



HYBRID  
BETHANY WICKER

# Hybrid

Bethany Wicker

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This book is dedicated to my amazing husband, Lucien, who is allowing me to chase my dream. Without him, I wouldn't be where I'm at now.

Also, for Henley, the newest addition to the family.

BB, thanks for being there when I need you. You know who you are.

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## Chapter One

My breaths were ragged and heavy as I approached the house Kane and I shared. I'd just finished being examined by the healer and her words were stuck on replay in my mind, "Yep, there's a pup in there."

My suspicions were confirmed. I was pregnant. Logically, I knew Kane was going to be ecstatic, but that didn't hinder the nerves that settled in my gut and threatened to make me vomit. This was going to be good news, but it was still a big one to drop on someone. This was the type of news that changed your life forever.

It'd been three years since our battle against the werewolf hunters and Dash. There was still no word about Dash's disappearance and that thought always lingered in the back of my mind. I would always be prepared for him to strike and that made me even more nervous about having a pup because deep down, I knew he wasn't dead. My wolf *knew* he wasn't dead. She could sense him out there somewhere, waiting for the perfect moment to attack.

After the fight, the majority of the hunters chose to reside in our territory. These were the hunters who didn't enjoy hunting werewolves anymore. They wanted to start bridging the gap between werewolves and hunters with us. We were hoping to bring about a new, better generation. So far, things were going well.

The hunters who did stay with us were adapting well and we opened a school for werewolves and hunters to attend together. That way we could also adjust to their lifestyle, too, and not just the other way around. There hadn't been any conflict yet. Who knew what time would bring, but hopefully we were in it for the long run. The other hunters who still wanted to rid the world of werewolves hadn't made a move either. I figured they were seeing how our strange situation would play out and I was hoping they'd learn from it. If only all hunters and werewolves would be on board...

When enough confidence gathered within me, I pushed open our door. Kane was sitting at the kitchen table, looking like he'd been waiting for me. His fingers tapped against the table impatiently and his foot thudded on the floor. His body lurched towards me after I stepped in and closed the door.

"What's going on? Your anxiety had me worried. I knew you were still around here so didn't want to come searching for you like the paranoid mate I am."

As my mate, Kane could feel my emotions through our mate bond. It linked us together and was annoying in moments like these. It was hard to keep things from him when he always knew what I was feeling.

"Well," I started and moved him to the couch. After sitting next to him, I continued, "There's something I have to tell you."

My mouth opened again, but dried instantly and the words left me. Why was I having such a hard time? This talk had been all planned out in my head. Where'd it go?

Noticing my pause, he exclaimed, "You're pregnant, aren't you?"

My eyes widened at him and my head simply bobbed since my mouth wasn't able to form the words. It was as if cotton replaced my tongue.

He jumped up and began doing a victory dance. "I knew it. You just smelled different and your emotions are crazy."

"Did you just call me crazy?"

He grinned. "No, not you specifically, just your emotions."

That earned a heated glare, but he just laughed it off and enveloped me in a gentle hug. He pulled away to shower my face with kisses and a smile morphed on my lips instantly. He was an amazing mate and was going to be an even better dad.

“So, what names do we want?” Kane looked ready to jump out of his skin with excitement and I could feel his wolf stirring through our bond.

Our invisible mate bond was a defensive method that was meant to warn the other when something was wrong. It came in handy when we were rebuilding the pack after all the destruction and while on patrols. Neither of us had to worry if the other was in trouble or not. However, there were several times when I wished my emotions could be kept to myself and this moment would’ve been one of them. My anxiety ruined the surprise. Then again, he’d already suspected it anyway.

“Ugh,” I moaned. “It is *way* too soon to be thinking about that. I’m only a month along. At least, that’s what the healer suspects.”

He tugged at my arm in the direction of the door. “We *have* to tell everyone.”

“Now? But I’m tired,” I whined.

“Nonsense, you can rest later, unless you don’t mind missing everyone’s reaction to the news.”

I playfully sneered at him and he took that as my answer as he pulled me outside. The first person he ran to tell was his sister Marie and her mate Ace.

Marie was a quiet, sweet-natured girl, but when she heard the news, the squeal that escaped her lips was so loud it nearly burst my eardrums. “I’m going to be an aunt,” she hollered. “This is so awesome. I’m going to be the best aunt there ever was.”

Her arms clamped around me and she nearly strangled me. Ace laughed at her reaction, but joined in the group hugs once Kane did.

“Congrats man,” Ace stated happily as we pulled away. He clapped Kane on the shoulder and they smiled goofily at each other.

Ace was Kane’s Beta, or second in command, and he was such a goofball. He and Marie were so cute together and the two of them had quickly become family to me.

Kane and I were the Alphas of our werewolf pack, which made us the leaders. I was gifted with the rarity of hybrid blood and had the powers of an Alpha and a Luna, which led to the name I came up with: Aluna. Kane’s instincts gave us trouble in the beginning because his Alpha pride didn’t like the idea of a second leader. It was only supposed to be him at the head of the pack. As time went on, he and his wolf slowly opened up to the

idea of sharing the role with me and now we couldn't be better. It made us stronger if anything. We led our pack with sincerity and rarely bumped heads. That was probably more because we had the same ideas and beliefs though.

Next on Kane's list were Trevor and Rebecca. When we got there, their two-year-old son was running wildly in the front yard in his underwear while Trevor chased him around in his wolf form. They stopped when we approached and little Callus ran up to give me a small hug and sloppy kiss. Trevor had named him after his father who died during the battle while protecting the children. Little Callus was the spitting image of Trevor and big Callus and my heart cracked every time I saw him. Trevor's father helped me a lot when my father passed so we'd been pretty close. He'd been my Beta until Trevor came of age. Now, Trevor was my second in command, so we also had two Betas along with the two Alphas.

Our pack, the Onyx pack, would go down in history as the strangest pack yet.

Trevor approached me hesitantly, while sniffing the air. "Are you pregnant?"

I shot him a 'what the hell' look, but he just grinned and pulled me into a bear hug. Rebecca came bursting through their front door to join in the celebration. Trevor most likely told her through their mate bond.

These were two wonderful people and I was so proud they were a part of our pack. After the battle, they took in all the orphaned children and had been caring for them ever since. The kids were currently in school, which was good since I didn't want to be bombarded with questions from them. Children were wonderful, but sometimes too curious. It was something I'd soon get used to hopefully.

"How did you know?" I asked Trevor through excited giggles after he finished twirling me around. It was a strange sound that erupted from my lips and it didn't want to stop.

"You smell like Rebecca did when she was pregnant. It's a smell that your hormones emit. At least that was what the healer told me."

*Are you serious? You're pregnant?* Stark's voice invaded my mind.

He was now officially part of the pack, but I could feel that he used the blood bond between us to communicate and not the pack bond.



During our capture with the hunters, they took my blood to try to create their own hybrids. They were so desperate to get an advantage over werewolves that they'd resorted to unapproved experiments. My blood was apparently the answer and they'd used Stark as the first guinea pig. They injected the blood into him and it caused the reaction they'd hoped for with his wolf. It made him strong like me, but what they didn't expect was that it also connected him and me through an invisible bond. It was similar to a mate's bond where we could feel each other's emotions and hear strong thoughts. We'd taken to calling it a blood bond. Neither of us wanted to admit it since we both had mates, but the blood bond had a stronger pull than the mate one.

Stark's emotions flitted into me: pain, anger, and disbelief. He was with Kayla, Kane's cousin, but it was still hard to shake the feelings our connection stirred. In a way, we felt like mates, even though we weren't. The mate bond had clicked into place between him and Kayla, but it was still hard to shake off how close we'd grown through our journey. Kane and I were mates, but I still harbored feelings for Stark that I was sure would always be present no matter how much time passed. It was a hard situation to swallow for everyone, but it didn't hinder our relationships with our mates. Neither of us would ever go against our mates' backs, but it didn't hurt Stark or me any less.

What made it even weirder was that since Kayla was Kane's cousin, family dinners were a little awkward.

*I'm sorry, Stark. I wanted to tell you in person, but I guess the excitement slipped through our bond.*

A sigh left my lips and understanding lit Kane's eyes when he looked at me.

"Stark found out, didn't he?" His eyes darkened with the question and I averted my eyes.

Things would be so much easier if Stark and I weren't connected, but I wouldn't change it for the world. It was nice to know that he would always be there for me if anything went wrong. I was certain he'd protect Kayla over me if it came down to it, but I still enjoyed having another player on my team along with Kane, as selfish as that was.

*You better come over before I accidentally spill it to Kayla. You know I'm not good at holding secrets from her. Dang woman always gets it*

*out of me somehow.*

Good, he was joking. That was always a good sign.

I laughed and told Kane that we'd better go to them now so we could at least surprise his cousin. Kane agreed and we left Trevor and Rebecca who were still beaming. Little Callus had his arms wrapped around Rebecca's leg and I waved a goodbye to him, which he returned with an energetic one.

Kayla was outside their house, tapping her foot impatiently on the ground. Her hands were on her hips and the guilty look on Stark's face said it all.

"Why did I have to find out through my mate instead of you guys?" Kayla huffed.

Her brown hair had grown even longer these past few years and now reached the middle of her back. Her brown eyes shined with amusement, letting us know she wasn't actually mad. Stark was squirming at her side and I sent him a playful glare.

"Thanks for ruining the surprise," I told Stark.

He just scratched the back of his head and shrugged his shoulders. He really did suck at keeping things from Kayla, but it strengthened their relationship and I couldn't fault him for it. That didn't mean I couldn't tease him a little, though.

Stark's dark hair was ruffled and his purple eyes, eyes like mine, were trying to look at everything except me. Our purple eyes were a result of the hybrid blood. We were both stuck with them in both human and wolf forms. Alphas had blue eyes in wolf form and Beta's had green ones. Their human forms didn't hold the same though and could be any color.

Kayla let her playful anger fall as she gripped me in an embrace. "I'm so excited for you two. I can't wait to see what he or she will look like."

"I think we should keep the news of it just within our pack." Stark's voice was strong when he spoke. No guilt or pain present, which was a relief. "People still don't like the idea of your existence and will use your pregnancy against you. When pregnant, you can't shift into your wolf form without risking harm to the baby. Now would be their best chance to attack you. You'll be too vulnerable."

“Stark’s right,” Kane agreed. “I was already thinking the same thing.”

“But there haven’t been any problems in months. Not even at our borders. I was thinking we should actually discuss decreasing the time our patrols monitored the edges of our territory,” I admitted.

The healer had already told me I couldn’t shift into wolf form, but it still sucked to hear it spoken aloud again. The pup couldn’t always tolerate the shift and could die as a result, so it wasn’t worth the risk. However, without any recent incidents, I didn’t see the reason to freak out. Sure, Dash was probably waiting, but we could take him when the time came. We did it once, so we could do it again. Plus, I would always be on the lookout for him, which squashed his chances at surprising us.

“No way,” both Kane and Stark yelled at the same time. They looked at each other heatedly before Kane said, “We can’t risk it. Not when you’re so vulnerable.”

There was that word again. *Vulnerable*.

“I’m pregnant, not broken,” I growled at the two boys.

“But you’re weaker when you can’t use your wolf form,” Kane reasoned.

A snarl bubbled in my throat but I didn’t say anything. These two were idiots if they thought I was worthless without my wolf form. My eyes shifted to Kayla who just smiled hesitantly. She was smart and staying out of this argument.

“How about we go eat a late lunch? I just seared some meat,” she offered.

Kane shook his head. “We have to finish telling people the news.”

*Lena’s pregnant*, Kayla screamed through the pack link so loud that I instinctively covered my ears.

Excited voices and words of congratulations spewed through the link seconds later. Kane and I both stared at Kayla in disbelief, but she just half-shrugged.

“Problem solved. Now we can eat.”

After a few deep breaths to calm the shock, I followed them into the house. The smell of the meat made my mouth water and I eagerly took a seat at their table. Stark served the food and we chowed down.

Getting home that night took forever because several people stopped Kane and me along the way to say their words of congratulations. Mrs. Carmina and Mr. Scott were among them and she stated she was going to bake me my favorite cake to celebrate: *tresleche*.

Mrs. Pots was one of the hunters who offered words of delight. Since they weren't werewolves, they weren't connected to us through the link, but word had obviously been passed on to them too. Her teenage daughter, Alice, was with her and she also gave me a quick hug. A few other hunters followed them and it was amazing to see that they were just as excited as my pack was. Even though I wasn't their leader, they still looked to me as a person of importance.

Tony was the current leader of the hunters. He'd taken over a few years ago when their former leader, Katie, left to live with Knox, a neighboring Alpha. It was strange to hear about a hunter-werewolf relationship, but it still seemed to be going well for them two. Tony was a strong warrior that was more than perfect for the role. He'd helped with the joining of werewolves and hunters and played in a key role of rebuilding our houses.

When we finally got home, we crawled into bed without hesitation. Fatigue had set in with full force. That night, we fell asleep cuddled together with Kane's hand on my belly.

## Chapter Two

My lips pulled back to reveal my elongated teeth. They were directed at Kane. It had been three weeks since I broke the news to him and he hadn't stopped fussing over me. If I heard 'don't lift that' or 'stop walking so fast' one more time, I was going to kick Kane in the face. He was acting like I was fragile and going to break like glass with a simple step. And apparently, I became more violent with pregnancy. Every little thing got on my nerves, especially the meetings.

Kane, Ace, Trevor, and I would meet once a month to collaborate on ideas that would better the pack, but I wasn't very talkative these days. Thankfully, we'd only had one meeting so far but it was so disastrous. We didn't accomplish a thing.

Tony would join us as well at the meetings, but he'd left a quarter of the way into it muttering about crazy werewolves.

I yanked the box of clothes from Kane. They were too small for me, so I was taking them to the donation house. It was something we started to pass down our unwanted possessions to those who needed them. Money wasn't something that we worked to attain anymore because we'd detached ourselves from the human society completely. Initially, those who had money used it to stock the donation house so possessions could be reused.

We didn't have to worry about food since the crops we grew covered it and the meat and fish we caught. It was a relief to be independent

from the humans.

The donation house was where I was hoping to find some bigger sizes that would be more comfortable for my expanding belly, but Kane had snatched the box from my hands before I'd even stepped out of the house. I'd fought him to get it back. With the box back in my possession, I walked out of the house, but Kane quickly blocked my path and stole the box again.

"Let me carry it," he insisted. "I need the exercise anyway."

"That's the worst excuse ever. You and I both know you don't *need the exercise*. I can handle a simple box, Kane. It isn't going to bite me."

"You might strain something."

My eyes narrowed and I kicked his shin. He grunted in pain, but gave me another opening to tug the box out of his hold. I darted towards the donation house with him hot on my heels.

Our houses and buildings were constructed from logs and leaves. Nature provided what we needed to rebuild. It was just knowing what to do with the resources. With all of the helping hands between the hunters and werewolves, houses popped up within hours and our new territory was set to go in no time. The only thing we lacked was running water and electricity. We used to have solar panels at our previous territory, so we would look into getting some for this one eventually. It was harder without money, though. Luckily, the river was close by so baths and drinking water weren't a problem.

"You shouldn't be running like that, Lena. Slow down. You could fall." He continued to yell annoying comments like that all the way there.

I couldn't switch into wolf form, which was bad enough, but I wasn't cutting running out too. There would be so much pent up energy between my wolf and me that I'd go crazy. Kane would be the one to suffer most because I'd take it out on him so you'd think he would just let me be.

Kane growled in annoyance as he opened the door to the donation house for me. He didn't even try to take the box this time and let me walk in first. We greeted Annie and William who were sifting through a box of clothes. William was a hunter and Annie was a werewolf, but they were currently exclusive. It had only been two weeks, but I was still rooting for them. They helped sort the donations by age, sex, and size. The donation house was always open whether they were there or not but it was nice to have them keeping it organized.

“Lady Aluna.” Annie bowed her head in respect. William hurriedly copied her actions and lowered his head.

The wolves and some of the hunters had taken to calling me ‘Lady Aluna’ and I liked the way it sounded. Being looked up to was no longer strange and just part of the daily routine. The bowing of the head was the ultimate sign of respect to a werewolf that was reserved for their Alpha, or Alphas in this case. However, it still felt off when a hunter did it.

“Annie, it’s always wonderful to see you. William, I hope you’re taking good care of her.” I smiled at him.

“Yes ma’am. I try, but I think it’s the other way around most of the time. She’s too good for me.” He took her into his arms and it was so cheesy, but so cute.

“I’ve brought some of my old clothes and am in dire need of some larger pants. These were too tight around the middle. I think the baby likes to sit low and by low I mean on my bladder,” I explained as I handed the box over.

She laughed. “I’m sure we have something that’ll fit you around here.”

Annie began rummaging through a container of clothes and pulled out various shirts and pants. I selected the ones I wanted and thanked her. William and Kane had been talking, but Kane quickly scooped up the clothes I’d chosen. Shaking my head, I allowed him to lead the way out with the clothes.

“Thank you so much, Annie. You two let me know if you ever need anything,” I yelled as I exited.

