

Chapter 24

The sky that had been gloomy when I arrived back at the mansion opened up. It was pouring rain, soaking my fur thoroughly within a matter of minutes. The grass was completely saturated already and mud holes were forming. It was a mess to run in, slippery and dangerous, threatening to send me sliding at any moment.

I didn't care.

All I could think about was Caleb and poor Abby. She had trusted me to keep her safe. As her babysitter I had been paid to make sure nothing bad happened to her. And I had invited an awful man into her life. Hell, I had encouraged him to come over when I was with her because I thought his behavior towards her was cute.

25

It made me sick and each time my stomach rolled I just pushed myself harder, thinking that if I ran hard enough and got far enough my aching muscles would be the only thing I could think about.

It didn't work at first and after an endless span of time, I still didn't feel any better.

But I didn't stop. I couldn't.

I felt like every time I blinked, every time I sucked in a full lung of air, I saw him in my mind. I could so easily see little Abby's little face too, so close to my sister in age. I had only ever seen her as a fun way to earn some extra money. And I had destroyed her.

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And what of Caleb?

2

He was dead now, gone. He would never be able to fully pay for his sins. Hades had said that he needed to die and he was right. No man like that- who could do something so awful repeatedly- deserved to live. But it still wasn't fair.

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It wasn't fair that he was buried somewhere on my packlands and his family was mourning him like he was taken too soon. It wasn't fair that I wasn't allowed to return home and see my family because Hades had done the right thing. And it wasn't fucking fair that he didn't suffer when he died. At first, I was horrified that he had died in battle. Now, I wished Hades had been less effective so he could die slowly, bleeding out and suffering. And I wished that all those mourning him knew the truth.

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I had loved him. I had wanted a life with him so badly that I had not wanted a mate of my own. I had thought that he would be my everything. I was ready to go against the wishes of my family and werewolf culture for that bastard. I felt sick all over again when I thought of the way he touched me, how he made me feel so wanted.

23

Now, I felt like filth.

13

I pushed harder.

My claws dug into the soft soil, but still slid through the mud. I wasn't sure if it was raining harder now or if it was just dripping off the trees, but I felt like there was suddenly too much moisture. It was dripping into my eyes, running into my ears. I shook my head, trying to keep my senses about me as I continued at a breakneck speed.

My back paws landed in a mud pit with a heavy thump and when I tried to pull them up again I let out a yelp, feeling a mess of roots wrap around one of my legs. I fell into the murky water with a mighty splash and a scream.

I couldn't be idle. I felt like it would be the end of me if I stopped moving. I thrust my body forward in a desperate attempt to untangle myself and keep moving. I was only met with shooting pain raising up my leg. It was broken, snapped right above the paw.

Frustrated, betrayed, and in so much agony, I tipped my head back and let out a thunderous howl towards the cloud covered moon, cursing the moon goddess for doing this to me. Why did I have to fall in love with Caleb? And why did my mate have to be the one to tell me the truth? I just wanted to be loved, to have a mate and a family that cared for me.

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What was so wrong with me that I didn't deserve basic comforts?

18

My head lowered until my chin was resting in the mud. I shut my eyes, hoping that something, anything would take the hurt away.

I drifted in and out of sleep. It was awful, but I was exhausted and didn't have much of a choice. It was dark now and I had run off the lands that Hades controlled. I was lost and with no light I would have little luck limping around. Once my bones had began healing I could try and wiggle my foot out again, but it was too risky now. I didn't want to make the injury worse. So I would shiver in the puddle, half asleep while whimpers poured out my mouth. Sometimes I would shiver so violently it would wake me enough to lift my head or rain would drop from the above tree, landing on my fur and startling me.

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But when I woke up to the sound of someone or something splashing through a nearby puddle I released a feral snarl.

"It's just me," Hades murmured into the dark, the sun now completely gone.

"Though I don't know if that puts me in a safer position or not."

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His attempt at a joke fell flat and I settled my head in the mud again.

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"You've gotten yourself into quite a mess, haven't you Char?" he said, coming closer. I let out a grumble, but didn't respond otherwise until I felt his hands slide down either side of my body and attempt to lift me out of the water. I snapped at his fingers when the pain shot through my hind end.

"Alright, let's have a look then."

2

He settled me back in the mud but had identified that the problem was submerged. Now, his fingers were careful as they moved below the surface, feeling what he could and frowning as he navigated. I let out a warning snarl when he came close to the injury and expected him to pull away. Instead, there was a snap of the root and a scream exploded from my mouth.

"It's alright, it's done. I'm sorry that it hurt, but I needed to get you out of the mud and I needed to see in the injury," he explained. "Do you think you would be okay if I carried you home?" he asked.

I let out a growl in response. He tipped his head back, staring at the sky that refused to stop raining. I had lost track of time, but I was sure we were only a few hours away from the sun rising again. He let out a frustrated sigh then surprised me by sitting with his back against a tree, effectively soaking his pants.

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"Forgive me, this is going to hurt," he whispered.

Then, his arms were around me and he was pulling me into his lap, out of the puddle. I let out a squeal and thrashed as my injured leg flared up again, detesting the movement. But I was settled into his lap rather quickly and his fingers were running through my fur. I wanted to bark at him for causing me pain, but all I could care about was the warmth his body offered mine and how soothing his touch felt. He was chasing away all the pain.

"Rest, Char. In a couple hours you'll heal enough to not be in pain when I carry you. I'll take you home, you can have a bath and you can sleep as long as you'd like."

I felt my eyes grow heavy, doing as he said. I had suffered enough today. I deserved some rest, some time with no worries.

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I felt him move and a moment later his jacket was laid over my still trembling body.

"I'm sorry my love. I didn't mean for it to come out like that. You didn't deserve that. I promise I will make it up to you when you let me," he vowed just as I faded into sleep.

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~~~Distraction Section~~~

Double update because the last two chapters have been less than lovely. Writing them was tough and I don't imagine reading them was much better. Now we have something a little softer and sweeter to look forward to, right?

Question of the Day: Do you prefer spontaneous updates that occasionally are plentiful or would you rather have an update schedule for consistency?

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