

Chapter 1 Chapter 1

When the sun was setting at dusk, Alpha Tate ran through the woods in his brown-furred wolf, along with Beta Mannon's black wolf and Xiera's grey wolf. They caught sight of a few rogues and were chasing them down. This rogue-hunting expedition already lasted eight months, yet he and everyone else doubted that they caught every single scoundrel there was in the Kingdom of Mondeideal.

Most of the wolves were getting tired and impatient. How much longer did they have to do this? When they said there were still hundreds out there, how many hundreds were they talking about exactly? It was exhausting! And the constant need to be on one's toes was still the reason that some of the smaller pack's leaders remained anxious

despite the many rogues already secured behind bars in lycan territory.

Tate was probably the only one who didn't mind continuing the hunt. Apart from pack business, hunting rogues kept him busy, preventing his mind from inadvertently wandering off to Lucianne, who was now the Lycan Queen. It took every ounce of strength in him to offer the Lycan King and Queen his congratulations on their wedding day. The way she glowed and blushed whenever the King was by her side showed how happy she was with him, how at ease she felt whenever he was in the room. Tate had never seen Lucianne like that with anyone else.

Even if Tate weren't told to refrain from interfering in that relationship, he wouldn't have interfered. Lucianne had gone through so much for her age. She deserved to be happy, even if it meant her being with someone else. As much as he wanted her to be his Luna, he made peace with the fact that that was not a possibility anymore.

Moving on hadn't been easy for Tate, but it was doable with time, time away from her. The tormenting anguish in his chest when he had to cope with thinking about Lucianne being with someone other than him slowly, very slowly, became a bearable pain. As more time passed, the pain reduced to a mere discomfort. He still missed her but the emotions associated with loss had subsided a lot in the past few months. His pack members had been a good source of encouragement and comfort, making moving on feel like a phase in life rather than an end.

As Tate dodged branches and tree stumps, the rogues came closer into view. Two were black and one was red, wine red. Red wolves were extremely rare, and thought to be extinct generations ago. Tate himself had never seen one before. Red wolves were clairvoyants, and depending on their maturity and psychological stability, they could be either very accurate or inaccurate in telling the future. In the past, some of their precognition abilities were so inaccurate that their own clients had them slaughtered for poor fortune-telling.

Tate tried not to get too distracted by what he was seeing, and focused on capturing the rogues. With an authoritative howl into the sky, he pounced forward and blocked the rogues' way, stopping them from running any further. The rogues came to an abrupt halt as they whimpered, an express cry for mercy.

Tate shifted back to his human form and uttered, "By order of the king and queen, I, Alpha Tate of the White Blood Pack, place you all under arrest. You are to follow us back to White Blood, where we'll hold you in custody until the authorities come get you. Any attempt to escape justifies an immediate execution. Understood?"

The rogues continued whimpering and nodded at whatever Tate just said. Mannon and Xiera shifted back to their human forms as well. They took towels out of their sling bags, and threw them over the rogues before hastily fastening a silver bracelet around their front limb, forcing them to shift back.

The two black wolves were males, and the red wolf was a female, who looked particularly small, even smaller than Lucianne when she was a wolf. She couldn't be older than fifteen. Her rosewood eyes amplified fear as she looked at her friends in dismay.

The males looked afraid as well. They were in their early twenties at most. As soon as the rogues properly wrapped themselves with the towels, Tate and his wolves led them back to White Blood before any of them could come up with a clever plan to escape. He really hoped they wouldn't try to escape. Things would just get messy and bloody.

Fortunately for everyone involved, they made it back to White Blood without any fuss, and Mannon and Xiera placed them in the dungeon.

In the shower, Tate's thoughts went to the rogues all of a sudden. There was something different about this group, especially that wolf who looked like a child. Was she a child, or was she just born small and didn't look her age? None of the rogues they caught so far was a minor. This couldn't be one, could it?

Then, there was their demeanor. Most rogues turned defensive and brutal when they were cornered. And who could blame them? The animal instinct in all of them when trouble came was to be defensive and brutal. But these three today were not. They didn't even try to attack.

The girl came to Tate's mind again. Why were his thoughts still lingering on her? His animal even felt that they shouldn't go too far with the red wolf in particular, but why? Red wolf or not, this was a rogue. What made this one different from the rest? Why was he feeling this need to...protect her?

To put his mind to rest, he decided to see the three they captured today. After putting on a blue shirt and black shorts, the Alpha made his way to where the rogues were held captive. The two warriors at the dungeon entrance greeted him with a smile, and he returned their gestures when he walked past them.

The guards flipped on the lights when he entered. White Blood's Gamma, Toby, was right about refurbishing the dungeon to make it less eerie and more sanitary. Some of the rogues they previously caught looked so afraid of being caught, and swore to Goddess a thousand and one times that they would never try to escape and made good on their word

. Toby figured that not all rogues needed to be bullied or scared any more than they already were.

The fixed-up lighting made the place brighter, and the three-month-old cemented floor and recently-installed toilet bowls were a much better alternative in terms of hygiene compared to the earthy ground from before. At least they had a proper place to empty their bowels now.

Tate walked down the familiar pathway to where they kept prisoners. They kept them at the far end of the dungeon so that it would take them a longer time to escape if they ever tried to.

The rogues had been given spare clothes and separate cells. Tate stopped at the first cell to study one of the two men they caught. There was a healed scar running down his right leg and his pitch black eyes were fixed to the ground like he was in a trance.

Tate moved on to the second cell. The ginger-haired man met Tate's eyes for a brief second before looking away.

Finally, the Alpha came to the last cell, where the she-wolf was held. She sat on the bunk bed, hugging her legs as her back pressed against the wall. Her straight brown hair reached her lower back and covered most of her face. Why was someone this young a rogue? Tate's wolf was instinctively worried. He was tough and strict as an Alpha, but like every other noble fighter, he was merciful and patient to children. Tate knew couldn't just let her be here for the night and then ship her to lycan territory to be put with the other criminals.

"How old are you?" Tate asked after considering what he should do.

Her rosewood eyes turned fierce when she spat, "None of your business!" Not the typical reply one would expect from a wolf who was just whimpering and pleading less than an hour ago.

The Alpha tried again, this time matching her hostility, "You're right. None of what happens to you and your friends is any of my business. I only asked because it's more humane to be more lenient with minors. But if you'd rather be subjected to a round of whipping before the lycans come get you three tomorrow, then be my guest."

The whipping was, of course, a lie. The men in the other two cells heard this, too, believing to be true, and became more fearful than they already were. Tate turned away from the she-wolf, and pretended to walk away before her small voice came, "Thirteen."

He asked, "Are these your brothers?" He doubted it. They look nothing alike.

"No."

"Friends?"

"Something like that."

"What does that mean?"

"We just run together."

"From where?"

She avoided Tate's gaze, and she pressed her lips shut. Tate thought she wasn't going to say anything further before her answer came in a sad, lonely whisper, "Everywhere."

After another moment of silence, Tate muttered, "Okay."

His eyes glazed over as he mind-linked Lucianne, who now had formed permanent mind-links with every pack leader as their queen.