They quickly nodded their heads and waved their goodbyes before disappearing behind the closed door.

“They’re so sweet,” I commented.

Kane chuckled. “Most of them are here. We’re pretty lucky to live with such amazing people.”

“The hunters truly seem happy here, don’t they?”

“You say that like you’re surprised.”

My shoulders lifted into a shrug. “I just never thought the day would come that werewolf hunters and werewolves could live together.”

“I also never imagined a day where there would be two Alphas, but we seem to be leading our pack into a new world. The next generation

might not even have to worry about being tracked down for the type of species they are.”

“You’ve got a point.”

He kissed my nose as we reached our house and I opened the door for him this time. He helped me put the clothes away and I told him I was going to have lunch with his sister. Kane was glad Marie and I were so close. We’d bonded after our first meeting and had an immediate connection. She was so bubbly that it was hard not to love her.

Kane walked me out the house and gave me a kiss. “Take it easy on the way to her house.”

I rolled my eyes. “I will, but she doesn’t live that far away at all, so I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“Either way, just be aware of your surroundings.”

“Sure thing, *Dad*.”

We shared another kiss and I headed out.

My eyes shifted to the sky as I strolled. The clouds were starting to darken, so it’d start raining soon. I picked up speed in hopes of making it to Marie’s before they opened up. I wasn’t in the mood to get wet. It wasn’t the getting soaked part that I hated. It was the wet clothes you were stuck with after. They always seemed to take forever to dry and just clung to your skin uncomfortably.

Thunder rumbled and my pace quickened even more. It wasn’t looking good for me. Distracted by the weather, it took longer than usual for me to realize the change that had occurred in the atmosphere. My footsteps halted and the hair rose on the back of my neck. Something was off. My eyes scanned the area, but nothing looked out of place.

My feet started forward again, but more cautiously this time. My senses were in overdrive and I felt Kane calling to me through the link. I couldn’t answer him because I didn’t know what was wrong and I didn’t want to be distracted.

The grounds were nearly empty since everyone had retreated into their houses to escape the storm. A drop of water hit my nose and it startled me. It had almost been enough of a diversion to give my attacker time to deliver a killing blow. Luckily, my instincts kicked in and my body shifted out of the way of an oncoming sword. The sword looked like a katana,



which is a Japanese samurai weapon, and it slashed into the ground, barely missing me. It was a very *sharp* katana.

Twirling around, Alice came into view. She was Mrs. Pots's daughter who'd just congratulated me again only yesterday. Her blonde hair was tied back and her green eyes were narrowed into slits. She held the sword firmly in her grasp. There was no shaking or hesitation in her hands as they moved and her resolve was mirrored in her gaze.

The sword was raised again and she swung it at me. It was a fast swipe, but I once again dodged it and she grunted in frustration.

"Why are you attacking me?" I hollered between her attacks.

"This is for the Order." She slashed her sword again. "It's only a matter of time before my steel will meet your flesh. Then, you'll feel how much my bite hurts."

This time, as she swung the sword, I grabbed her wrist. The blade sliced my other arm, but I'd stopped her from cutting me deeper. Alice threw a punch towards my face, but I grasped that hand with my free one. We were tangled together, breathing deeply. The sword remained between us. One slip and she could cut me.

Dang. I couldn't shift into my wolf form to get myself out either. Kane and Stark had been right. I really wasn't as strong in my human form and that was hard to swallow.

Shouts were invading the tense space around us. Backup was coming quickly and Kane and Stark were in the lead.

Noticing my shifting of attention, Alice took the opportunity to yank me forward by the arms and landed a head butt on my forehead. My hold on her slackened and my hand flew to my face in response to the pain.

The sword moved towards me again and would've made contact if Stark wouldn't have tackled Alice to the ground. He was in wolf form and his white teeth gleamed as they sunk into her neck. Kane's arms wrapped around me, trying to hold me upright, but my body was quivering too badly. It was more from the shock of everything instead of fear.

I wanted to ask who the Order was and why she was disturbing our peace, but the words were stuck in my throat and she was already gone from the world. Alice was so nice and helped plenty while we were rebuilding. She also kept the other children entertained while we were working. She was the last person I would expect to do something like this.

Heck, she was just a girl. A girl who was always smiling and always willing to assist those who needed it. She was too young to be dead. She was too young to fight like she did. She had so much still to do, but her body remained motionless in the dirt and it wouldn't move again. That eerie thought gave me goosebumps and a lump formed in my throat.

A shriek pierced the fearful and astounded murmuring. It belonged to Mrs. Pots, who shoved her way through the crowd. She fell at her daughter's side and started sobbing. Her eyes narrowed on us.

"You animals," she yelled. "You killed my daughter."

Mrs. Pots grabbed the sword and lunged at me, but Stark stopped her. His jaw was about to close on her, but I pushed as hard as I could through our blood bond and willed him to stop. He froze in place, but didn't pull back. Mrs. Pots scrambled backwards, away from him. Stark stayed where he was and looked like he was barely breathing.

*Release me,* Stark hissed through the link.

My eyebrows shot up. What the heck did he mean by that?

*I don't know what you did, but I can't move because it was your command. A blood command,* Stark elaborated.

I blinked stupidly before mentally telling him he could move.

As if he'd been broken from a spell, he closed his jaw and his eyes landed on me. They were searching for how I'd stopped him. Could I control him through our bond?

*Why did you spare her? She tried to kill you.*

I sighed at Stark's question. *There's no reason to forfeit her life too. Death is permanent and she doesn't deserve that for wanting to avenge her daughter.*

Tony pulled Mrs. Pots to her feet and yanked her away from us and from her daughter. My eyes followed them until they were out of sight. The onlookers were panicked and started looking around at each other, as if their neighbor was going to attack too.

"Get someone to move her body," I told Kane while waving a hand at Alice's body. I couldn't look at it. "We need to bury her."

"Already on it," he replied as people quickly picked Alice up delicately, even though she was gone, and moved her away.

I didn't know where they were going to take her or what they were going to do, but sorrow overtook me and I started to cry. My hand rested on

my stomach as I envisioned something like that happening to my child. I would react the same way Mrs. Pots did. She was too young to be buried. Nobody should have to bury a child. Kane held me in his arms while I sobbed. Stark lingered in wolf form like he was waiting for others to attack.

The wolves started to separate themselves from the crowd and my eyes stopped on Annie and William. Annie was pushing him away and followed the rest of the pack. This was exactly the outcome the Order would probably hope for. Whoever they were, I wouldn't let them have that victory.

I borrowed some of Kane's strength as he helped me to my feet. They were wobbly from the adrenaline and shock, but he held me in place. I didn't realize I had sunk to the ground in the first place.

My eyes scanned the chaos that was starting to form and I spoke loudly to address everyone. "We won't give up our peace for this one incident. Instead, we will band together. Any hunters who can give me information on the Order would be greatly appreciated. Others here may be in on it, but that will not break us. They will weed themselves out in time. For now, I want you all to go about your day as if this didn't happen. We will have a funeral for Alice and mourn her death properly. Then, we will get to the bottom of who the Order is and what they want with us. She attacked me specifically, so please don't worry yourselves until there's something to worry about."

The mumbling grew louder and nobody moved. Eyes continued to scrutinize their surroundings. We were on the brink of a fight if things didn't settle quickly.

"Wolves stand down," I commanded in my Alpha tone.

Most of the voices stopped and all the wolves stood still at my order.

"We will not let this ruin us," I repeated.

"You heard your Aluna." Kane flashed his teeth. He was using his Alpha tone, too. "Go back to your houses and wait for further orders. Trevor, Ace, and Stark will be on guard until we get some answers. You will report to them if you know anything or have any problems." He started leading us to the house and added so only I could hear, "We're going home. You need to settle down after that attack. We'll figure this out but you need to get your emotions in check."

He was right. My emotions were a whirlwind. They shifted from sad to worried to angry and seemed to just be on repeat as they alternated. The grief was for the loss of Alice, no matter what she did, and for what her mom must be feeling right now. The anxiety was for what this all meant for the future werewolf-hunter relations. Our peace was so fragile as it was and I feared this event would shatter it completely. The anger was for the Order and whatever they represented. They had a teenager attack me, which was irresponsible and affected all of the hunters in our pack. Our werewolves would scrutinize all of the them from now on. I hated to admit it but knew I would too.

There were different ways to tell whether a werewolf was a rogue, Alpha, or Beta. Rogues were wolves who traveled by themselves and the pack life wasn't for them. They usually killed without a second thought and were more volatile. Stark used to be a rogue until he met me and I opened his eyes to how wonderful the support of a pack was. A rogue was usually distinguished by their eyes. They were a different shade of purple from mine. Not to mention, all werewolves smelled different and we could tell what they were from their scent.

The werewolf hunters all looked alike and all smelled the same. There was no way to tell who was really on your side and who wasn't. I wouldn't have guessed that Alice would be the first to turn on us, but that was what the Order most likely wanted: to catch me off guard. I wondered if her mother was in on it at all. Then, my thoughts trailed to who else could be a part of the Order right under our noses. The Order was unsuccessful with killing me, but had accomplished with inserting doubt into our community.

"You aren't getting control of your feelings at all. If anything, they're becoming more chaotic." Kane shook his head at me as we reached the house. "Go lie down and relax. I'll make you something to eat."

"What would I do without you?" I teased. It was the best way to distract myself.

"You would starve and die from exhaustion or emotional stress."

"Aw, aren't you the sweetest?"

He just chuckled in response and I did as he asked. I sunk into the couch and started to calm my wolf and myself. My wolf was snapping to get out, but staying composed was the best thing to do at the moment. I

needed to wrap my head around this so I could come up with a solution. The best answers weren't developed with anger present. Only the irrational ones were.

"We'll have a meeting tomorrow with Tony to determine what we should do next," Kane stated as if he was reading my mind.

"That's a good idea."

My thoughts should be a little more organized by then.

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## Chapter Three

“We can’t start pointing fingers at each other like your wolves have been doing,” Tony stated heatedly.

We were holding our meeting about what to do in regards to the attack, but it wasn’t going too well. The boys were complaining about pointing fingers when they were doing it right now. They needed to practice what they preached and stop blaming each other. We were never going to get anywhere if they couldn’t get over that hump.

“Well maybe you guys need to start weeding out the traitors and we’ll stop trying to figure it out for ourselves,” Ace growled.

“Yeah, you guys are the ones attacking us. We werewolves don’t have any secret agendas with mysterious groups like the Order,” Trevor added, stirring the pot a little more.

“You two stop it,” Kane snapped. “If you can’t calm down and do your parts as Betas, I’ll send you back out to patrol while we sort things out.”

“My point exactly.” Tony huffed and crossed his arms, staring defiantly at Trevor and Ace. A permanent scowl was etched into his face since the moment he walked in.

“And you need to stop acting like the victim,” I shot at Tony. “I’ve already sent a wolf and contacted Katie through him. She and Knox are on their way.”

“You think I can’t handle it?” Tony’s eyes narrowed at me. Sweat glistened off his dark skin and he had black spots under his brown eyes. It was obvious to everyone that the situation was stressing him out. He was a good warrior and fighter, but still wasn’t used to the leadership and decision-making role. That had been Katie’s job.

“I think you’re a little in over your head,” Ace snarked.

Our Betas were acting abnormally vicious and it wasn’t professional. They needed to calm their wolves and be role models. They were going haywire because I was attacked and also currently pregnant. Apparently, male wolves became overprotective of pregnant females. It was part of their nature to protect the next generation. The fact that I was their Aluna was just icing on the cake.

“Last straw. You two go patrol.” Kane gestured towards the door and they ran out with their heads down. No arguing needed. If they were in wolf form, their tails would be between their legs as they left.

My eyes darted back to Tony. “It isn’t that you’re not handling it. It’s that many of the hunters look up to Katie and we think her presence would be beneficial. We need all the assistance we can get if we want this to continue working between us,” I explained.

Tony sighed as he relaxed into his seat and put his head in his hands. “This is such a mess.”

“Can you tell us what the Order is?” I asked.

The curiosity was becoming unbearable.

Tony loosed another breath before he answered, “The Order is a group composed of the old-fashioned werewolf hunters that still believe silver will kill you guys. They also believe that all werewolves should be exterminated without hesitation. The head of the Order is made up of five incredibly strong hunters. The baddest of the bad and they oversee hundreds of hunters who follow the Order. They dish out locations of werewolves for their disciples to take out. My guess is Alice was a follower of the Order, just like her father used to be before he was killed. She most likely received the command to take you out. Her mother knew nothing about her dealings. Mrs. Pots was never a part of the Order and I feel it’s stayed that way. Alice’s father most likely sucked her into his lifestyle without her mother’s knowledge or approval.”

“But why are they just now attacking?” Kane inquired. “We’ve been coexisting for a little over three years now. You’d think they would’ve tried to nip it in the bud when we first began.”

Tony shook his head. “I’m not sure. They were probably hoping we’d screw up somewhere down the line and destroy ourselves. When it didn’t happen on its own, they made their move.”

“By using a teenager,” I scoffed. “It probably had been ingrained in her mind since birth.”

“Not necessarily,” Tony countered. “The Order’s hardcore but gives their hunters several outs because they only want those with determination and the right mindset. However, once they’re completely in, those who want out usually leave in a body bag.”

Kane and I both flinched at that.

Tony continued, “It sounds pretty rough, but once you’re a part of their society, you can turn down jobs you don’t feel comfortable with without getting reprimanded. Alice could’ve declined this job if she really wanted to, so that just tells me she wasn’t happy with our living situation.”

“And you think there are others like her among them,” I mused.

The answer had been written all over his face, so what did that mean for us?

“So what’s the next best step to take?” Kane asked.

“I think we should wait for Katie to get here. We’re all in over our heads with this one,” I replied.

Tony groaned. “I guess you’re right. Until then, our main priority should be to keep the peace.”

Kane and I both agreed and we all left the meeting not feeling reassured at all. Hopefully, Katie would be here by late afternoon.

The sun hit my face as I exited the building. It was mocking the gloomy atmosphere that had settled within our territory. Rain would’ve been a better match for our moods.

Kane stuck to me like glue as I checked in with the members of our pack to reassure them that the situation was under control. He vowed he wouldn’t leave my side until this situation was dealt with and he’d stuck to it so far.

Stark even lingered in the shadows, keeping an eye on me wherever I went. He was trying to be sneaky about it, but I always knew when he was



there. They were just being protective like usual.

“Mrs. Carmina, how are you and Mr. Scott holding up?” I questioned once I ran into them.

She smiled weakly. “We are doing well. Just brought some food to Rebecca for the children. How are you holding up, dear?”

“I’m hanging in there. Wish I could lose my bodyguard.” I shot Kane a meaningful look, but he just grinned.

“Not happening,” he stated and his smile didn’t falter. That butt was enjoying this.

“You two should stay close to each other. Who knows who could come at you next! It could be your neighbor.” Mrs. Carmina’s eyes darted around. “We don’t know which of these hunters are actually on our side.”

“We can’t blame them all though. They shouldn’t *all* be held accountable for one person’s actions,” I reasoned.

“They can when the hunters don’t even know who to trust.” Her expression was serious and I knew she had a point, but we needed to try to keep things from escalating. Worrying didn’t do anyone any good.

She bowed her head at me before stepping away, probably to head home.

Kane and I spoke to all of our pack members and moved on to the hunters. They weren’t as receptive as our pack was. Some claimed they felt like they were being put on trial. I hated that they felt that way, but it was scary not knowing who would attack next. Everyone was scared of what was to come and although I wouldn’t admit it out loud, I was too. It was crazy how one thing could have such a large chain reaction. It just proved how fragile peace really was.

Katie didn’t get there until dusk. Knox apparently had gotten her here in wolf form and that vision made me giggle profusely. If only I would’ve seen it. Katie started laughing with me while the boys just stared.

Katie’s unruly red hair was cut short and stopped just at her chin. It was cute and shaped her face perfectly. Knox’s black hair, on the other hand, had grown shaggy and covered his ears. They were in love and would’ve sealed the mating bond if she was a werewolf. They also hadn’t tried for children since they were afraid of what would happen. There hadn’t been an offspring that was produced from a werewolf and hunter. They didn’t even know if it was possible, but I hoped it was.

“How’s Alex doing?” I asked.

Alex was Knox’s son from his previous mate. Knox’s mate, Alex’s mom, died a while ago, but Katie seemed to fill the void that had opened in both Knox and Alex’s hearts after her death.

“Alex stayed behind to help keep the pack under control while we were here,” Knox replied.

“It’s hard to think of him being old enough to do something like that,” I teased.

“Heck, he’s almost as tall as me now.” Knox chuckled.

“That’s so hard to believe.” I joined in on the laugh before turning to Katie.

Katie’s English accent was still thick when she spoke. “I’ve missed you, Lena. Congrats on the baby. Any idea what you’re having?”

“Not at all, but I’m thinking it’s going to be a boy.” I smiled and rubbed my belly. It was so strange that a child was there.

Kane interrupted our greeting and put his hand on my stomach. “I’m thinking it’s going to be a boy too.”

