

## 28 | Blood Of A God

Consciousness comes in the form of Riot's bare chest against my face and his arm wrapped around my torso like a python. I don't bother waking him up. Instead I attempt to gain my freedom by rolling over, which only triggers that aforementioned python to go on lock down.

Through the open curtains on the wall straight in front of me, I can see the blackness of the outside. Dreary and dark.

A crack of thunder rumbles through the house briefly, vibrating the bed gently. Riot nuzzles his nose into my disheveled hair, still asleep. It's as if, even unconsciously, he's showing me that he's still there. I smile before closing my eyes again.

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Morning rolls around and when the sun comes up it stays dark outside. The heavy patter of rain drums on the roof above, creating a relaxing sort of lullaby.

We're both awake now, but neither one of us makes a move to get up. My arm is thrown lazily across his washboard stomach, one leg tangled with his while my temple lays his shoulder. His arm is wrapped around me, making me feel once again safe and sound.

He presses a kiss to my forehead, melting me from the inside out. He has this way of always being intimidating— whether he's threatening the lives of others or putting butterflies in my stomach. The unfairness of the power he has drives me crazy. But maybe that's why it took him so long to accept this, because he feels the same way.

"Are you ready to get up?" His morning voice sends shivers down my back.

I groan. I never want to get up. How many more chances like this will I get? "Do we have to?"

Right then, as if on cue, my stomach decides to recite the symphony of a starving whale, growling unrealistically loud.

"Yes," he chuckles, poking me right above the belly button. He untangles our bodies and sits up. Immediately I feel lost without his added warmth and firm embrace. A pang of vulnerability shoots through me and I quickly knock it down.

From where I'm laying, I catch glimpse of the little black symbol made into his skin. A dire descendant. I know what that mark means and the history of it. But what about the other peculiar thing etched into his flesh?

When he stands up and stretches the muscles of his back glide fluently beneath his skin. I can almost feel my pupils dilate.

"Nooo," I whine and stretch my limbs. I'm not ready to leave this moment yet. And when I reach out for him, he's not long coming back to me. He sits down beside me on the bed, tucking one leg beneath him.

My eyes land on the three long scars running diagonally across his pec. The only other flaw that marks his flawless body. I haven't thought that much about it before. How he got that scar. All I know is that it came from his own hand.

I put my hand overtop of his and raise them both up to his chest. With my fingers overlapping his, I line them up perfectly with the grisly claw mark. It's like putting the missing piece in the last slot of the puzzle.

"Why did you do it?" I ask quietly. There's so many mysteries about this wolf. And I want to know every single one.

He arches an eyebrow, catching my fingers between his and curling them into his palm. "Do you really want to know?"

I nod, certain that I do.

He takes a deep breath, closing his eyes.

"It's from when I le this pack. Almost four years ago," he starts.

"Those ear rings, they're permanent right?" He looks at my ear and I nod again. That's common sense. Pack rings don't come out. Ever.

"No they're not," he corrects.

I scrunch my face up. Now he's lost me. There's no possible way to remove a ring once it's in. There's just not. The Bastieelian metal they're made from is unbreakable, and even then they're blessed by our ancestors. They simply don't come out.

"My parents brought us here as rogues. Minutes a er stepping through the gates we're being tagged like trophy kills with those goddamn ear rings."

I remember seeing Senya's. The color gold: Khopeski's trademark. She still has hers, but Riot doesn't. His ears are untouched, leaving no possibility that a ring was ever near it.

"You want to know why I hate this place? All of the fucking rules. It's a fine if you so much as breathe the wrong way. I couldn't go anywhere or do anything without half these assholes watching me and the other half telling me what to do. They wanted to smother me."

As he talks, his voice gets increasingly more passionate and angry. Just remembering it is irritating him as if it were over four years ago and he's still living here.

As I think about it, his hatred starts to seem justified. He lived his life as the rogue he was born as and suddenly he's being buried in pack rules and judgmental members. For a wolf who loathes control, his parents had a snowball's chance in hell of that going smoothly.

"And Senya..." I trail o. I have so many questions about her, but I'm scared of asking the wrong one. One sensitive subject and he's liable to lose what rationality he contains.

"She laid down like the perfect lap dog," he growls. "She kissed every ass she possibly could. She even sided with them. She didn't give a fuck what they did, just that they were right and I was wrong."

He throws his arms out to the sides, gesturing to our surroundings. "Look at where we are! This is because she can't stand that I broke the rules and le this hellhole."

I've determined that "they" is anyone in the Khopeski pack, especially anyone with authority. Although I know Riot's anger isn't directed at me, my nerves can't help but to be on edge. He gives o the exact violently unstable air that I've heard whispered about before. Though that's never stopped me before.

