

# Ch 1: Elara

My mother always warned me not to enter the forest. Everyone in Darkwood knew of the monsters that lurked inside. The Whispering Woods was not the place for a human to wander, particularly an unbonded female omega.

Our people wrote tales about the magic that turned fae into beasts, made them ravenous and blood thirsty. Anything was better than the men in the town. The same ones who would throw beer and drench my clothing. They tried to touch me in inappropriate places as I minded myself. Once Father had left years ago, never to return, Mother kept trying to push me toward one of the townsfolk. How could I be intimate with any of the men that sneered at me and slandered my name and reputation behind my back.

What man would want such a tall omega? An omega that stood nearly as tall as them. A freak of nature they would state.

It was frowned upon to think negatively about others, but they had it coming. It wouldn't upset me to know if they all mysteriously died or the village was burned down to the ground. They were all despicable, depraved people. Yet they wanted to think they were righteous and better than the beasts in the forests? Ha, foolish men.

I had spent the morning turning beeswax into candles, getting them ready for the market. Mother had been out all morning doing god knows what. Probably spending the meager coins that I had earned. She tended to believe that since she birthed me, housed me, fed me, and clothed me, she was entitled to my coin and labor. I owed her for destroying her body and ruining her life.

I couldn't exactly state that I hated my mother, but I greatly resented her. She stumbled into our little cottage around midday, her hair was a mess, her clothes were crooked, and she reeked of mead. What I didn't expect was for a man to follow her into our space.

"I brought you something, El. You're nearing thirty and it is time you got out of my hair. Let me introduce you to this lovely man who offered me coin for your hand," she proudly bragged.

"You can't sell me mother, I'm an adult. I have my own freewill," I lamented.

"I'll do whatever I want with you, omega. You're my property. I birthed you," she sneered. "You will meet him and accept this lovely gift you have received." She backed up and plastered on her perfect smile as she turned back to the man in question. "This is Regent Haylor."

His eyes zeroed in on me, the need to squirm under his predatory gaze was nearly overwhelming. I curtsied as required. "Pleasure to meet you, I'm Elara."

"She's larger than you stated," he muttered to my mother. "Quite plain as well."

"She's a virgin at least," my mother muttered to him under her breath.

"Very well." He walked toward me, barely the same height as me. "Your mother already introduced us so I'll make this quick. I shall be back tomorrow to collect you and your belongings and you will accompany me to my home and become my wife. I have given your mother half the coin already for your hand. Make sure to be ready by morning, I do not like to be kept waiting," he threatened.

"I understand." It was the only thing I could think to say that wouldn't cause more harm.

He nodded, turning back toward the door. "Good. See you tomorrow." He turned toward my mother quickly. "You will receive the other half tomorrow when I arrive. Make sure she is

bathed.” With that, he left, slamming the wooden door behind him, leaving us in the cramped space alone.

“You heard the man. Now get out of my sight until the morning. Don’t do anything stupid either. This is a great chance for you.”

She meant a great chance for her. If she wanted money so bad maybe she could be the one to marry him. Or better yet, stop spending all her coin on mead and sex.

I scurried away, moving toward my tiny corner that had my bed, if you could even call it that. Dread filled in the pit of my stomach the more I sat in silence, waiting. There was something off about that man that had unsettled me. He wasn’t good one bit. But what could I do? It’s not like I had money to run away or a friend who could house me, no one to protect me.

An hour or so went by, mother fell asleep in her room. This was the only time I could leave, nightfall was too much of a risk. I gathered my wits, put on my only pair of shoes and quietly escaped through the back door that was on the edge of the woods. The less people who saw me, the better. I could only imagine what would happen to me if I was caught.

It was a cool afternoon, the breeze picked up as I entered the treeline. Although the sun began to sink, the trees created a dense canopy, cutting off light. I quickened my steps the farther I moved away from my entire life and the only home I had ever known.

The forest was quiet except for the chirps of birds that sat high up in the tree foliage. Time was impossible to tell, especially when the clouds began to darken above me. The dark sky began to rumble, making the earth shake beneath my feet. The scent of rain filled my nostrils as drops started to hit the ground.

Please, please, please. I begged the weather. My psyche couldn’t take being stormed on right now on top of every other questionable decision I was running from. I was nearly out of breath. My lungs burned, my legs screamed, my stomach tied in knots. I hadn’t eaten practically all day, I felt my body’s reserves sputter out. There was nothing more important than finding somewhere safe, so I kept pushing.

The sound of a twig snapping forced me to stop, my head snapped up as I surveyed the area. It was difficult to see as the rain pelted down, creating a haze around me. Suddenly there was a low, deep, throaty growl that had the hairs on my arms and neck stand up at attention. I turned around slowly to find a monster staring right at me, his light green eyes vivid and full of hunger. He stalked slowly toward me, growing bigger in size the closer he got.