“And how exactly did you come to that conclusion?” Katie teased.

“Because it’s my child.” His grin widened.

“So, I hear you guys got yourselves into more trouble,” Knox stated, ready to get down to business as usual.

Kane and I updated them on what had happened. Tony joined in halfway through and updated us on the hunters that were staying silent. They didn’t feel the need to explain themselves or defend themselves in their own home.

Katie went to speak to some of them while I went check to see how dinner was coming. We were going to eat in our dining hall tonight to welcome Katie back. The hunters and werewolves were at least working together to cook dinner. They wouldn’t allow me to help and insisted it wasn’t good for the baby. I’d never felt so limited in my life.

When Marie and Rebecca joined me, Kane finally thought I was safe enough for him to check on the patrols. I told the girls how annoying it was to be babied, but Rebecca admitted that it had been the same way for her. Trevor wouldn’t let her out of his sight, but that changed once Callus was born. Now, Trevor wouldn’t let him out of his view. We all laughed at that.

Our conversations remained light to keep the mood up while we waited for dinner. Marie and Rebecca soon left me to help set the food up, so I took my seat at the table we usually ate at. It was in the middle of the room in order for us to see everyone. Katie took the empty seat next to me after a few minutes. She looked tired and winded.

“Nobody wants to talk to me either. A few only defended that they’d never risk the peace they worked so hard to create.” Katie frowned. “I’ve been mulling over why the Order would choose now to strike but the answer is right in front of our face. It’s your baby. There hasn’t been a baby from a hybrid before, so they’re probably scared of what it will bring. Some members of the Order probably believe it will bring the end of the world.”

“But it’s just a child and not even here yet,” I argued.

Katie placed her hand on my shoulder. “I know that, but that doesn’t change the way the Order sees it. They hate change almost as much as they hate werewolves. Your baby is something new. Heck, hybrids in general are still a new concept because you and Stark are the only ones, that we know of at least.”

The words hung between us creating a dense aura. Silence lingered as we processed the possibilities of what was to come. All this because of an unborn child. It was insane. It didn’t make me ashamed of what I was and I wouldn’t change it for the world. Instead, it made me furious and the urge to destroy the Order boiled in my blood. They wouldn’t hurt my pack any further and they certainly wouldn’t hurt my child.

## Chapter Four

A few weeks passed without any more incidents. Katie and Knox were back and forth between their pack and ours. Knox could only stay for a few days at a time since he had his own pack to run and Katie didn't want to come by herself or go without him for too long. The werewolves and hunters seemed to be getting back into routine as well and weren't trying to accuse each other of treachery anymore.

Kane was *still* always at my side. It was hard for me to even go to the bathroom without him looming over me. Thankfully, we had two wonderful Betas. Trevor and Ace had divided the patrols and were handling any problems, only consulting with us when necessary.

I'd felt our baby kick for the first time yesterday. It was the sweetest thing and Kane was upset that he couldn't feel it. I'd freaked out when it happened and ran to the healer for help. She just laughed at me before explaining that it was a good thing and not an alien thing going on.

My appetite had increased and I was just short of eating the place out of all the meat. My body craved red, raw meat, which apparently was a werewolf-pregnant-thing. The healer had been so helpful and I didn't know what I would do without her.

It was lunchtime and I was on my second helping of meat for the day when Marie came over to visit.

"I want to feel the baby," she exclaimed. "Kane told me you felt him kick."

She'd also taken to calling the pup a 'him' just like Kane and I started to do.

"No hello?" I joked.

"Not when there's a baby I could be feeling."

I giggled at her giddiness. "He's not really kicking right now, but you can try."

She instantly placed her hands on my stomach and waited. And waited.

"He's not kicking." She frowned after a few minutes passed. "That sucks. I can't feel him."

Her reaction was the same as Kane's. Like brother, like sister. They were a pair.

She only stayed for a few minutes longer before claiming she had to get back to Ace.

After Marie left, I rested on the couch, bored out of my mind. It stunk not being able to run in wolf form and I was missing it more and more with each day that passed. Kane didn't even like me walking around too much. He was worried either someone was going to attack me again or the walking was somehow going to hurt the baby.

Abruptly sitting up, I announced, "I'm going for a walk. Get over it."

I strutted out the door. Kane took a second to register what I said before he raced after me with a flabbergasted expression.

"You can escort me, but don't tell me I can't go."

He growled at that, but didn't say anything, just sulked as he strolled along with me. A person could only be cooped up for so long before they went crazy. After a few weeks, I was almost at that point.

The walk quickly shifted from tense to relaxing once Kane eased up a little bit. I'd even convinced him to take me into the woods a good ways.

"I'm sorry for being so demanding and worried all the time," Kane stated quietly.

"I know it annoys me, but it's to be expected. I can't be mad at you for the way your instincts are no matter how aggravating it is."

"Well, at least you know I'll always be there for you." He grinned at me.

I returned his smile with one of my own. "And I'm here for you."

Kane and I kissed and it deepened as he pulled me under the shade of the closest tree. I missed passionate moments like these. It was hard with everything that was going on to really take the time to just enjoy each other's company.

We strolled around for a few hours before I got too winded and was ready to head back to the house. My stamina wasn't as high as it was before I was pregnant. This little pup zapped my energy like it was nothing, even with simple things like walking.

Katie was waiting for us at the house by the time we returned. It caught us off guard because she wasn't due back for another week. Her solemn look didn't do anything to calm my nerves at her presence either. She beckoned us inside and we found Knox already waiting on the sofa.

"No hellos?" I teased trying to lighten the tension that fell between us. Instead, the butterflies in my stomach just increased when Katie didn't even try to smile weakly. "Okay, what is it?"

Katie held out her hand and passed me the ivory envelope that she'd been gripping. I shot her a look but she just told me to open it first and then she'd explain what it was.

The envelope was pretty heavy for how small it was and my fingers shook as I opened it. All eyes were on me and Kane's nerves flitted into me through our mate bond. It tripled mine and increased my heart rate further. I quickly removed the contents and realized it was an invitation. Kane moved so he could read it over my shoulder.

It read, *'The Head of the Order, Mr. Alister Morrison, cordially invites Selena Marks and Stark Mitchell to The Order's Semiannual Ball that will be held on September 5<sup>th</sup> at the Morrison Mansion. RSVP for directions.'*

There was a number printed at the bottom, but we didn't have phones so it didn't do us any good.

"This is from *the* Order as in the powerful werewolf hunters who are trying to take us out?" I asked incredulously. "Why would they invite us to their ball if they want to kill us? This is the silliest thing I've ever heard."

Katie bobbed her head. "They've requested you and Stark along with me and Knox to attend their ball. I'm not sure why because I've never been invited to one before. I don't roll with that crowd."

“Why does it say Stark and not me? I’m her mate.” Kane’s eyes were a shade darker with jealousy.

“I think it’s because he’s a hybrid like Lena. The messenger who delivered the invitations was very specific that it just be us four who attend. He said if anyone else tagged along then they would consider it an act of war. Our safety is guaranteed if it’s only us four.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Kane snarled. “How do they expect Lena to go without her mate? It’s unsafe and never going to happen.”

“What are they hoping to gain and how can we trust that they aren’t trying to lure us in with false security?” I raised my eyebrows curiously at Katie. The idea of it was still just so absurd.

“You can’t seriously be considering this,” Kane growled.

“We can’t just write this off Kane,” I chided him. “Well, Katie?”

“The Order doesn’t give out their word lightly because they don’t lie and they never go back on their promises. For them to say you won’t be harmed, it’s as if they were writing it in stone. It’s etched into their beliefs.”

“That’s not-” Kane started to complain but I cut him off.

“What do you think they are trying to gain, Katie? What’s your best guess from a hunter’s perspective?”

“I think they have something that’s going to rile you up. They probably want you to go, see what they’re hiding, and then get worked up enough so you attack. If you attack without cause, then they can go against their word and strike you out of self-defense. It’s the only loophole I see.”

My hand cupped my cheek as the possibilities swirled around in my head. “They could have my mom,” I concluded. “That’s the only thing I could imagine that would work me up enough to attack and there hasn’t been any word about her in years.”

“That’s very likely,” Katie agreed.

“Then we have to go.” Resolve replaced my curiosity.

My mom became one of the Lost after my father died. The Lost were those wolves that lost their mate and ended up losing themselves. They didn’t recognize friend from foe and didn’t even remember anything that happened before they became Lost. After not remembering who I was, my mom had left me to mate with some rogue. Last I heard, she was traveling around with the rogue and they’d sealed the mating process, even though they weren’t *true* mates. Mom may not be a part of my pack

anymore but she was still my mother. She was still blood whether she knew it or not. To be honest, I'd always wondered if she was even still alive after these past few years.

"I don't like the idea of it, but will accompany you two if you want to attend, Lena," Knox spoke for the first time.

"Why do they want you to go, but not me?" Kane whined, addressing Knox.

"Come on. A werewolf hunter and a werewolf together in a relationship? They want to see us together and how we tick." Knox snorted. "It's absurd, treating us like a science experiment."

"I'll tell Stark tomorrow," I said. "I know you don't like this Kane, but I think it'll be better since we need an Alpha to be here just in case something happens anyway. Things have been too crazy for us both to leave."

"I hate to admit it out loud, but I'm a little excited," Katie squealed. "I've never been to a ball before."

"I don't know what a ball is," Knox and I both stated at the same time.

We glanced at each other quickly before looking back to Katie.

She blinked. "Are you serious? A ball is an event that everyone gets dressed up for in formal attire. The girls wear beautiful dresses and the guys wear nice suits. There will be food, drinks, and dancing amongst the beautiful decorations."

"That doesn't sound like too much fun to me, especially since I don't know how to dance. At least not good. Werewolves don't really dance in their spare time. Plus, we don't own any dresses here," I mused. "I hate wearing dresses and those awful high shoes too."

Dresses were very restrictive when it came to quick movements and those high shoes nearly broke my ankles whenever I wore them.

Knox chortled. "A werewolf in a dress. What are things coming to?"

My eyes narrowed at him. "I may not like them, but I think I'd look good in a dress."

"Of course you would, babe," Kane kissed my cheek. "Baby and all. But on a serious note, it's not a good idea for you to put our baby at risk by going to this *thing*."



Kane said the word ‘thing’ like it was some type of disgusting creature or infectious disease.

“They’ll probably send escorts for us and then have several guards lingering around at the ball,” Katie explained. “They don’t ever go against their word and if Lena thinks she can remain level-headed, then we should go. I’d like to see what they’re hiding and planning.”

“Whatever it is, it can’t be good.” I sighed. “What if they do something while we’re gone?”

Katie clapped her hands together. “I already had that thought out and have sent a messenger to their house to clarify that *nobody* will be hurt, including everyone in our packs. I made sure to include both packs so there were no loopholes.”

Aw. Katie was stepping into her role as a pack leader. I only wondered how Knox’s pack felt because she used to hunt our kind. I would wish for things to be easy and normal, but then I wouldn’t be a hybrid, we wouldn’t be bridging the gap between hunters and werewolves, and I wouldn’t be an Alpha. No matter what we faced, the benefits outweighed the tough odds.

“Good thinking.” Knox grinned at Katie. “You two are making me want to take a closer look at these hunters now. I guess Katie and I will head home to make sure everything is in order and then meet you back here in a month for this ball thing.”

“I think that sounds like a perfect idea,” I agreed.

We said our goodbyes and they left Kane and I to talk things out. He’d never be okay with me going, but that was no surprise. If there was any doubt about our safety and the safety of our baby I’d bail out. But, I believed Katie knew what she was talking about. She wouldn’t put herself or Knox at risk either if she was even the littlest bit unsure.

After discussing it for a while, Kane at least stopped arguing it and I took that as a win since it was probably all I was going to get. Now, I just had to get Stark on board.

~\*~

“I don’t like the idea of it,” Kayla admitted. “Why can’t I go? Why does he *have* to go?”

I'd just spilled the news of the ball to her and Stark. She didn't like the idea of him going with me to a dance without her. I didn't blame her for her hesitance either. Jealousy was hard to swallow when it came to our mates, even when it was with her Alpha.

"He doesn't *have* to go, but I don't feel comfortable going without him," I explained. "We need to see what the Order has up their sleeve. This may be our only chance."

"It'll just be for one night Kayla. This is our Aluna and she's asking us for something. Don't you want this all to be over with?" Stark tried to reason.

Kayla sighed and stared at her feet. "I don't like it, but I understand why you're doing it. It just sucks."

"Kane feels the same way," I told her.

Kayla smiled weakly. "I'm sure he does, but he's letting you go. I'll get over it. I hope you guys find lots of useful information. We need to kick this Orders' butt."

Stark and I agreed with a laugh. At least she was on board.

Stark walked me back home that night and confessed that he was happy he would be there to defend me if need be. He vowed that no harm would come to me while he was around. It was endearing, but hopefully unnecessary. If Katie was right, then we really weren't in any danger. We just had to keep our tempers at check. That'd be the real challenge, especially for two hotheaded hybrids.

For the remainder of the month, I would spend as much time with Kane and make sure everything was in as much order as it could be. Hopefully, the friction about it would be completely gone by then.

Kane kissed my forehead in reassurance when I got home and told me everything would work out even though he didn't want me to go. He was only one call through the bond away. I didn't want to burst his bubble that he wouldn't make it in time if something *did* happen.

We both slept restlessly that night.

## Chapter Five

The month flew by a little too quickly for my taste, and it wasn't long before Katie had shown up at my doorstep with a long piece of fabric in tow. The fabric was unfortunately my dress that she had to force me into. It was long, purple, silky, but still very uncomfortable. Kane's face of awe made it worth the struggle to walk in. It seemed to cling to my body in ways that I never thought clothes could. The dress I could get over, but the high shoes, or heels as Katie called them, were a no go. Werewolves did *not* wear heels. We weren't made for them.

Thankfully, Katie had been prepared with a Plan B. She'd brought matching purple flats. They weren't as formal as the heels, but they'd have to do.

Katie's dress was similar to mine except it was a midnight blue. Unlike me, she was able to rock the heels and they looked a lot sexier than my flats. Hopefully, I wouldn't have to suffer through something like this again so I wouldn't have to ever worry about heels after tonight.

Katie brushed through my hair to make it presentable since I wouldn't let her style it. She pulled me out the door once she heard a car horn sounded. She explained that they were picking us up in something called a limousine, which was a really long, fancy car. I hated cars no matter how big they were so it didn't make a difference. However, when she walked me up to it, my thoughts quickly shifted. This thing was huge

and I peeked through the dark window to see that it was also very fancy inside with drinks, snacks, and flashing lights.

“I’m jealous of you guys. You’re going to have so much fun,” Kane teased.

He was really just trying to calm his nerves about the whole situation. He didn’t like that it was completely out of his control. Things rarely were when you were Alpha.

Kayla hugged me bye after showering Stark with kisses. As she gripped my shoulders, she whispered, “He better come back because if something happens, then I’m coming after you. I’ll probably lose and it sounds ridiculous to try since you’re my Alpha, but I’ll do *something*.”

I laughed at her attempt at a threat. It would’ve held more weight if I wasn’t her Alpha. It was almost impossible to go against the Alpha. It was programmed into our nature and attacking an Alpha was a way to challenge their title. It was usually done because someone else thought they could hold the title better. It didn’t happen often, but when it did, the challenger almost always lost.

Kayla laughed a little with me and I promised to bring him back safe. Although, I didn’t think he would need much protection. I was the ticking time bomb out of us two since I wasn’t able to shift into a wolf.

I saved Kane’s goodbye for last, that way his scent would linger on me. Tears pooled at the corners of my eyes as we embraced, but I wouldn’t let them fall.

“It’s only for a few hours.” He rubbed his warm hands up and down my arms to soothe me. “I’ll see you tonight and you can tell me how ridiculous the whole dancing thing was.”

“What if something goes wrong?” I hadn’t meant to ask that dreadful question aloud, but it just slipped out.

“Nothing’s going to happen. Knox and Stark will be there with you. They’ll make sure you and Katie get back okay.”

He kissed me deeply and held me for a few seconds longer before waving me off. After one last lingering look, I climbed into the limo and took the empty seat next to Stark. It was very comfortable and my muscles wanted to relax into it even with the chaotic nerves pulsing through me.

The ride to the Order’s Ball was quiet, tense, and didn’t do anything to ease my concerns. None of us knew what to expect, not even Katie. We

were so worried that we couldn't even enjoy the large car like I'd hoped.

The window that divided us from the driver rolled down. "Hello there," the guy said nervously. His blond hair was gelled back and his green eyes were hesitant. "My name's Steven and I'm going to escort you guys there safely. I promise you guys will not be harmed."

None of us said anything in return and he awkwardly rolled the window back up. I mentally noted every twist and turn Steven took just in case we had to find our way back.

Stark tried to reassure me with his touch on my arm as a constant reminder he was there. It helped a little, but the anxiety got worse when we came to a stop in front of a stone mansion. Windows lined the outside and giant wooden doors were swung open, inviting the guests to enter. The smell of food wafted out of them like a finger beckoning you in.

