

Screams and shouts echoed throughout the humid night's air. My heart rapid-fire against my chest.

The sounds of her struggles cut off. The raged warrior cry abruptly morphed. Terror combined with unimaginable pain heightened the pitch of her voice, latching onto me as I peeled farther and farther into the bare forest. My throat squeezed, but I pumped my arms faster. Her screams followed me, the steady stretch of distance dimming the heartbreaking confession of agony. A loud crack slammed into my senses causing me to stutter in my stride. A branch had broken underfoot. I couldn't hear much over my rushed footfalls and ragged breathing. They had to be following me. Were they close? Breathing down my neck? Back of my neck tingling, I pushed harder. Faster. Far away from here. From *them*.

Air whistled past. Branches smacked my skin. Rocks stabbed my bare feet. My muscles burned, begging me to relent. To ease my pace. But I couldn't, not now. If I was caught, a promise of a much more painful fate than my lack of endurance awaited me.

Blood and dirt marred the once-white material of the formless dress I was forced to wear. I endured a relentless pace. Sweat soaking my skin. Add in a dash of humidity, a whole lot of fear, and I was drenched, the dress clinging to my body like a second skin.

When I was first captured, I'd plotted and planned every second I was awake. How far I would go to get out, what I would do to *them* once I got out. Bitterness raked my insides. But what *could* I do? Nothing. I was powerless. Weak. Helpless. That point had been absorbed harshly and quickly after my first—and only—attempt at escape. I didn't try again.

I had given up hope. Until tonight.

I would have rotted in that cell if it weren't for her. She created a window of opportunity. A small one, but one that couldn't be wasted. And yet, I had hesitated for the barest of moments.

That hesitation might cost me.