 'o', and then they tremble, her hands shaking as well as she reaches into the back pocket of her jeans, pulling out a small piece of paper. "I was in the kitchen, making breakfast yesterday morning when-" Her voice catches, and the utter pain in her expression pushes me to my feet, "I was injected with something... it knocked me out. When I woke up... they were gone." The last words end on a whisper.

I take the note, pulling it loose to read what's written.

Hell.

I didn't even know about them until moments ago, yet somehow, I'm the target of this attack?

Her kids-our kids-are nowhere to be found right now, probably scared, hurt or f**k, even worse because some loose end out there is trying to get to me.

I rub a hand over my jaw, suddenly not even wanting to meet Nat's eyes.

What does she think of this?

Does she blame me?

"Do you have any idea who could be behind this?" Her voice is hopeful.

But slowly, I shake my head.

She lets out a short cry, palming her face with her hands.

"Hey," My throat tightens, and I reach out, placing a hand on her shoulder to steady her. But then realize it's a mistake as soon as I do it, because she instantly stiffens under my touch, recoiling away from me like she would a re.

She won't even let me touch her.

My arm draws back, "I'm so-"

"What are we going to do, Cardan?" She cries, "They could be suffering! Only goddess knows what my poor babies are going through right now." Her hand clutches her neck, "They're all alone, and scared. How could this happen? How could I have let this happen?"

"No, Nat, don't blame yourself for this."

"I was careless!" The tears are falling faster now, and it guts me that there's nothing I can do to stop them. "I should have been more attentive. I should have been keeping a closer eye on them?"

"Where were you?"

"At home!"

"No," I say, keeping my gaze on her, "Where... where did you go?"

Her sobs quieten as she understands my question, "I left, Cardan. I... I left this life... it wasn't for me."

"Don't say that."

"Don't act like you know me!"

"I do know you!"

Her eyes blaze, shining so beautifully I have to fold my arms across my chest so I don't do something stupid like pull her into my arms, "Yeah," She says, holding my gaze, "Yeah, you did."

To anyone else, it would have been a simple agreement.

But I read the hidden meaning behind her response easily. I did until I didn't. And it's no one else' fault but mine.

"You need to rest."

"Rest?" She cries, "My kids are out there under the mercy of goddess knows who and you're asking me to rest."

"You're tired, Nat." I say, keeping my voice soft, "I'm sure you haven't slept for the last two days. There's nothing you can do for them when you're in this state. You need your energy back."

She looks around the room, like she wants to argue but knows I'm right regardless.

"Get some sleep," I tell her, "I'll be here when you wake up, when you've eaten and you're well rested."

She looks at me, her face is impassive, and for probably the rst time ever, I'm unable to know what she's thinking, and it is disconcerting. It takes me back to how easy things used to be between us. How easy it always was for me to read her expressions, to tell what she was thinking without her having to mutter even a single word.

The years have denitely been hard on her, toughening her up. I can almost feel the shield she's put around herself.

A scue sounds from outside the door. I turn my head just as an angry, "Let me through!" echoes outside, moments before the door swings open.

My jaw tenses as I take her in, still unchanged from her wedding gown.

Fiona.