Two burly men were at the door, collecting invitations before permitting entry. They were dressed in nice navy suits and had analytical gazes that were sizing up everyone who entered.

The Order's hunters made us a path as we approached the guards with Steven in the lead. Each person looked at us with appalled expressions. The men's eyes quickly landed on us as we got closer. They looked to each other before motioning for our escort to step forward.

Steven moved ahead of us and whispered in their ears. They nodded their heads abruptly before allowing us to pass them. Stark tensed and put his hand on my back as we stepped over the threshold, leaving the outraged muttering behind us.

The music stopped when we reached the beginning of the white marble stairs that descended into the heart of the ball. Stark moved even closer to me, but nobody shifted to attack. Heck, they didn't even twitch a finger. They seemed to be in as much shock as we were. The coppery tang of werewolf hunter blood was suffocating in this enclosed room and made me gag. There had to be hundreds of them and all the attention was on us. This was obviously the first time a werewolf had been invited, let alone three of them. The stares weren't all hateful though. Some were open and scrutinizing.

A balding man rose from a long table that was positioned in the back and made his way towards us. He was thin and I immediately knew who he was by the aura that emitted from him. Alister. Four equally skinny

men flanked him and they had to be leaders of the Order too. I recalled Tony saying there were five of them, but Alister had to be the most powerful one.

Alister's expression was welcoming and he opened his arms when he halted in front of us. "My honored guests," his voice boomed. "I am Alister. It is so nice of you four to accept our invitation and abide by the stipulations. I am very impressed that you werewolves were civil enough to come on your own, instead of having your pack in tow."

There went the first jab of the night. Stark's fingers gripped my dress from behind as he attempted to keep his anger in check.

Deciding to play the nice card, I said, "It was so nice of you to invite us to your gathering. You have such a beautiful home."

"It's incredible how much money there is in the werewolf business." Alister smirked and his eyes glinted with mischief. "Many people want problems like your kind to just disappear and we just so happen to have the unique talent to make it happen."

Stark's anger radiated from behind me and I reached back to hold his hand that was still clutching my dress.

*Don't let him get to you,* I told him through our link. *That's exactly what he wants.*

Stark didn't reply, but he loosed a tight breath through his nostrils. His hold still remained on the back of my dress, but it helped keep me grounded. He was here and nothing was going to happen.

That was what I kept repeating to myself as Alister led us to our designated table. It only had four place settings, so no hunters would be eating with us at least. The tablecloth was a gleaming gold and the napkins were brilliant white. I never understood why people used white napkins because that color was the hardest to keep clean.

I moved to sit across from Katie, but Alister stopped me with a hand on my arm. His touch was cold and clammy and it made my muscles tighten. Repulsion coursed through me at the contact. Stark moved closer to me from behind, but Alister released me before any threats could be dished.

"We didn't think it'd be appropriate to have you four sitting together, so you will be sitting at a different table with me."

Two of the skinny guys that'd been walking with Alister took the empty seats next to Katie and Knox. The other two sat at the table behind

Knox and Katie. Alister led us away from them and I shot Katie one more fleeting look. We were on the opposite side of the room from them now and Alister gestured to our table.

“You will be dining with my wife Zandra and me.”

A beautiful blonde-haired, fair-skinned woman rose at our arrival. Her eyes were a striking green color that seemed to stare straight through you to your soul. Her ruby lips were pulled into a tight smile that was obviously forced. She nodded her head in greeting before sitting back down. Her eyes examined us as we took our seats. I sat across from her and Stark sat across from Alister.

“Your purple eyes are simply hypnotic.” Her voice was smooth and silky like velvet when she spoke. “I did not expect you guys to show up. Your situation is the most peculiar thing. Tell me, does it make you anxious knowing that your neighboring hunters probably want to stab you in the back?”

Every muscle in my body tensed, but I didn’t act on it like I wanted. Stark growled, but my hand on his knee silenced him. At least he was behaving too. Neither of us could lose it. Not when we were so outnumbered.

I shot Zandra a plastered on smile that was as cold as hers. Hopefully, she felt the bite of my eyes since I couldn’t use my teeth. “I trust in my friends and it may seem strange to you, but those hunters *are* my friends. Just because you have your grasp on *some* of them doesn’t mean that it’ll change my opinion on *all* of them. Especially when we have the majority.”

“That’s what you may think, darling, but know that it’s in our nature to kill werewolves,” Zandra purred. “Your ‘*friends*’ as you call them will be quick to turn on you if the opportunity presents itself. For example, if the Order decided to make a move against you, do you think they’d protect you from us? Their own kind?”

The threat was there between the lines and I could tell Alister was about to intervene. He let out a booming laugh, but I spoke before he could say anything.

“Is this why you brought us here? To poke fun? Because if that’s the only reason then we might as well leave.”

Alister's smile turned sinister with his next words. "There is time for that later and you're going to love it. But first, we eat."

Alister stood tall and clapped his hands loudly. All attention turned to him and the entire room fell silent. "My friends and my honored guests, I am so thankful that you all could make our semiannual ball. This is the time to celebrate all we've accomplished, like the Hanson family. They were a difficult bunch to track down, but we managed."

Laughter and murmuring followed that statement. The Hansons were a family of powerful werewolves and the father was an Alpha before his pack was destroyed. I didn't realize these guys were the culprits.

Alister continued, "And the Bastiens."

More cries of triumph followed. That was another powerful werewolf family and he was obviously rubbing it in our faces while he had the chance.

"But none are as important as the presence of our guests. The first ever Pureblood hunter that's in a relationship with a werewolf and two powerful hybrids. We are so pleased you could join us and we have a present we'd like to give you. But first, food please. Your present will be the dessert."

My jaw slackened. It'd been clenched waiting for the big reveal, but I breathed deeply after realizing that it wasn't time yet. People started bringing out trays of different assortments of food. They piled various items on my plate and it all looked incredible. My stomach growled as the delicious aromas filled my nostrils. Stark and I waited for Alister and Zandra to begin eating first, just in case there were customs that we didn't know about. Once they started, we followed and dug in.

Explosions of flavor invaded my mouth with each bite. This was the best tasting food I'd ever consumed and most things weren't even meat related. It didn't matter the color. Green, orange, brown. It was all delectable.

The servers kept refilling our plates until we had no more room in our bellies. Alister and Zandra seemed to be enjoying the food as much as we were. My eyes searched for Katie and I found her rubbing her stomach with satisfaction. My little pup kicked to let me know that he was happy too.



I figured I'd stick to referring to the baby as a 'he' because it sounded better than 'it'.

"So are you ready for your surprise?" Alister questioned after we'd all finished eating.

My mouth went dry as I nodded my head. The savory food threatened to come back up. Alister motioned to someone that I couldn't see and this was the moment of truth. My gut wrenched and my heart jumped into my throat. I was glad I was finally going to get to see my mom, but this wasn't how I'd hoped it would happen.

Stark shifted his chair a hair closer to me as something was rolled out. It was covered with a sheet, so I couldn't see what, or who, it was. The men wheeled it until they reached our table and halted. Alister stood beside it and shot me another dark smile.

"Underneath this piece of fabric is someone I'm pretty sure you're dying to see."

With that, Alister removed the cover in one fluidic motion. My chest started to hurt and I quickly took a deep breath, not realizing I'd been holding it. A big black wolf came into view and relief flowed into me once I realized it wasn't my mom. Instead, a motionless Dash rested at the bottom of the black metal cage. The strangest thing was that he was still in wolf form.

I rose to move closer to him to get a better look. "Is he dead?"

"No, just tranquilized and the silver chains are zapping his energy as well. We aren't sure why he's still in wolf form. Usually, they shifted back to a human once knocked unconscious. We were thinking it was a hybrid thing and was hoping you could shed some light on it."

*Idiots, Stark growled in my mind. They still think silver affects us. Whatever they have him drugged up on must be hardcore.*

*I'm just happy it's not my mom. Let them continue thinking silver affects us, I replied. We'll have to keep it from the hunters in our group. Jack knew, but they must not since it hasn't gotten back to the Order yet.*

"It's not polite to have secret conversations, especially when a present has just been given to you." Alister's eyes narrowed at us. "We plan on studying him to see what affects you hybrids since you don't seem to go out the old-fashioned way. The silver spike didn't seem to bother him at all, but luckily the drugs worked."

*I'm surprised the drugs worked. He should be burning them off quickly,* I told Stark.

“Um, I’m not really sure how you want me to respond. A ‘thank you’ doesn’t feel right.” My expression remained stoic as I answered him.

“I think a ‘thank you’ would suffice. I believe we caught one of your enemies, but it’s a shame we can’t get him to talk. I guess we’ll have to conduct experiments physically since words aren’t being produced. That should get results.”

“What is it with you hunters and experimenting on my kind? That’s not going to get you anywhere except buried six feet under the ground,” I seethed.

Alister blinked twice before his eyes darkened. “Are you threatening me in my own home?”

“I didn’t say that I specifically was going to do anything. I was just explaining that that’s usually the outcome for you guys. I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news.”

Alister’s body lurched and I thought he was going to attack me, but his arms remained at his side. His fists clenched and unclenched and the muscles in his jaws ticked violently.

“I believe your welcome has been worn out. I am a man of my word, so I suggest you leave before I do something we both will regret.” Alister’s words hung between us as we were stuck in a stare down.

A hand pulled at my arm and Katie’s voice broke through my swirling thoughts. “Come on, Lena. Let’s get out of here.”

Stark put his arm around my shoulder and led me away from Dash and Alister. His touch was comforting and prevented me from attacking those stupid hunters. They thought they knew everything and had the right to do whatever they wanted. If that had been my mom, things would’ve taken a turn for the worst.

*Selena,* Dash’s familiar ragged voice called to me.

I stopped to look back at him, but he hadn’t moved a muscle. He still appeared to be unconscious.

*Dash,* I called to him as we started walking again.

Being hybrids gave us the ability to communicate with each other even though we weren’t linked through a pack bond. It used to piss me off, but for once, I was glad for it.

*Selena, darling, I'm going to stay attached to your mind for a while. That way I can spill their secrets to you. These people are sick and a million times worse than me. We have to take them out.*

I focused on keeping my steps and breathing normal as we reached the exit. The faces we passed were blurred with my inattention. The limo was waiting for us and we all piled in. They tried to talk to me, but my hand silenced them as I kept my concentration on Dash.

*Why should I trust you after all you've done?*

It took a few minutes for Dash to respond and I worried that I'd lost him.

*Because I'm your inside agent and you need me to defeat these guys. They want to see the complete extermination of all werewolves. I just wanted to create stronger ones.*

*Why did they invite us to that ball then? What was the point of it?* I asked him.

Dash was silent for a heartbeat before he said, *They wanted to see what you looked like in person so they could make you their number one target. They also wanted you to know that they're searching for your weakness. Those hunters you live with are pawns for them to play in the plans they have for you. Stay on your guard even when you're in your home. They're coming with full force.*

With that comment, the flicker of doubt about our neighboring hunters sparked into a flame. Dash was right about that. The Order had as much said so too. Who could be trusted?

Could Dash even be?

## Chapter Six

The car ride back to the house was full of anxiety again, but it wasn't as thick this time. After telling Kane we were on our way back, I told the three in the car that Dash had reached out to me and explained what he'd said. Stark was adamant that he couldn't be trusted and Katie was appalled that he thought the hunters that lived with us would turn on us. I held my tongue about the fact that they already had. I was too exhausted to have that argument tonight.

Kane and Kayla were both waiting for us when we returned to the territory, even though it was well past bedtime. Kane scooped me into his arms and once again showered me with kisses. I laughed at him and reminded him that I hadn't been gone that long. He just shrugged his arms and asked how it went.

"Ugh," I groaned. "I'll tell you all about it tomorrow. We need to have a meeting while Katie and Knox are here. They're sleeping at our house tonight and then we have a lot of talking to do tomorrow. So, let's enjoy tonight."

Kane agreed, even though I knew he wanted to know everything right that second. I wanted to tell him, but I didn't have the energy to go through it with him when I knew I'd have to retell it again tomorrow. It was nice that he was so understanding and led me straight to bed when we got back to the house. I was out like a light as soon as my head hit the pillow.

~\*~

“We can’t trust Dash. It’s as simple as that so I’m not sure why you’re even acknowledging his words,” Kane stated without hesitation.

Kane had the same belief as Stark. Dash couldn’t be trusted and that was that. They were probably right too, but I just couldn’t shake off the idea that he could be helping us out of spite towards the hunters.

“I thought it was something I should at least mention and put it out there for discussion. It would be nice to have someone on the inside,” I reasoned.

Tony shook his head. “No way. We finally have things under control here and the hunters are starting to feel at ease. We’re not going to let that fool stir things up again. He’s already done enough, don’t you think?”

“I agree with Tony,” Katie inputted.

I sighed. “Okay, that’s that. I won’t listen to Dash anymore and will just block him out. Our patrols need to stay on track and some hunters should join in the mix. They know what to look for more than we do when it comes to the Order’s tactics.”

“That sounds reasonable,” Katie stated. “Tony, I’ll leave it up to you to select who. It’s about time Knox and I got back home. I’m sure Alex is worried.”

“Thanks for accompanying us to the ball and helping us, like usual. You’re always welcome so don’t hesitate to visit us. I’d like to see Alex sometime soon. It’s been far too long. Maybe we could come when things settle down too?” I offered.

“That’d be wonderful.” Katie beamed. “I’m sure Alex would love to see you. He thinks you’re the coolest werewolf ever. You’re like a superhero to him.”

I giggled at that. “That’s a strange thought. Selena the superhero to the rescue.”

I struck what I thought to be a heroic pose, but probably just looked like an idiot.

“Well of course it’s weird when you say it like that.” She rolled her eyes at me.

We hugged goodbye and I bid them a safe trip home. They took off with Katie on Knox’s back. It was funny to see her riding him like a horse

as they ran off into the woods. The real thing was a lot more hilarious than my imagination portrayed it. She'd held onto his fur like it was the reins and it would've made my day if she'd kicked his sides to get him to go. It was cute that she was so small in comparison to his wolf form.

Kane and I laughed about that for a while after and went to eat lunch at Marie's. She was waiting on the doorstep when we got there and was smiling creepily at us as we approached.

"What's going on?" I asked hesitantly.

Before she could answer, Kane yelled, "You're pregnant, too?"

She nodded her head excitedly before tackling him in a hug. "You're going to be an uncle on top of being a dad. Our children are going to be so close."

After sniffing the air, I said, "I don't think she smells any different. How did you know?"

Kane shook his head at me. "Only male wolves can pick it up. It's a weird thing, but I think it's so our instincts to defend them can kick in."

I sniffed one more time before asking, "What does it smell like?"

"That is for us guys to know and for you girls to never find out," he responded.

"So, it stinks?" Marie snickered.

Kane didn't reply that time and walked past her to congratulate Ace. They did a little man-hug thing before moving to sit at the dining table. Marie and I placed the food on the table and everyone dug in. For a fleeting moment, I wished we had some of the food that the Order had cooked up. That would spoil me rotten if I could eat it every day. I didn't even know what it was but that didn't matter.

During lunch, the subject of Dash came up and Marie cut the discussion short. She claimed that she never wanted to hear that name again and was happy he was suffering in a cage somewhere like she had.

Before the battle years ago, Marie had been captured by Dash and was injected routinely with Cesium, our true weakness. It hindered her from shifting into wolf form and made her so weak and sickly looking. I understood where her hostility came from, but I didn't think he deserved to be left at the Order's mercy. Who knew what they'd do to him to try to decipher a hybrid's weakness? Hopefully they wouldn't discover that silver didn't have an affect on us.

Dash hadn't contacted me yet today, but I hoped he would check in soon. I wouldn't block him out like I told the others. He couldn't be trusted, but that didn't mean that some of the information wouldn't be useful. It was better than nothing. Dash was a vengeful person and the Order was doing exactly what they needed to get on his bad side.

When push came to shove, I was certain Dash would backstab us, too. I wasn't naïve enough to think otherwise. That was why he had to remain at arms length and I couldn't let him or the Order get under my skin. I had to focus on what was important. The safety of my pack. I would do what I thought was best for them. At the moment, that was getting anything about the Order that I could out of Dash.

Lunch went well and Dash's name wasn't brought up again. Marie and I talked about all of the fun stuff our children would do together. They'd go through the same developmental stages and become best friends. We were both hoping for boys, but it'd be fun to dress up little girls.

We started gushing to the boys about how awesome it was going to be and they just couldn't get off the topic about how strange it was to be parents. Kane said he didn't feel old enough to be an adult sometimes, let alone a dad. I was certain that would change once the baby was here. This pup was going to be spoiled rotten.

Trevor's boy wouldn't be too much older either so the three of them would probably remain close, just like we all were. I could imagine our little boy running up to little Callus's house and asking to play like Trevor and I did so many times.