"You wanted out," I state so ly. There is no comforting for something like this. The least I can do is show that I'm listening.

He nods. "The Hierarchy hates me. When I called them to council to say I was leaving, they refused to let me. If I walked out those gates, I won and they lost. And god forbid that happens," he says sarcastically.

His hand subconsciously squeezes mine with a bone crushing force as he tells the next part. Nonetheless I grit my teeth and hope I don't hear something crack.

"Instinct told me what to do. I have no idea how it worked but it did. I dug until my claws scraped bone, Adrienne. Then the blood did the rest. It fell o and the hole in my ear disappeared."

I squint, ba led beyond comprehension. Blood?Blood doesn't melt metal. It would have to be the blood of a god to do that. Lava would barely even melt Bastieel metal. What he's telling me is far fetched at best and beyond impossible.

But it doesn't even cross my mind to call him a liar.

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I didn't ask anymore questions. I decided that trying my luck to see how angry he could become without breaking something would be a bad idea. So I avoided it, despite the herculean urge to ask about his parents and the story behind what he said to Senya.

"They killed our parents! If you weren't so far up his ass you would realize that!"

They were dead. Anyone could guess that. But it's just the matter of how. I can't imagine what it would be like to lose your parents once you've had them.

My route to becoming an orphan was virtually painless. I didn't know them to grieve them and the underlying resentment that I'd been abandoned only helped me along the way. But Riot was barely a teenager when his were ripped away from him. The people who raised him, taken away by murder. It has to sting.

I comfort Riot in the only way I know how: by touching him. Touch is the only thing that can calm him down, along with a few choice words here and there, which I'm currently out of. So a long lasting hug and a soothing hand rubbing his back will have to su ice for now.

My stomach kept growling at her words, so eventually Riot insisted we head downstairs to the kitchen.

"Do you know how to cook?" He asks, going through the cabins over the counters.

I laugh. "Honestly? I shouldn't even be allowed in here."

Agatha would be growling in her grave right now, jumping at the chance to put me through misery. I can all but hear her nagging in my ear, saying she's taught me all there is to know and then blaming me when I don't know it.

I'm occupied with irritating memories of the old woman who couldn't break me trying her damndest at it when Riot turns around. Before I know it, a bowl of white powder, milk, and eggs is being shoved into my hands.

"What are you- No, this is really a bad idea."

He hands me a handheld device with two whisks and an electric cord attached.

"I trust you," he says meaningfully, touching my hand gently.

I raise my eyebrows in amazement. "You truly are self destructive."

With a quick kiss to the top of my head, Riot tells me he has to go pick something up in the city. Before I can protest, he's already out the door. Which means leaving me to my own devices.

A certain inkling tells me that he truly wants this house to burn down. And considering his very blatant hatred of Khopeski, I don't doubt it in the slightest.

Minutes is all I expect it to take before everything spirals out of control, but somehow I surprise even myself. Nothing is burning or broken yet. If Nagatha's cataract blurred vision could see me now she might even be proud.

That's what I would like to think at least. In reality it would be a lecture about the proper method of stirring.

God, I want a cigarette.

So maybe the kitchen hasn't gone up in flames yet, but at what cost? It takes e ort ,which only gives back stress in return. Everything is beeping— the oven, the microwave, and whatever other appliance I've forgotten to turn o.

It's gone to my head. I can hear the ringing in my ears, multiplying in my imagination.

Why does he hate me? Haven't I paid enough for the train incident?

Why would anyone put themselves through this? Our ancestors had the right idea. I would rather eat a raw carcass than go through this, too.

Out of the corner of my eye, though the thick silk curtains, a shadow moves.

It's the beeping. It's driving me mad.

Then, through the crackling of bacon and blaring of timers, I hear something. A sudden shattering coming from the back patio.

The chance to leave the kitchen and all of the beeping behind is a golden opportunity I can't pass up. My senses tingle in alertness the closer I get to the glass door with the shades drawn. Whatever is on the other side, my wolf instincts don't have a good feeling about.

I jerk the door open to find nothing but a clay pot shattered on the ground, the plant and its soil strewn across the patio.

As soon as my foot crosses the threshold of the house, my mistake is confirmed. An arm loops around my neck, dragging me backwards into a body.

"GET OFF, YOU FU--"

A rag smashes against my face. The smell of chemicals smothers me.

My vision tunnels, caving in. The last thing I pick up on is that goddamn beeping. Except it's more high pitched. More shrill and annoyingly persistent. Like a smoke detector.

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