

Purlieu

Michaela Daphne

THE HIDDEN GROVE SERIES: BOOK 1

PURLIEU

Be The Good Publishing

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www.michaeladaphne.com

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ISBN 978 0 6482241 0 5 Paperback

First Edition.

SAMPLE

I BREACHED THE top of the embankment. The wind barraged me, turning the droplets that covered my body into ice. The ice cracked and fell as I forced myself to continue towards the cottage.

In the green glow left of the dying sun, stationed on the hill like sentries, were three ice maidens. The sight jolted my heart and I stopped in my tracks.

Would they come for me? I edged closer. They didn't move, and I noted that their shape was still fashioned to look like they wore ball gowns. Their bodies were facing neither the river nor the cottage, looking off into the forest with empty faces. Their profiles looked queer without noses pointing out.

Reaching the crest of the little hill I stared at them as I passed, bracing for an arm to reach out and grab me at any moment. But they didn't. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that they were watching my back as I continued on towards the cottage. I shuddered. It was an eerie reminder of the disastrous ball William had thrown me. How he had blatantly controlled me.

The cottage came into full view on the plain of the clearing. William was off to the left, ferrying the animals from the yard and into the barns. My stomach constricted. Nerves overcame me but I continued onto the plain. How would William react when he saw me? Would he willingly let me grab my things and go?

Through the whistle of the wind the snow crunched behind me. I whipped around and braced for the ice maidens to be upon me, but they hadn't moved. I saw instead the grey backs of a pack of wolves appearing at the top of the hill by the ice maidens. Their eyes were fixed upon me. Where had they come from?

I cried out, my scream carried away on the wind. They bounded into action across the icy plain, moving quickly over the snow in my direction. My heart pounded and breath escaped me as I turned and ran towards the cottage. I knew they would be too fast, that they would catch me and tear me apart before I got ten metres away.

It was over. All that I had been through in the mountains and with William, everything back home since dealing with mum's death would all have been for nothing. I would be with her soon.

As I stumbled through the snow, I waited for the impact, waited for pain to rip through me as they sank their teeth into me, scratched up my skin with their claws and

tossed me about as a plaything before eating me alive.

A sob escaped me. I could hear William's muffled yell and, behind me, a loud thump, the sound of cracking glass and whimpering. The wolves growled but I sensed they had stopped chasing me. I chanced a glance behind, and stopped in my tracks.

A thick wall of ice had appeared directly behind me. It was covered in crack lines and a smear of blood. Lying on the ground on the other side of the ice were three of the five wolves, limp, dead. The remaining two were crouched low, growling. One barked before they turned and ran back the way they'd come.

The smear of blood was at head height. I had been but a moment from impact.

I collapsed on the ground, breathing too fast. Their teeth had been so close. William had created the ice wall. He had saved me. He had the power to erect walls in mere seconds.

I quivered. What had I gotten myself into?

William was running towards me. He surrounded me with his arms and pressed his lips against my temple.

"Are you okay?"

He pulled back from me and inspected my body, pulling my hair back from my face. He wiped the tears that streaked my cheeks.

"Did they hurt you? Are you in pain? You are freezing," he said, stroking my hair. "Where did you go, and what happened to your dress?" He rubbed his hands up and down my arms to warm me.

"I'm fine," I said.

He continued to rub my arms.

"William, stop it." I brushed him away and stood up, folding my arms. "You had no right to use your power on me," I said.

"What are you talking about?" He stood also and motioned to the wolves and the ice wall. His forehead crinkled.

"I used it on them, not on you. I saved you."

"You lost my trust when you used it on me at the ball."

His mouth gaped open. He looked sorry.

"I can't be with you anymore. I'm leaving you, William."

His eyes darkened, the compassion leaving them entirely. He stomped his foot on the ground. "No," he said. His voice was shaky, filled with distress. I steadied my breath and tried to remain calm and in control, ignoring the fear that was bubbling just below the surface of my own voice.

I walked past him towards the cottage. He stomped his foot again.

"You are made to stay with me in Purlieu."

"No," I said. I turned back to him and pointed at the cottage.

"You're going to watch me go upstairs and get my things. You're going to let me leave, like a real man would."

His upper lip curled. His eyes turned to slits. He spat at me.

"You are not going anywhere." He puffed his chest out and clenched his fists. His mouth turned into a dirty smile. "You are mine, and if you will not choose to stay of your own accord, then I will make you obey."

My stomach flipped over. "No." I turned to run.

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