If only our parents could see us now. They'd be so proud. It was tough knowing our pup would grow up without grandparents. My dad was killed before this whole mess started. My mom went Lost, so she was currently MIA or dead. Kane's dad was killed during the attack by Dash and the hunters. Kane's mom died before I even met him. We'd carry their memories and pass them on to our pup so he'd know what they were like, but of course it wasn't the same as having them here.

I was starting to get tired and desperately wanted a nap, so Kane escorted me home. Before we left, I told Marie that this was what she had to look forward to and she just giggled. The fatigue never seemed to go away.

After I positioned myself on the bed for some shuteye, Kane came over and started to give me a back and shoulder massage. I sighed and said,

“What would I do without you?”

It was a question that I seemed to be asking more frequently these days. He was so supportive and was there whenever I needed him.

“Not get awesome massages.” He chuckled.

My body relaxed at his touch and I started to drift off. The peace was quickly interrupted, like it usually was.

*Selena, darling. Dash called. He sounded weaker than the last time he spoke to me. They have been doing all types of things when they think I'm unconscious, including talking about their plans. They're going to make their move soon.*

I kept my eyes closed and my muscles loose so Kane wouldn't suspect anything. I knew he'd fuss about me talking to Dash. *Why are you telling me this? You're my enemy.*

I felt the need to keep reiterating that so he knew where he stood. It was also so I could keep my thoughts straight.

*For the sake of our hybrid blood. I don't want it to die with us and there aren't any others that I know of.*

*Stark's one now thanks to you and your hunter buddies. I'm surprised the Order hasn't given you an award for turning your back on your own kind.*

*I deserved that, but he isn't a true hybrid. He was made. He isn't as stable as you are and it probably won't last forever for him.*

I hesitated. *You mean he isn't going to stay a hybrid?*

*Most likely not. He definitely won't be able to pass it down to the next generation like we can.* He paused before continuing, *I have to go. They're catching on that I'm not unconscious. Stay aware of what's going on around you.*

*Wait, Dash. Who specifically do I need to watch out for?*

He didn't answer and it remained silent on his side.

“So what did he have to say?”

My eyes popped open at Kane's sudden, angry question. My gaze shifted to him and he even looked peeved. Not wanting to annoy him further, I told him everything. The hunters were coming for me, Dash was probably going to die there, and Stark wouldn't remain a hybrid forever.

Kane's expression lightened. “So Stark isn't going to stay a hybrid? Does this mean your bond will break when his powers diminish?”



My gaze hardened. “Out of those three things, you picked out Stark’s situation as the most important one? Not that they’re coming after me while I’m vulnerable?”

Kane shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. “I know you’re safe here with me. That’s my logic at least.”

“You went from being the best mate ever to the most idiotic,” I snapped. “You can be a real jerk sometimes.”

Pushing myself up, I almost made it out the door, but Kane stopped me.

“Where are you going?”

“To talk to Stark. I think he should know about this and I want to tell him in person.”

“You don’t even know if it’s a true statement. Dash could just be lying to you. That’s something he’d likely do.”

I grunted and took a deep breath to calm my wolf. She’d grown angry with not being able to run free. It was weird for that monster to be back in my life so suddenly, so I needed to not be swayed so easily. Kane was right and it was stupid of me to think Dash would want to help us. However, I did still think that I should talk to Stark about it.

All plans of napping flew out the window now that the wheels in my head wouldn’t stop turning. I’d probably turn in early tonight.

“I’m still going to go talk to Stark. You can come and visit Kayla if you want while we talk.”

He shook his head. “I’m going to go check on the patrols. Tony is supposed to be joining me with some of the hunters.”

“Why do we still call them hunters if they don’t hunt us anymore?”

“We think they don’t, but some obviously still do.”

“Good point,” I admitted. “Maybe we can come up with a new name for them once the Order is taken care of.”

Kane chuckled and kissed my cheek. “Only you would be worried about something like that. I’ll talk to Tony about it. Let me walk you to Stark’s first.”

My emotional whiplashes seemed to be rubbing off on him. His moods were all over the place like mine.

We walked hand in hand to Stark’s house chatting about simple things like the weather. It was pleasant and I was glad that Kane and I could

still do this no matter what craziness was going on in our lives. Every conversation didn't have to be a serious one.

"I love you," I told him as we strolled. "It's been a while since we've said it, but it'll never change."

He grinned and placed his free hand on my stomach. "I love you too, Lena. I can't wait for the newest addition to our wild life."

"I can't wait to be able to run in wolf form again," I teased and he just laughed in response.

Stark was already waiting for us on the porch when we arrived. His eyebrows were raised and his arms were crossed as he stepped forward to meet us. Stark nodded a hello to Kane and pulled me in for a quick hug.

"I'm not sure if you realize, but you project your thoughts and actions to me all the time, including this one," Stark explained.

"I'm sorry. I guess I didn't notice it."

He waved his hand as if to say 'don't worry about it'.

"Well, I'm going to head off to meet up with Tony." Kane kissed me bye, nodded again at Stark, and left us alone.

He was still so awkward when it came to Stark and I knew he hoped the blood bond would break like Dash believed. Once again, I couldn't blame him for it. I was sure me being pregnant just made it worse.

"Where's Kayla?" I asked, noticing she wasn't around.

"She went hang out with Rebecca. Shall we?"

Stark steered us towards the woods. I shot him a questioning look, but he didn't respond. I was surprised he wasn't trying to keep me away from the woods like Kane was. He stopped at the clearing I used to come to when I needed some alone time to think or settle down. I hadn't been here in a while. How did he know about it?

"I saw it in my dreams," he answered, reading my thoughts. "Well, I'm guessing they were your dreams, but I wasn't complaining. This place is beautiful."

He was right and that was the reason I had been drawn to it. The clearing had bits of sunlight shining down where the sun could peek through the trees. Flowers of various colors blended together. It hadn't changed one bit and the sheer magnificence of it still stole my breath. It was amazing I'd stumbled across it and nobody else had yet. Stark didn't count since I basically showed it to him.

I took a seat in the overgrown grass and positioned myself by the flowers. My fingers traced the velvety petals as I asked, “Do you know why I wanted to talk to you?”

Stark took a seat next to me so close that our knees touched. I reined in my emotions. After years of being with Kane, it was still hard to squash the feelings I had for Stark. He would always hold a part of me that I’d never get back and it hurt sometimes. We blamed it on the blood bond, but I also thought it was just because he was such an amazing guy and was there when I needed him. Although, that wasn’t a fair comparison because I wouldn’t allow Kane to be there.

I internally groaned. I had no right to get mad at Kane in regards to his comments about Stark when it was my fault things were so insane.

Stark’s reply pulled me out of my thoughts. “I have no idea. *That* you’ve managed to keep locked inside that labyrinth of a mind.”

“Well, at least I know I can keep *some* things from you.”

He playfully stuck his tongue out at me and I giggled. At times and places like this, I could forget the troubles lurking behind each tree. I could forget that hunters wanted me dead for what I was. I could forget about Dash.

We enjoyed the silence and relaxation for a little bit longer before I told him about what Dash told me.

“I’m shocked that you didn’t know I talked to him,” I added when I’d finished.

Stark shrugged a shoulder. “I don’t hear *everything*. Just most things. I had a feeling you were going to talk to him again even though I thought we’d decided you should ignore him.” Stark quirked an eyebrow at me.

“Well, I didn’t listen. I think it’d be good to have someone so close to the Order spilling their secrets.” Ugh. I was so back and forth about this.

“I wouldn’t say he was close to the Order,” Stark mocked. “But is it still a good thing if he’s feeding you lies?”

“Well, no, but-”

“No buts. He may or may not be right about my hybrid powers diminishing, but that’s something we’ll figure out as we go. For now, focus on blocking him out. His words aren’t worth the trouble of deciphering whether they’re honest or not.”

“You do realize they’re going to kill him, right?”

“Good. One less problem for us to worry about. I’m just surprised they haven’t recruited him.”

“I was thinking the same thing, but I guess it’s because the Order is so old-fashioned that they couldn’t fathom getting help from a werewolf.”

“True.” Stark bobbed his head. “Your belly is getting bigger.”

I snorted a laugh. “If I wasn’t carrying a pup right now I’d probably kill you.”

“Well good thing you’re carrying a pup then,” he teased.

We joked like that for a couple more hours, enjoying the weather and silence that nature offered, before heading back to our houses. It was getting dark by the time we made it to the house. Stark walked me to mine before going back to his. Kane had already returned from the patrols. He’d even prepared dinner and apologized for being jealous and hotheaded at times. I said sorry for acting the same way.

He filled me in on what happened with the hunters joining the patrols. Apparently, they weren’t too pleased about it, but Tony put them in their place. Kane had even asked Tony about the name thing, but they like still being referred to as hunters. It was what they were even though they didn’t track down werewolves anymore. Well, some of them didn’t. We had to keep reminding ourselves about that so we didn’t lower our guards and give the traitors an opening.

## Chapter Seven

Nightmares of Dash being tortured plagued my dreams. They caused me to wake up in a cold sweat. I sat up and willed the panting and erratic heartbeat to subside. Kane didn't stir, which was astounding. The only explanation was probably that it was Dash's anxiety and not mine, so he couldn't sense it.

I swiped at my clammy forehead as my breathing returned to normal. It was hard, but I refrained from calling out to Dash. I would respect both Stark and Kane's request this time and cut off contact with Dash. That was my final decision, so I blocked him out completely. What would be, would be. It wasn't like I could do anything to save him without putting us at risk. Instead, I'd focus on getting our territory ready so that our pup would have a stable home to thrive in.

Stability didn't involve Dash.

Relaxing back next to Kane, my apprehension calmed and Dash was evicted from my thoughts and thankfully from my dreams too.

~\*~

Kane and I were having lunch when it happened.

Gunfire pierced the silent air while we were eating the meat and vegetables I'd prepared. Next came the yells through the pack link. Frantic voices searched for their relatives. Others tried to explain what was going

on to us. It was hard to think and make out what was being said, but we were able to get the gist of it. The hunters had made their first move.

It'd been a few weeks since my nightmare about Dash and he hadn't tried to contact me during that time either. I could only assume he was dead and now they were turning to us.

We jumped up quickly to head into the fight. Kane tried to get me to stay in the house, but that wasn't happening. He transformed into his wolf once the hunters with guns came into view. He knocked me aside before rushing forward.

*Stay there*, he commanded in his Alpha tone and my wolf bristled.

Like hell I was just going to stand around. What kind of Aluna would that make me?

*An alive one*, Stark's voice replied to my rhetorical question.

He emerged from the hysterical crowd. Blood matted his fur. The gunshots were getting louder and closer. Cries of fear were the only sound that could be heard besides the gunfire. Werewolves and hunters were both desperate to escape the attack.

Kane was completely out of sight and it was difficult to understand anything through the link since there was so much frenzied shouting overloading the pack link.

*Head to the woods for cover*, I boomed through the link with every ounce of Aluna voice I could muster.

The outcome of my command was visible. The werewolves, both in human and wolf forms, darted towards the trees instantaneously. Rebecca and Kayla burst through the swarm with the children in tow. Callus was perched in Rebecca's arms and they were making their way to the woods.

Rebecca noticed me watching and beckoned me to follow with a nod of her head, but I only shook mine in response. My place was here for the moment. Kayla didn't see us as she focused on the kids around her. They clung to her clothes as they moved.

*Stark, you should be helping them. I'll be fine*. I used our blood link to talk to him since it would be clearer.

*Kayla's safe. My place is at your side for now. Nothing will happen to you, but you do need to heed your own command*.

*Nonsense*, I answered as I helped an elderly woman to her feet.

She was a hunter and had tripped on a rock. She thanked me as she continued forward to the trees once her gait was stable enough. My eyes traced the group and I realized my wolves were passing the message on to the hunters since they weren't connected through the link.

Only after the amount of people thinned significantly and our attackers started to come into view did I allow Stark to lead me away.

Kane was completely lost in the chaos but Stark remained at my side as we followed the crowd. He was still in wolf form and would nudge me to keep moving. I cursed my weakness at not being able to shift, but it wasn't worth the risk, especially since it was more dangerous now that the pup was bigger.

I'd pause here and there to make sure everyone was getting out and to look for Kane, but Stark kept urging me forward.

*Where are you?* I called to Kane using our mate bond.

*Just keep going. Get out of here. I'm making sure everyone escapes. Trevor and Ace are with me.*

I was so relieved to hear his voice. If it weren't for our separate links I probably wouldn't have heard him. *I should be helping you.*

*No, you need to make sure our pup remains safe. I love you.*

My heart shattered with those three words. *I love you too. Come back to me.*

My chest continued to fracture. Piece by piece chipped off with each step I took away from Kane. It was painful and sucked, but he was right. He, Trevor, and Ace would have to hold the front. I'd only get in the way since I couldn't shift. Kane would probably get hurt trying to protect me.

The rising sun was once again mocking the fight that was going on. The hunters finally chose their side. I was just glad to see some running with us. At least they didn't all fool us. Some were genuine in their strife for peace. I paused to catch my breath.

*We have to keep going,* Stark insisted.

I shook my head, which had started to ache from the rush of adrenaline. *I need to breathe for a minute. My heart is about to pound its way out of my chest. Plus, I'm worried about the others.*

*But you can't fight. If something happens to Kane, you need to remain safe so the pack will still have a leader. You need to guide them*

*through this mess so they can reach the other side. The Order is getting closer.*

My jaw clenched. This didn't feel right, even though it was logical. *He'll be fine*, Stark said reassuringly, but it was to no avail.

The muscles in my legs were burning. They hadn't moved this much in a long time and my lungs were more easily winded this time too. It was getting harder and harder to draw in deep breaths.

*Get on my back*, Stark stated simply after realizing I wasn't moving. *No way. You aren't some stallion.*

*Katie does it with Knox.*

I snorted and was about to retort something about how ridiculous they looked, but then a thought hit me. *We should head for Knox's territory. That'll be the best place for us to regroup.*

Stark bobbed his head and lowered his body so I could hop on his back. My cheeks heated. This was so awkward. How did Katie do it regularly? But, it was the only way we'd pick up the pace with my debilitating situation.

Stark's fur was rough as I grabbed onto it and hoisted myself up. The blood that stained it was dried and it was hard not to gag at the smell. It took a second to get situated, but my fingers dug farther into his fur for support as I told him to go.

*My pack, head for Knox's territory. We're going to have to cut it left.*

The authority in my voice was fierce and couldn't be mistaken. They obeyed my command and made a sharp turn left. The hunters followed along and kept up with our pace for the most part. They looked confused, but staggered along with us.

It seemed we did way too much running away, so this would just be temporary to regroup. No more evading. We'd face the Order head on the next chance we got.

~\*~

It was well into the night when we stumbled into Knox's territory. His patrols ran to meet us and escorted us into the territory. I hopped down from Stark's back as Knox and Katie approached us. She ran up to me once I made it to the front of our exhausted group.



Knox started barking orders for his pack members to help mine get settled. It felt like the incident from a few years ago was happening all over again. Déjà vu hit me hard and the tears pooled in my eyes. This time, they spilled over.

Katie pulled me in for a tight embrace as she steered me towards their house. My pack and the hunters were being brought to Knox's pack house. His wolves were going to bring them some food too. Stark left me to search for Kayla and Rebecca to make sure they were okay, along with the children. Knox lingered behind to make sure everyone was taken care of while Katie and I left. I filled her in on what had happened.

The hunters living with us were the first to attack and caught many off guard. Minutes after that, the Order members appeared out of the woods to join the fight. My wolves reacted as best they could in the given situation, but things went downhill so fast. At that, we retreated. Worry engulfed me as I told her that Kane, Trevor, and Ace had remained to give us a chance to escape.

"There was nothing you could've done other than help them get away, Lena," Katie said as she pulled me in for another hug.

We arrived at her house to see someone who resembled Alex waiting on the front porch. This guy just looked so much older though it was crazy. Had it really been that long since the last time I visited?

"Lena," he cheered as he rushed to hug me. His voice was deeper than I remembered too. "What happened? Are you okay?"

I nodded my head and forced a smile, still in disbelief that this was Alex. "We're okay for now. Your dad is so incredible for taking us in."

"It's the least we can do for all you did to help destroy those terrible hunters last time. Oh, sorry Katie." He sent her an apologetic smile.

I sometimes forgot that it was Katie's brother, Jack, who had led that attack three years ago. I knew she was living here, but I wondered if it was still hard for her to be here at the place where it happened. This was where he was killed.

"It's fine," she reassured him, but her voice was thick with emotion.

It definitely still affected her. She had the same accent as Jack and every now and then, I would be thrown back in time when she spoke. His voice still plagued my nightmares and reminded me of when I was trapped by him and Dash.

“How about you go down to the pack house and see if they need any help?” Katie’s smile was genuine and Alex nodded his head excitedly before darting off. “He loves to do anything he can to assist with the pack. He can’t wait to follow in his dad’s footsteps,” she explained after he left.

“That’s sweet. We aren’t staying long though. I don’t want to impose and I don’t want the Order tracking us here. It puts you all at risk. We just need to regroup and decide our next move. I just hope Kane will be back soon. He and the warriors stayed behind to give us the chance to get away.”