All I could do was freeze, my body wouldn’t cooperate or move. It had given up on me as if it knew something I had not. Was this monster dangerous? Were they going to kill me? As soon as they got close enough, his scent swirled around—vetiver and cedar mixed with the rain, creating a heady and calming combination. Somewhere in the recesses of my brain, my omega squealed, stating that we were safe and everything would work out, but I was unconvinced.

He threw me over his shoulder quickly, something that took me by surprise with how quickly he was able to snatch me up. I let out a squeak as I felt his arm wrap around my thighs, holding me tight against his body. My body began to wiggle, trying to break free of his hold. There was a loud smack in the air, cutting through the hoots of the night. Suddenly warmth and pain bloomed on my butt cheek, my face flamed red from how tactless and rough he was handling me.

“Don’t move,” he growled.

“Where are you taking me?” I panted as his hand soothed the ache he created.

“Home, little omega.”

Most people would probably be scared in this situation, but all I felt was the thrill of excitement coursing through my veins, my core throbbed with how much larger and stronger he was than me. The way he threw me over his shoulder with ease.

He didn't break a sweat as he started jogging at a brisk pace. His steps were silent against the forest floor. My eyes traveled to his feet as I hung down his back, noticing that he had large, specialized paws and an elevated heel. At the base of his spine was a fluffy, thick, cream colored tail that moved as he ran. It was impossible not to stare at his legs or his paws.

I wasn't sure how long we had been traveling for but the forest and trees blurred by, the forest was now dim, cloaking the forest in darker shadows. The rain had finally let up, turning into a light sprinkle. We were both already soaked by then. How far away was his home? Was he even taking me home in the first place? My thoughts began to spiral, a knot forming in my stomach.

"You're not going to eat me—are you?" I asked warily. Something I probably should have asked when he first snatched me. But let's just say I was in shock, on top of finding the monster quite attractive.

He let out a huff, shaking his head. "Not in the way you're imagining, sweet omega," he growled. My brain went through what he stated, trying to figure out his intent when it finally clicked. Oh, ohhh. Men—did that sort of thing? The image of this giant monster between my legs made me squirm against him, need coursed through my body. It was time to change the subject before he could scent my arousal.

"Are you going to at least tell me your name?"

"Vidar," he growled in that rumbly, deep voice I wanted to hear more of.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Elara."

Since my body finally had time to rest, I cataloged how exhausted I was and what parts of my body were in pain. Earlier I had tripped on a root and twisted my ankle, forgetting that it even happened as I panicked.

"What are you? If you don't mind me asking."

"Werewolf fae," he answered quickly.

Ahh that makes sense then why he looked like a wolf. "Can you shift or transform?"

"No, this is my only form. I can cut my claws, but that is all."

"Is that normal for your... species? Are you a species? Or are all fae one species? I'm assuming you interact with other fae, or monsters? Are all monsters considered fae?"

He huffed a small laugh as he patted my butt with his giant hand. "You sure are a curious little thing, aren't you?"

Shame flooded through me at his comment. It was something I would always get in trouble for, whether it was my mother or other townfolk. "I'm sorry."

"Tsk, ts— none of that now. It's only natural to be curious, not something to apologize for, okay?" he patted me again, trying to console my emotional state.

It was cute that he was giving me butt pats as affection. Although my brain started wandering, trying to imagine those large hands all over me.

"How much longer until we arrive to your home? Or well that's where I'm assuming you're taking me."

"It is. And not far. We should be there in time for dinner. You're lucky I found you."

My stomach decided to make itself known at the word dinner. He was even going to share his food with me?

"I can hear your stomach from here, little omega. Have you eaten today? I bet you are starved if you were running in the forest for long."

"N-no I haven't," I whispered.

"We promise to feed you well, you won't starve ever again. Promise." Then he muttered to himself, "damn humans, so backward in the way they live and treat each other. And they want to call us monsters? Despicable."

"D-did you say we?" I squeaked out.

He chuckled at my response, his tail wagged in the air. "I live with my bonded alpha and mate. You will like him."

"Does that make you an omega? Beta?"

"No, I'm also an alpha," he mused. "Can you not tell, little omega? I could scent you right away and knew. It was one of the reasons why I'm glad I found you, another beast was on your scent trail."

I sputtered at his question. "I was a bit shell shocked to really pay attention."

The fact that I could have ended up dead or potentially worse if he was a minute late sent a shiver of fear down my spine. A whine escaped my lips at the realization of how much danger I had put myself in. Anything was better than marrying that man. Somehow there was only kindness, concern, and something akin to affection that radiated off this alpha. It was offputting with how atypical his mannerisms and behavior was.

"We're here. Welcome to our home," he said with pride.

I looked over his side to find a dim light in the distance, a wooden cabin soon came into view. I bet this would look gorgeous during the day. Here is to hoping I'm welcomed