“You guys are welcome to stay as long as you want. We fought together once before and would be willing to do it a second time.”

*Lena, where are you guys? Something went wrong with the hunters’ weapons so we were able to break away.*

Kane’s voice stole my breath for a second, but I was quick to answer. *We’re at Knox’s place.*

*Good. We’re on our way. The hunters had all type of weapons, including explosives. While we were fighting, a blast went off in the middle of the Order’s troops. They were forced to pull back, which gave the remaining troops the chance to escape. Many were killed and Ace was injured, but we are heading that way now.*

I passed the news onto Katie and we rushed to tell the others. Knox and Stark had everyone situated and they were about to eat dinner. They tried to get me to eat something, but I couldn’t stomach anything until Kane had returned.

“They probably won’t be back until morning, so you should at least eat a little something,” Katie reasoned.

I shook my head. “My stomach is way too uneasy for me to try eating anything. I’d probably just throw it all up and then it would just be a waste of good meat.”

Stark snorted, but didn’t say anything. My eyes narrowed at him, but he just ignored it. He walked away and I watched as he joined Rebecca and Kayla. His posture was stiff as he moved and it didn’t take our link to know that something was bothering him. I wouldn’t pester him though because he’d tell me when he was ready to talk.

Looking at Rebecca, I realized she was just as anxious as I was as she waited for Trevor to return.

My focus turned back to Knox, Katie, and Alex. It was pleasant watching them interact. They were a family and their differences didn't matter. A heart was an incredible thing and it was refreshing to see theirs so open. I couldn't wait to have our pup join the world and watch him interact with Kane. My fingers trailed my stomach at the thought and the little guy kicked at the touch.

The hunters had divided themselves from the wolves. There wasn't any laughing amongst them and they seemed lost and unsure. My pack wasn't much better. They looked so solemn and kept shooting looks of contempt in the direction of the hunters. I had no words to ease either side. Some of the hunters that lived with us all those years were part of that attack. We really didn't know if some of the ones who fled with us were still working as spies. Knox's pack seemed to have the same idea as they watched from the corners.

Yet, none of them questioned Katie's presence or watched her every move. They'd accepted her and I could see why. She and Knox molded perfectly together like two matching puzzle pieces.

One by one, everyone drifted off to sleep, but my eyes were wide open. Sleep evaded me as I awaited the arrival of Kane and the others.

After getting tired of staring at the ceiling, I left the pack house for some fresh air and stargazed for a while. Footsteps approached me and drew my attention away from the cloudless sky.

A boy approached me hesitantly and he kept looking from side to side nervously. He had to be only eight years old. The hunter smell was potent on him and I was certain he was worried about an oncoming attack. How did he manage to slip through the patrols in the first place?

His black hair was wet and clung to his face. Whether it was sweat or water, I wasn't sure, but once he noticed me, his stride became more confident. I was obviously his target. From the previous attack, I gathered that the Order loved using children as their pawns. It was as if they didn't care for their offspring. They were just tools.

I moved towards him and noticed an envelope in his hands. Of course the Order would know I was here. I just didn't expect them to move so quickly.

His head only reached my chest and it reminded me how young he was. His outstretched hand passed the envelope into my palm. I didn't

hesitate this time and tore into it.

It read, "Come alone and nobody will get hurt. Save your wolves from the fight."

"What's the meaning of this?" I asked the boy. "Where am I meant to go?"

"I'll lead you to her."

"Who's her?"

He shook his head. "She doesn't want you to know until you're there in person."

"This is ridiculous. You know that right?"

He just shrugged his shoulders in response and probably thought I was crazy. The real crazy people were the Order. Why did they love writing letters like this and how could they expect me to keep going alone?

"What happens if I don't comply?"

"Your pack will be obliterated."

I growled and he flinched back. My teeth had elongated, but I wouldn't allow the shift. Sucking air through my nose, I tried to rein in my anger. The boy must've realized I wasn't going to attack him because he visibly relaxed.

"Why did they send you? Did they think I had a soft heart for children and wouldn't attack?"

"I'm all she has so she had no choice but to send me." His expression was full of sorrow and that comment ignited the curiosity within me.

"So this threat isn't from the Order?"

He didn't answer. Just motioned for me to follow him. Like the crazy person I was, I allowed him to lead me away from everyone who would protect me if this were a trap. This couldn't be the work of the Order though. They had more than one boy to do their bidding and the boy seemed earnest. Either that or I was too gullible and easy to fool in my pregnant state of mind. It seemed my brain just went to mush these days.

We both looked around to make sure nobody was following when we crossed the line of trees and moved out of sight. As we walked, I asked his name to try to create small talk, but he didn't say anything in response. He also evaded my other attempts at conversation, so I just stopped and

followed him quietly. Hopefully, this 'her' wasn't too far because this was going to be very awkward if so.

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## Chapter Eight

“She will meet you here,” the boy said as we came to a halt after walking for a good mile and a half.

He gave me a weird bow before leaving me alone. I glanced around, but nobody was in sight and it was strange for the boy to just stroll back into the woods. I sighed loudly and was starting to grow nervous and was realizing how stupid this really was. Thankfully, I didn’t have to wait too long.

“I see you're still just as reckless as ever,” a female voice said from behind me.

My muscles tensed for an attack as I turned to the familiar voice and my knees locked to keep from giving out at the person who stood in front of me. Her blue eyes were no longer cold, and now, were full of gentleness and hesitation. Her blonde hair was cut to her chin and had its shine back. She smiled, not sneered, and suppressed memories were unlocked like she turned a key in my brain.

"Mom?" My voice came out so weak and pathetic, but I was too shell shocked to care.

She nodded her head, but that was it. She didn't offer an explanation or any other words of reason.

"How is this possible? Why do you smell human?"

Her scent held no wolf, only human. The mark the rogue wolf had left on her neck was gone. Her posture was soft and tender. There wasn't any sign of a lost wolf within her.

"How about you give me a hug first and then we will dive right into the explanations?"

She opened her arms up for me, but I stood still and rigid. My muscles were tensed and my brain was screaming not to, so I shook my head.

"I'm okay right here for now. I think you need to make sense of all this first."

Mom dropped her arms awkwardly and moved her hair behind her ears.

"Okay," she said plopping on the ground. I remained standing as she continued, "The Order cured me."

"*Cured you?* You mean they made you human? How can they do that?"

"Yes, yes. I'll get to all that. Apparently, it's been something they've been working on because they can produce the cure in gas form. Once they perfect that then they could hit all the wolves at once, which would be faster and easier than fighting them."

"But they took away your identity. They took away your other half. Why do you sound so joyful about it?"

She smiled again. "I was Lost, Lena. I didn't even know you, so I see it as them curing my disease."

My eyes narrowed at her suspiciously. "Why are you really here, Mom?"

Her smile finally fell. "I'm extending the chance for you to live a normal life with your baby. I'm offering it before it's forced upon you after a dirty battle."

My head nodded in understanding. "So you're working for them now. I gotcha, but that doesn't make it right. I can see where you're coming from since you were Lost, but I love my wolf and I don't want to lose her. She's a part of me."

"But it would make things so much easier. You wouldn't lose any more fights."

“We haven’t lost any yet, but that’s besides the point. I’m a leader and the easier way isn’t always the best way. How can they even have something like that developed? When did they discover it?”

“I’m afraid they won’t divulge that information. But, Lena, sweetie, think of your baby. He or she could be normal. Live a normal human life without fighting.”

“Human isn’t normal to me. That’s not what we are and I’m happy about that. I don’t want to be human and I will fight tooth and nail to make sure it isn’t forced upon me and my wolves.”

“What about your dad? He’d want what’s best for you.”

“Don’t you *dare* bring him into this. Being human *isn’t* what’s best. It may be to you, but don’t try to force it on me. You’ve been gone all this time. What makes you think you can just come back into my life to tell me I’m better off as a human?”

This was the weirdest thing that could’ve happened to me today. My mom pretty much came back from the dead and was now human. My mind was officially blown and there was nothing that could surprise me now. I just couldn’t believe she was working for the Order. Wait a minute...

I cut Mom off as she was about to answer. “Who was that boy? He said he was all you had but how can that be if you’re working with the Order?”

“My, my you have a ton of questions.” She laughed. How could she be so laidback about this? “That was Sebastian. His parents died, so I took him in after I was turned human. He was the only one who’d accompany me and be a messenger to grab you. Everyone else was too anxious because the leaders of the Order don’t want to give you the option to be human. They just want you dead.”

“So, what? You were going to turn me into a human and then hand me over to them?”

“What? No!” She looked appalled. “I would never. I was hoping that by making you human they wouldn’t see you as a threat anymore. Can’t you see I’m trying to help you?”

“I’ve heard enough,” a male voice growled from behind me.

I recognized it as Stark’s voice and boy did he sound angry. The mask of fury on his face confirmed my suspicions when I turned to look at him. I hadn’t heard him approach and wondered how long he’d been there.



“I’ve been here the whole time.” He let out another snarl. “You let your guard down too easily, Lena.”

He stepped out from behind the shrubs and I realized he was dragging a body. I could only hope that the guy was just knocked out and not dead. Stark’s hair was a hot mess and I assumed it was from the fight with the guy he was holding. Stark tossed him at my mom’s feet once he reached us.

“I found this one behind a tree holding a gun,” Stark stated. “It was pointed at you, Lena.”

“Mom, did you know?” My voice had withdrawn into a whisper. “Tell me you didn’t know.”

“I forgot what it’s like to be able to sense people around us. I knew you wouldn’t be able to sense him because of the pregnancy. In humans, pregnancies enhance senses, such as smell. In werewolves, they’re weakened.”

“You were going to let him kill me?” My voice had gone even softer, and my ears were ringing.

“No, sweetie. Of course I wouldn’t. The gun contains the gas to cure you.”

“I’m not sick,” I snapped, before putting my face into my hands.

“Being her mom, I’m giving you a chance to leave now before I tear out your throat,” Stark threatened.

I wanted to shout at Stark for talking like that to my mom, but couldn’t bring myself to defend her. She’d betrayed me once again, except this time was of her own free will. She *knew* what she was doing.

“Lena, darling, save yourself the fight and just let me help you,” Mom pleaded.

I pulled my hands away from my face to look at her one more time. “I’m sorry, but it seems we’re on opposing sides now. If I see you again, your presence will be considered a threat to me and my pack.”

“How can you say that?” She asked in a sob, but I didn’t respond. “I’m trying to help you. You’re my daughter. We aren’t enemies.”

She continued to implore me to change my mind, but I just allowed Stark to pull me away. Thankfully, Mom didn’t follow. I didn’t think Stark would be able to control himself if she did.

What had the Order done to her to completely change her morals and sense of what was right and wrong? It hurt me to think it, but she was still a ghost to me. My mom was gone and I wasn't sure what had replaced her. At least before I knew it was her wolf. Now, I had no words for this situation and what she was.

Stark rubbed my shoulders as we walked and my body instinctively leaned into him. Fatigue overwhelmed me, but my brain was too active for me to even consider going to sleep.

"I don't know what I'd do if we didn't have our bond. I hope Dash is wrong and it never breaks."

Stark chuckled. "You'd probably be human right now if we didn't have it. This completely changes everything."

"We need to get in and destroy it before it's too late. We need to stop them before they have it mass produced if they haven't already."

"You're probably right, but you aren't going to have anything to do with it. You didn't even realize I had followed you. I guess I can't fuss at you for it though because it's part of the pregnancy."

My gaze hardened. "I most certainly will help with this situation. I just never knew my senses were weakened too. I probably never would've noticed it if Mom wouldn't have mentioned it either. This sucks."

He rolled his eyes. "We'll talk about it later."

A deep sigh slipped through my lips. This had been a terrible, dramatic day. I was surprised my brain hadn't exploded. My emotions were all over the place and I was starting to lose sense of what was up and what was down. How had things gone so wrong so quickly?

By the time we reached Knox's pack house, it was almost dawn. Kane was waiting for us outside the door and I ran straight for him. My arms wrapped around his abdomen, but he only gave me a quick hug before pulling away.

"Where did you two sneak off to?" he asked with an edge to his voice. I could sense his wolf nipping to get out.

"Ugh," I groaned. "Can that wait until tomorrow?"

"No, it can't. Not this time," Kane said with finality. "Besides, it's already tomorrow."

Dang. That had worked last time, but he was too pissed for it to now.

I swallowed hard and watched Stark walk by us without a word. Jerk. He wasn't even going to help me explain everything, even though he knew full well that I wasn't ready to talk about it. Looking at Kane's stern face, I knew I didn't really have a choice though.

So, we went for a walk around Knox's territory.

"Stark followed me after I snuck in to the woods and you won't believe who was waiting for me." I blew out a breath.

"Who was it?" he urged.

"My mom and she wasn't a wolf anymore. She was just an ordinary human."

"I thought she was dead. How can she be human?" Kane was as confused about the situation as I was.

"I was never certain she was dead, just that she wasn't anywhere to be found. She was made human by the Order. It's what they want to do to all werewolves, except us. I'm pretty sure they want us dead because they're scared of me for being a hybrid."

"But how is that possible?"

My shoulders lifted into a shrug. "I'm not sure. We'll have to dig for the answers. Now, it's your turn to give me an update on the situation."

Kane bobbed his head and notified me of what happened back in our territory. "The fight was rough and many were hurt. Ace has a pretty nasty injury on his back where he was shot, but it'll heal quickly thanks to his Beta power. He'd been protecting Marie from an oncoming attack, which is why I'm glad you weren't there. Marie made it out unscathed thanks to Ace though."

"If I'd stayed back, you probably would've been in the same boat trying to defend me, except it would've been worse since I couldn't shift."

Kane nodded his head. "I'm glad you left when you did because I can't imagine being in the same situation as Ace because Marie can't shift either."

"That's right. I'd forgotten that for a minute. Who else was hurt?"

"Trevor has a few scratches here and there, but the worst one is on his right cheek. It's pretty deep. They're all from stray bullets that had barely missed him. He's lucky to be alive."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

“He’s with Rebecca right now and they’re probably all sleeping by now, including Marie and Ace. They managed to find an empty cot. Good thing Knox has plenty resources for times like these.”

“I know. We owe him big time.” I realized a shadow took over Kane’s face and knew there was still more that’d happened. “Who else got hurt?”

“Well, we lost quite a few of our warriors, including Annie and William. They went down fighting together even after their argument.”

A gasp escaped my lips and tears fell from my eyes. They were two amazing, sweet people and they were setting a good example for our next generation. They could’ve been the perfect example of peace.

“Mrs. Pots had also been caught in the crossfire while trying to get out and was killed,” Kane continued. “Tony took a bullet to the left shoulder, but is still breathing and the healer said it wasn’t a fatal wound. Katie already has him patched up and he’s resting as well. Mr. Scott got shot in the right leg, but Mrs. Carmina made it out without a scratch. She’s tending to him right now, and at least they’re both alive.”

I continued to sob. “Tomorrow, we have to grieve those we lost before we can figure out what to do next. That’s the only way we will be able to think with a clear head. How did you guys manage to get out? There was some type of explosion?”

“Well, we were lucky a freak accident occurred amongst them. While the hunters were attacking us, something went wrong and their front line was swallowed in an explosion. I’m certain it killed the majority of their troops, so it’s going to be a while before they are prepared for another attack. I think they were trying to launch the blast on us. Thankfully, they weren’t successful. None of us would’ve made it if they had been able to hurl it in our direction. It was massive.”

I embraced him and breathed in his scent. “I’m happy you guys made it back. I don’t know what I would’ve done if you hadn’t.”

Kane pulled me into him as much as he could manage with my stomach. “I’m glad the hunters messed up too.”

We stood like that for a few more moments before deciding to get some shuteye. Getting back to Knox’s pack house, we realized how overcrowded it was, but Kane and I eventually found an empty spot on the floor to rest on. We were offered the spare bed in Knox’s house, but we

thought it'd be better to remain with the pack. We cuddled together and both hoped that tomorrow would be a better day and we'd be able to get back on our feet.

The ground was uncomfortable and the sun from the dawn started to peek through the windows, so it was hard to fall asleep. We needed at least a few hours of rest before we faced the new day though, so we continued to try. Otherwise, we would be like zombies dragging our feet.

After what felt like forever, unconsciousness finally consumed me.

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## Chapter Nine

I felt like a zombie anyway the next morning. I'd probably only slept two good hours, which was nothing when your reserve energy was being used to create a pup. I felt sick to my stomach I was so tired and dragged my feet everywhere I went.

At the moment, I was hanging out on the back porch of their pack house. Katie was keeping me company while Knox, Alex, and Kane were setting up a bonfire. We were going to burn it in memory of those that were lost. Katie and I were watching everyone in silence since we were both too tired to talk. Katie hadn't slept well either.

Marie was hovering over Ace and wouldn't let him out of her sight. She barely let him pick anything up and the agitation on his face was comical. Trevor was playing with Callus and the other children while Rebecca observed them with a smile on her face. Stark and Kayla were cuddling under a tree. She looked mad, but he was smiling. I was happy they were all making the best of our situation. The other pack members were doing similar things. It wasn't all laughs though. Some were crying for their lost loved ones and my eyes watered at that thought again.

The hunters had completely divided themselves from the wolves. Most lingered inside the house and didn't want to join us outside. Tony was inside as well, but was resting so he could heal up faster. I was surprised that they were even still here. It didn't really make sense since the peace

was already destroyed. Was it because they had nowhere else to go or did they still want to fight for our cause?

“As a former hunter it’s hard for me to say this, but I think you should cut your ties with them and part ways. There are too many whispers going around about the Order and I really think a good bit of them are still a part of it.” Katie’s conclusion shocked me.

“Why would they have fought for so long to remain with us in peace just to give it up now?”

“To gain trust and remain on the inside for moments just like this.”

“Did you know they were making a cure for werewolves?”

Katie quirked an eyebrow at me. “How is that even possible? It’s not like you guys are sick or anything.”

My lips morphed into the first smile of the day. I had thought the same thing. “I have no idea. My mom actually met me last night to try to get me to turn human. I wouldn’t have believed her, but there she was, standing in front of me as a human.”

“So that’s where you snuck off to. I was wondering what was happening when I saw Stark sneaking behind you.”

It was my turn to quirk an eyebrow. “What exactly did you think was going on?”

She half-shrugged. “I wasn’t sure. I know you guys are bonded so...”

She trailed off with another shrug and wouldn’t meet my eyes. I realized what she was implying and gritted my teeth.

“It’s not like that between us and I can’t believe you think I would do that to Kane. I love Kane. I didn’t even know Stark was following me, but it’s a good thing he did. I probably would be a human now if it wasn’t for him.”

She held her hands up defensively. “I didn’t mean any offense. I just see the way your eyes seem to find each other no matter how large the crowd in the room is. But let’s get off that topic. Why do you think the Order didn’t try turning you all into humans yesterday?”

My eyes were still hard with annoyance, but I was thankful for the change of subject. “According to my mom, they want me dead because I’m a hybrid. They’re scared of me since they don’t know what to expect.”

“What about Dash? I’m sure they’ve tried it on him.”

“I’m not sure. I’ve blocked him out and haven’t attempted to talk to him. Kane doesn’t want me to.”

Stark didn’t either, but that didn’t need to be added.

“Well maybe now’s a good time to try. He might know something.”

“I thought you didn’t want me to either?”

She made a face. “I don’t like the idea of it, but it can’t hurt with everything else that’s happened.”

I rubbed at my burning eyes and tried to swipe away the exhaustion, but it didn’t work. “Alright, but this stays between you and me.”

She nodded her head eagerly and watched as I lowered my head. My mind reached out to his through the hybrid link, but it wasn’t there. I tried harder and concentrated with everything I had but with no luck.

My eyes popped open and I shot Katie a confused look. “I can’t contact him.”

“So what does that mean?”

“The thread that connected me to his mind isn’t there. Either they found a way to make him human or they killed him.”

We fell back into a brooding silence, both trying to sort our own thoughts. I believed he was dead. If the Order had made him human, then they wouldn’t be so worried about me because the gas would obviously work.

Katie and I hadn’t been pondering for long before Kane and Knox joined us. It was time for the bonfire and both our pack and Knox’s gathered around to watch the flames. Many were crying, including me. The hunters didn’t join us, but at least Katie did.

Kane and I both said some motivating words. He said more than me because I couldn’t stop crying long enough to get out clear words. My emotions had gone haywire and were out of my control. Kane was amazing though. He stood strong and didn’t shed a tear. He was my rock and kept his arm tightly around my waist the whole time.

My eyes unconsciously shifted to Stark and he was holding a crying Kayla. His eyes met mine instantly and he sent me a small smile. Kane was my rock, but Stark was something too. It was painful and terribly wrong to think that, especially after telling Katie off for suspecting something. But, that connection would always be there, like a taut string that tied us together. It was woven through our hearts and I didn’t want it to ever snap.



I broke the eye contact and took Kane's hand in mine as we moved back into the crowd. I loved Kane more than Stark, without a doubt. Kane was my mate and that was that. Starting today, I would try to gain some restraint on the feelings I held towards Stark, especially since I was expecting Kane's pup. That line would always connect us, but I needed to try to block the emotions that came with it.

The air remained thick as we bowed our heads in respect for the dead. Sobs were the only thing that could be heard for the longest time. As the night went on, the cries turned into watery smiles as they shared memories of the deceased.

Everybody who passed where Kane and I were standing thanked us for the bonfire. It was just what they needed to move on. The hunters continued to remain segregated from us of their own will. They had stayed inside Knox's pack house for the whole ceremony. Tony was hurt and needed the rest so he was reprieved from my anger. The other hunters should've been there if they truly wanted to live with us. Grieving was a part of the process no matter what or who you were and I was saddened for the hunters we'd lost too, not just the werewolves.

After the bonfire was finished, Knox, Katie, Kane, and I held a meeting to determine what to do next. Tony couldn't make that either and I hoped he got better soon. The four of us argued back and forth for a while.

"We don't want to put you guys in danger too," I explained.

"But if you stay, then we can help you take out the Order. They're probably going to come after us eventually so we would do better standing together," Knox reasoned.

"Yeah, but I hate how we always seem to drag you into our mess," I complained.

"As if," Katie snorted. "We're stronger fighting together and the Order is after all wolves, not just yours. So, they'll come after us eventually."

"They have a point, Lena," Kane agreed.

I sighed. "Alright then. We'll stay and then join together for the fight. You're right about it being easier that way."

After that was decided, our planning started taking a turn for the worst. I wanted in on everything, but the three of them ganged up on me and shut me down. They told me I couldn't be a part of the battle with a

baby on the way. I gritted my teeth and slouched into my chair. I'd hold my tongue for now.

The three of them only bickered for a few minutes longer before giving in to their rumbling stomachs. It was time to eat and we had argued all day. The stars were bright in the night sky tonight, like our deceased were looking down on us from above.

Dinner was ready by the time we got to it and the selections were huge. Knox's pack had gone over the top to accommodate us. It was touching and there was no way we could repay them for all they'd done.

Kane and I slept in the pack house again that night and dreams of my mom plagued me as I slept this time. But, at least I rested.

~\*~

Waking up, I didn't feel refreshed like I'd hoped. Instead, I felt like a zombie again and my mind was stuck on the fact that my mom was a human. It was amazing that it brought her back from being Lost, but she still wasn't the same person who raised me. That person would've never tried to force me to turn human. She was once the Luna, so she knew how important our wolves were to us. I could understand how being a human was better than being Lost, but that didn't make being human better than being a wolf.

"Are you okay, Lena?" Kane's voice invaded my thoughts. "You seem distracted."

I sighed and rubbed my eyes roughly. "I can't get my mom out of my mind. It's wearing me out. Do you think she's believes she's doing good or did the Order just brainwash her?"

"How could they brainwash her?"

"I'm not sure. We've never had someone come back from being Lost. Maybe she was more susceptible to fancy words."

"Fancy words?" He looked at me like I was crazy.

"Yeah, like, the Order spinning their words about how they saved her by turning her human. I also think they tracked her down on purpose to get to me. They probably thought they could sway me by using her."

"That sounds like an excellent deduction." Kane smirked.

He hadn't smirked in a while and I realized I missed it. The smiles were better, but the smirk brought me back to when we first met. He used to always smirk and it was sexy. Annoying and arrogant, but sexy.

"What's with that smile?" Kane cocked his head sideways. "You look like you drifted off to la-la land again."

"I was just reminiscing about when we first met." I purposefully threw him a dazed smile this time.

"Hopefully, you were only thinking about the good parts of it."

"The good parts? It was all good to me. Yeah, you were frustrating at times, but that was to be expected because of your nature."

"I was an ass. There's no excuse for that, so stop trying to blame it on my nature."

My arms wrapped around his waist and tugged him closer. "You're my ass and I love the way you are."

"It's funny how cheesy you still are even after everything that's happened. Oddly enough, you're nicer when you're pregnant."

My mouth dropped open at that comment. "Are you serious? I thought it was supposed to be the opposite and I feel I've been more moody rather than *nice*."

"You get mood swings but you seem to need me around more when you're pregnant. Before, you just wanted to do everything yourself. In the beginning you were still like that, but the further you go along, the nicer you are."

"I'm going to slap you now," I teased.

He playfully moved away in response and we started laughing.

"I want to be a part of the attacks on the Order," I said bluntly and totally ruined the mood.

A low growl rumbled in Kane's throat. "Not happening. I won't let you walk into danger like that."

"I'm not just going to waltz into it. I'm smarter than that," I argued. "I'm the one they're after anyway. It always seems to be my fault so what kind of Aluna would I be if I didn't try to fix things?"

He sighed and pulled me back into him after I'd shifted away. "It isn't your fault, Lena. You didn't ask for this and nobody blames you."

"I blame me."

“Keep your chin up because you shouldn’t blame yourself. We’ll get through this. Our pack is strong.”

Our conversation was halted when we noticed the hunters being relocated from the pack house. They didn’t look happy about it either and a few that fell behind were nudged to pick up the pace by Knox’s wolves. What was going on? By the look on Kane’s face, he was wondering the same thing. Noticing Knox following behind, we approached him to find out what was up.

“One of the hunters attacked my wolves,” Knox explained. “We can’t trust any of them. Not when we don’t know which ones will strike next. They’re just lucky that the wolf they attacked is still alive. If he would’ve died, we would be fighting right now. I’m moving them to the cells.”

“The cells? Isn’t that a little drastic?” I exclaimed. “Where’s Katie? What does she think about all this?”

“She isn’t too happy which is why she’s at the house. But, she knows it’s what we have to do to keep the pack safe. She wants to visit them and try to sort friend from foe. I think we should just banish them all.”

Not seeing the warrior, I asked where Tony was.

“He’s with Katie. They’re trying to determine the best way to handle this,” Knox replied.

I looked at Kane. “You seem quiet. What’s your take on this?”

Kane exhaled loudly. “I think our pack needs to come first so this is the right thing to do.”

I grunted. They had a point, but that didn’t mean I liked it. “I’m going check on Katie.”

They didn’t say anything as I stormed off.

Katie was in hysterics when I reached their house. Tony was trying to console her but he wasn’t having much luck with it. Katie’s shoulders were shaking from the sobs that racked her body.

“E-everything was g-going so g-good before the Order butt i-in,” she said between cries. Her breathing was ragged and it was difficult for her to get the words out. She was sitting at her dining table, hunched over.

Tony patted her shoulder awkwardly. It was obvious he wasn’t used to crying girls. He looked so out of place it was almost comical. He didn’t have a shirt on and the bandage was fully visible now. It wrapped around

his chest and left shoulder. Dried blood stained the wraps where the wound on his shoulder was. He'd probably strained his wound during this incident. Every now and then, he would wince in pain while he listened to Katie's cries. He should still be resting, but that was probably hard to do given the situation.

I sat in the chair beside her and pulled her into a soft embrace. "What do you think we should do?"

She bawled harder. "We c-can't make them t-tell the t-truth."

"There's no way to tell who's lying and who's being honest," Tony finished.

Once Katie calmed a little, we discussed what our other options were in this situation. None of us liked the idea of keeping them locked up. They all shouldn't be punished. I kept reiterating that but there seemed to be no other logical option at the moment that would keep everyone safe.

Katie and Tony were both at a loss. This was their people, yet they couldn't trust them. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to not have faith in my own pack. I would probably be a wreck just like Katie was.

They described to me how it happened. Apparently, Derek, a wolf in Knox's pack, was minding his own business, heading to do his patrol, when he was attacked by two of the hunters. He didn't have time to shift and was almost killed, but another wolf that'd been patrolling saved him. The hunters were killed, but the damage was done. Fear had been instilled in the wolves and made them turn on all the remaining hunters.

After talking a little longer, we concluded that this was our best route. It wasn't right making all the hunters suffer, but we couldn't risk another attack. Especially when things were still so fragile after the Order's attack. Letting them go didn't seem right either considering we would just be handing the Order more troops to use against us.

Katie cried a little longer, but had been reduced to sniffles by the time Knox and Kane got there. Tony left us to rest in their spare bedroom since his shoulder was acting up. Knox immediately went to console Katie, and she fell back into a sobbing fit.

Kane and I wanted to give them privacy, so we left to meet up with our pack. They all had several questions about what was going to happen. We answered them the best we could but we still weren't sure ourselves.

Dinner that night was tense and Knox and Katie didn't join us. I was assured that food had been brought to the hunters. Trevor made sure of it for me. He and Rebecca sat at our table that night with Callus. The other children sat at the table next to us and were well behaved. Trevor and Rebecca were doing an excellent job with raising them the right way.

Ace and Marie joined us as well. Ace and Trevor were both doing better and Marie looked so much happier. Ace's health affected her, so it was good to see her smiling again.

The air remained thick throughout the whole meal. The absence of the hunters didn't go unnoticed. It made the wolves more apprehensive instead of relieved. They'd been living with us for so long and had become part of the family. It was oddly empty without them.

But we were safe. That was what I kept repeating to get through dinner in one piece. We were safe.

## Chapter Ten

After the setback of the previous day, we wanted to make sure that we came to a decision in the meeting today. We didn't know how long it would take before the Order recovered and couldn't afford to waste any more time.

So, Katie, Knox, Kane, and I met once again at Knox's house. Katie looked rough and I could tell she didn't sleep well last night. Her eyes were red and puffy from her tears and her red hair was thrown up messily. She probably cried herself to sleep last night. She didn't consider herself a hunter anymore, but it was still a part of her. Those people were still like family.

When she spoke, her voice was hoarse. "We need to figure out what to do with our people in the cells. We can't keep them there. It isn't right."

"I think we should let them go," I offered first.

"Not happening." Kane shot it down without a second thought. "We can't let them go with the Order still at large. It would hurt us if we did."

Knox nodded his head in approval. "I agree. We need to take down the Order before we let them go."

"Well, it depends on how long it takes then because we haven't even decided how we we're going to approach that dilemma," I grunted.

"I think we should just show up on their doorstep and be like 'knock, knock, surprise you're dead'. Then, we just take them out while they aren't expecting it." Katie got a wild look in her eyes with that idea.

“I hate to break it to you, sweetie, but it’s never that easy,” Knox stated gently.

“It could be if we tried.” Katie crossed her arms and stared at him.

Man, she was extra fiery today. I was glad she was on our side because I’d hate to be her enemy right now.

“I’m sorry, Katie, but I agree with Knox,” I admitted and earned her glare.

“I think we should wait here and let them attack us in a place where we feel comfortable,” Kane suggested. “We know where all the good hiding places are and can get the advantage easily.”

“But that would put Knox’s territory in the line of fire,” I argued. “I’d hate to see his territory destroyed like ours was.”

“Well, what other options are there?” Kane questioned heatedly.

This wasn’t going so well.

The four of us bickered like that until lunchtime and then took a break to eat and check on everyone. After our stomachs were satisfied, we went back to Knox’s house and argued some more about the same two options.

Tony joined us after lunch since he was feeling a little better. Another head should’ve made it better, but instead, it was just another mouth throwing in their opinion. Nobody had come up with another proposal. One idea was waiting until the Order attacked and then surprising them with our own troops. Another was bringing the fight to them and attacking them head on. Both had their own flaws and I wasn’t sold on either of them.

After about another hour, I suggested, “What if we do small, internal attacks on the Order to weaken them without them knowing? They can’t smell us like we can smell them, so we could do it right under their noses.”

“That sounds risky. They have high tech security systems that would be hard to get through,” Katie said. “Their defensive systems aren’t to be taken lightly.”

“But multiple small attacks would break them down,” Tony inputted.

“It just doesn’t sound like a good idea to me.” Katie clicked her tongue with distaste.

“I think it’s better than the other two options,” Knox stated.



Katie shot him a glare, but he stared back at her unflinchingly. If they were mated wolves, I would've assumed they were having a discussion through their link. Instead, it was just with their eyes.

"What do you think, Kane?" I asked, diverting the attention to him. I didn't like Katie and Knox fighting.

"I think it's a good alternative, but how would we go about getting around their securities?" Kane questioned. "What are their securities like?"

"Well, we can figure that out once we get more information on them. We need to send someone there for a covert operation and gain some Intel," I proposed.

"Who's going to do it?" Knox asked.

"Me," I stated simply.

Their voices rose as they immediately rebuked that thought. They were amazed that I believed they would allow me to. They continued to oppose it until I finally cut them off.

"Alright, how about we address that tomorrow. It's getting late and we've talked about it the whole day. It's already getting dark and I'm getting hungry again. We can bring this back up tomorrow when we have fresh minds."

They all agreed on that and we broke off for dinner. Kane held my hand as we walked and started to rub my stomach. He even spoke to our pup and it was so sweet. The pup kicked in response and I laughed at the face Kane pulled. This baby was going to be so rotten. I was about halfway through the pregnancy and couldn't believe it had gone by so quickly. There was still a long way to go though.

Dinner went better today than last night. More people held conversations and the air wasn't as anxious. The hunters not being there was still hard, but I reminded myself we were safe. Trevor continued to look after the hunters for me and made sure they were getting their meals and were as comfortable as possible. He kept me updated so I wouldn't worry about them. I knew they couldn't all be trusted, but they didn't deserve this torture. We couldn't keep them there forever.

As we ate, my thoughts drifted and I came to the conclusion that I needed to take things into my own hands. This was all my fault whether Kane wanted to believe it or not, so I'd have to be the one to fix it. My wolf

yipped at the idea and wanted to protect our pack instead of lingering on the sidelines. They would remain safe and I would help keep it that way.

Kane and I finished dinner and went back to the pack house to sleep. Well, he fell asleep and I stayed awake until everybody else was out. Quietly and carefully, I pulled myself out of Kane's arms. Thankfully, he didn't stir as I grabbed the bag I packed with some waters and tiptoed outside.

*Stark*, I called through our special link. When I didn't get a response, I tried again but louder this time.

*What the hell, Lena?* he groaned sleepily. *I was having a good dream.*

*Come outside and don't wake anyone up, especially Kayla and Kane.*

About ten minutes passed before he made it outside. Stark didn't look too pleased about being woken up either. He had bed hair and his eyes looked dazed.

"What's the meaning of this?" he whispered.

I pulled him around the back of the pack house and we quietly made it to the woods. I made sure there were no patrols around before I stopped. We were safe from them catching us because they wouldn't be worried when they came across our scents. They were usually on the lookout for new ones.

"Well?" Stark shot me an impatient look when I hadn't said anything.

"I need your help," I said simply.

"I'm listening. Spill," he grumbled.

Note to self, Stark didn't like his sleep to be interrupted and was very grumpy if it was.

"We need to get the low down on the Order and I want to be the one to do it. They're only after us because of me anyway."

"I hope you aren't trying to be suicidal." Stark gave me a pointed look. "It's not a good idea for you to be the one to do it when you can't even shift."

"That's why I'm asking you to accompany me."

"Why not ask Kane?"

"He would never allow me to do something like this."

Heck, he wouldn't even let me brainstorm about the idea.

"And what makes you think I would? I don't like the idea of you being that close to their grasp either, especially when so many things could go wrong."

"Because you know I'm going to do it anyway. So, I figured you would want to be a part of it instead."

"Or, we could just put rotating guards to keep an eye on you."

"Do you think that would work?" I cocked my head at him and stared at him defiantly.

He sighed. "No." He took in another breath and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "I hate that you're so stubborn and headstrong." He paused again before asking, "So when do we start?"

"Now." I grinned impishly at him.

His eyebrows rose at that notion but he didn't say anything. Finally, he nodded his head. He was in.

"So, how exactly did you want to go about this?" he asked with his eyebrows still raised.

"Well, about that." I twiddled my thumbs and my smile turned timid.

After explaining my plan, we put it into action. Stark was in werewolf form and I was riding on his back. I still thought it was odd to do this but knew it would be the quickest way. I was glad we both paid attention to where they had taken us when we went to the ball. Good thing they hadn't blindfolded us either. Werewolves had a keen sense of direction, so we were able to find the mansion without too much trouble and made it by sunrise. It helped that the human society was sleeping so we didn't have any run-ins with them when we had to cross streets to get to the next stretch of woods.

Alister was the head of the Order, so I knew this would be the best place to begin. Stark had thought so too. Now, here we were, lying in the bushes, watching what was going on. There wasn't much occurring yet, and I was sure it was due to the fact that most were still knocked out.

Stark and I ended up taking turns resting so we wouldn't be incapacitated when the action started. He made me go first so I slept for a good bit until Stark woke me for his turn. He slept until the activity started,

which was pretty late by my internal clock. These werewolf hunters liked their beauty sleep.

Members of the Order started bustling around and I noticed some carried weapons. The ones with guns took their positions around the perimeter. They were obviously the watch. Some of the werewolf hunters carried stacks of paper as they moved to a building that was on the outskirts of the mansion's property. That must be where they met and planned attacks. I hadn't noticed it when we came to the ball.

There were two raised stands on either side of the property where two guards were posted in each. They had some hardcore guns, too, and would pose the biggest problem. They would probably be the ones to spot us before anyone else.

Stark nudged me with his elbow and I followed his finger as he pointed. It led to none other than Alister. He was strutting like he was the toughest person out there. Like he was the only one who mattered in the world. It was annoying and I wanted to knock that smug expression off his face. I couldn't wait to make our move and see the look on his face.

*Where the hell are you?* Kane yelled through our mate bond and almost made me cry out in surprise. Luckily, I was able to bite it back or else it would've given us away.

*I'm spying on the Order,* I answered without hesitation.

*Are you kidding me? Do you know how worried I was when I woke up to find you gone? You better get your butt back here so I can knock some sense into you.*

*Well, that isn't nice,* I teased, trying to cover up my annoyance with humor.

*Oh, I'll show you nice when you get back. You're in serious trouble.*

*You aren't my father so stop acting like it,* I snapped at him.

Kane was quiet before saying, *Are you by yourself?*

I hesitated before responding, *Stark's with me.*

*Of course. Just come back safely.*

*I will. I love you.*

*Love you too.*

I looked to Stark to tell him we'd been busted, but found a guilty expression on his face. He was biting his lip and squinting his eyes. After another minute, he turned to look at me with a frown.

“Just got fussed at?” I asked quietly and he nodded his head. “Well, let’s focus on this and then get back. Hopefully, we return with good news and all will be forgiven.”

Stark didn’t say anything as he turned back to the mansion. Realizing that was all he was going to say, I tried to contact Dash since I was closer to him here. I still didn’t get a response and squinched my nose in thought.

My mom went in and out of the mansion a couple times and a pang went through me every time I saw her. It sucked being so close yet so far. She wasn’t the same person I knew, but that didn’t squash my feelings for her. She was my mom. One of the times, she entered the mansion with Alister and they were conversing with smiles on their faces. It was weird he’d taken her under his wing. Was she a werewolf hunter now? Had she completely turned her back on our kind?

We noted every shift change, the amount of people posted, and the fact that Alister never left the property and committed it to memory. We’d have to watch them again to make sure it didn’t change by the day.

Stark and I had little to no conversation. We were both focused on the task at hand and made sure we were invisible to the Order’s watchful eyes. We stayed in our positions for the remainder of the day and didn’t budge until darkness fell. The only occasions we moved were to use the bathroom and reposition the parts of our bodies that started to go numb. We drank the few containers of water I’d grabbed on the way out, but we went the whole day without eating. I’d forgotten to pack that. Our stomachs were growling so loud I would’ve thought the hunters could hear it, but we managed to remain undetected. The pup was probably trying to eat me from the inside out by now.

As soon as night fell, Stark and I darted back towards Knox’s property, moving faster than we were going to the mansion. I was surprised that had gone so well because you’d think they would watch the woods a little more closely. That would be our opening and their fatal flaw. Werewolves thrived in the woods so what other direction would we come from?

The scolding began as soon as we stepped foot onto Knox’s territory. Kayla, Kane, Trevor, Ace, and Knox were all waiting for us when we returned. Boy, did Kane look pissed! It made him look constipated, but I

didn't think laughing at him would help my case. So, I put on a sheepish smile and explained what we found as we made our way back to the pack house.

Kane was mad even after hearing our information. He pulled me a good ways away from the others and started pacing. I was glad I didn't laugh at his expression earlier. This would be ten times worse if I had.

"Why did you choose Stark to go with you instead of me? Why do you always choose Stark instead of me? Am I just the left overs to you?" His voice grew louder with each word.

"Of course not." I moved towards him, but he stepped away. "I chose Stark because you never would've said yes. You would've locked me in a room and gone by yourself."

"Because I'd rather you safe. Why are you always running head first into danger? How am I supposed to protect you when you do things like that?" His arms shook angrily at his sides and his breaths turned into pants.

"I don't need protection, Kane. I need a partner to do things with me."

"Then you should've mated with Stark." The tone of his voice was cold and harsh. His face was as red as a tomato by now and my eyes watered at that statement.

"I want you as my mate, Kane," I whispered. "Just because I knew you wouldn't let me go, doesn't mean I don't care about you any longer. You're still my everything. You're my other half, the father of my child, and the only person I see myself spending the rest of my days with."

He shook his head and squatted down on the ground, placing his head in his hands. His shoulders rose and fell violently with his uneven breaths. I placed my hand on his shoulder and was relieved when he didn't shrug it off.

"Please don't do something like this again. Stop putting yourself at risk." Kane's voice was so low that I probably wouldn't have heard it if I wasn't a werewolf, even though my hearing was slightly diminished.

I got down to his level and pulled him into an embrace. This time, he let me. We sat there for a few minutes before his breathing fell back into a normal pattern.

"I'm sorry, Kane. It won't happen again," I promised. It was a promise I intended to keep too. It hurt to see him this upset, especially when

I was the cause of it. I just couldn't do things right and always seemed to mess things up.

My stomach growled violently and he looked towards me with wide eyes. My cheeks heated with embarrassment and the pup kicked to let me know he agreed with my stomach. We were both hungry.

"Let's go get you and our pup fed," Kane said with a weak chuckle.

I wasn't completely forgiven, but that was okay. It wasn't going to happen again. I just hoped he would let me do more and not baby me again. I wouldn't go behind his back, but I was going to argue until I got my way.

Dinner was strained that night. Katie had joined us and we filled her in about our expedition, but that only seemed to stir Kane's anger again. After that, we didn't talk much. It wasn't until *after* supper that we planned our next shift to scope out the Order. They all agreed that we needed to watch them a few more days. Ace and Trevor would be the next two to go and would leave tonight. Stark would stay up to guide them the correct way to the mansion through the pack link.

Kane tucked me in close when we lied down for bed. I was sick of sleeping on the floor, but at least Kane was still cuddling me after today. It made our situation ten times better.

"I'm so happy you're in my arms right now," Kane breathed. "I'm still annoyed about today, but also just so thankful that you're okay. I was so scared when I woke and you were gone."

"I'm sorry." I reached up and kissed his nose. "It won't happen again."

He didn't say anything else and just pressed his body as close as he could to mine. It didn't take long for his breathing to become even and a light snore escaped him. It was cute and I fell asleep listening to him. It was my very own lullaby that nobody else could play.

## Chapter Eleven

Ace and Trevor didn't return until late the next night. They weren't starving like Stark and I were because they were smart enough to pack food. They also reported the same actions that we did, so there was no change. We agreed that we'd do it one more time to make sure it would be the same the third go round.

Knox and Kane were up this time and left a few minutes after it was decided. I was a nervous wreck that whole day waiting for Kane to return. Now I knew how he felt and it sucked. I certainly didn't want to do that to him again and hoped he wouldn't do it to me. Heck, I barely ate I was so anxious about his absence and wondered if he had been the same way when I was gone.

When they returned with the same security routines, we assumed that was how they did it every night. We didn't want to send anyone else back out there so we began to plan the next phase. It was time to strategize internal attacks. We waited until lunch the next day to discuss it to give Knox and Kane time to rest up.

Ace and Trevor were a part of this meeting and we spent the whole time working out how many would go at a time and what they'd do.

"We need to be smart about it because the Order isn't stupid," I started.



“Yeah, but they’re cocky,” Ace stated. “They don’t really keep a close eye on the woods.”

“They probably think werewolves were too scared to attack them,” Trevor joked.

“Well, that’s where we’ll get them. How many should go at a time?” Kane asked.

“I think we should keep it small at two,” Knox suggested.

“Two sounds too small,” Katie rebutted.

“Yeah, I was thinking more like four,” Kane said.

“I’m not sure about that,” Knox hesitated.

“How about we vote on it? Two or four?” I proposed.

They all agreed and after a vote, four was determined to be the perfect number. Next, we started talking names of who would be in the first group and our Betas were quick to volunteer. Knox thought that was a good plan and that the other two would be the strongest from his pack. So, after some more deliberating, we decided that the first four would be Ace, Trevor, and two from Knox’s pack: Leto and Xander. They would discuss tactics on their own for the remainder of today and all of tomorrow and move in on the following day.

The unease in the air that surrounded our pack was tangible. They were worried how it all would go down and hoped this would help solve our problems instead of creating more. It had to work though. Weakening them bit-by-bit was the best option.

After the four of them left for their attack, I remained by Marie’s side to comfort her. She was a wreck and hated that Ace was in the first group. It was understandable because we didn’t know how it was going to go.

Kane popped in to check on us every couple hours, but nothing would change. Marie and I would still be sitting stiffly at the table in the pack house. We tried to talk about lighter things to distract her from Ace’s absence, but nothing worked. It was the only thought that plagued her mind and her usual permanently present smile had completely disappeared. Talk of her growing belly even failed.

“I’m sorry, but it’s hard for me to talk. I’m keeping my concentration on Ace through out mate bond, so I can feel what he’s feeling. He goes through different stages of uneasiness and a little pain, but

it's enough for me to know everything is still going okay. They're still breathing." Marie's voice shook as she spoke.

"They're going to be fine," I reassured her.

"Yeah, I know," she stated, but didn't sound convinced.

Her nerves were starting to rub off on me and I began chewing my lip while I watched her focus.

Time continued to tick by. The sun went down and the stars came out to play, but the four guys hadn't return yet. Marie was still positive they were alive, but they should've been back by now. I was starting to get worried that there were complications that had arisen and that was the reason they weren't back, but I didn't want to speak that out loud. Marie was most likely thinking the same thing but that didn't mean it should be put into words. They were better left as thoughts.

Nervous chatter filled the usually silent halls of Knox's pack house. Both packs were concerned for the four wolves' safety.

Marie and I continued to sit there and twiddled our thumbs to well past midnight. Kane had come in about thirty minutes ago and was now snoring loudly on the floor behind us, propped up against the wall. Marie and I probably would be laughing at him if her uneasiness wasn't so contagious. She didn't even touch the dinner Kane had brought us. She tried talking to Ace through the link, but she didn't get any response back. That was when the nerves really increased for me.

Most of the pack house had settled down by now and had fallen unconscious. As my eyes started to drift, the dining room door banged open and scared me so badly that I nearly fell off the chair. Ace came bounding through the door panting and had blood soaked into his shirt. His hair was drenched with sweat and dirt covered his face and hands. Marie and I stood up quickly and rushed to his side. Kane stirred from the ground and jumped up as soon as he saw Ace.

"What happened?" Marie asked as she started to yank his shirt off to find the source of the blood.

Ace fought her, but he was obviously fatigued. After she got his top off, Ace fell back into one of the chairs at the table. Our prying eyes searched, but there wasn't a visible wound.

He lowered his head and squeezed his hands into fists before saying, "It's not my blood."

My blood chilled. “Is it Trevor’s?”

Ace shook his head.

“Tell us what happened,” Kane stated gently.

Ace took a few more gulps of air before he was ready to talk. “We went for their headquarters in the back of the property instead of the mansion like we’d originally planned. We managed to get into their complex without being seen and even stumbled upon their lab. We managed to swipe some of the Order’s explosives and had every intention of blowing the lab up, but humans were in there. Except, they weren’t really human. Their scents were different from your typical one. I think they were werewolves that had been experimented on until they’d turned human. Most were deformed and misshapen. Very grotesque sights.” Ace paused and shivered as he recalled their faces. “We couldn’t do it since they were involved, so instead we moved to where they were holding a conference. We dodged people coming down the halls but there weren’t that many because most were at this meeting. After putting the explosives in place, we jetted out of there as fast and inconspicuously as we could.

“We almost made it, but a little girl stopped us in our path. She looked like a little angel with her bright blue eyes and platinum blonde hair. She had to be nine at the oldest and we were just going to brush her off but she attacked. She launched for Leto and slashed his chest before we could register what was happening. We attempted to keep her quiet, but she just kept slashing her long knife at us and started yelling. Trevor... he—” Ace cut himself off and started breathing erratically again.

“He killed her,” I finished for him, guessing the conclusion, and Ace bobbed his head in response.

Marie let out a squeak and Kane blew out a sharp breath. I leaned against the wall behind me and rubbed the back of my neck. That must’ve killed Trevor. We waited in a strained silence until Ace was able to continue.

“After that, the werewolf hunters started piling out of the conference and knocked our bombs out of the way without realizing they were there. Someone must’ve done something to one because it exploded while we were just around the corner. It shook the whole building and hot flames started flying towards us. At this point, everyone was in a panic and they were running towards us to get out. They didn’t even notice that we were

werewolves in their terror, as we booked it for the woods. We shifted once we crossed the tree line and ran straight here. The blood on me was Leto's as I helped guide him to the woods. The cover of night and the chaos the explosion created gave us the chance we needed to get away, but they're going to find out it was us. I just know it."

"Where's Leto now?" Kane questioned.

"Xander took him to their healer to be looked over to make sure the cut wasn't as bad as it looked," Ace replied in a low voice.

"Well, we'll wait and see what happens," I said. "For now, we should all get some well needed rest."

The other three agreed and I exited the dining hall to enter the main living area. Kane followed me while Ace lingered behind, now in Marie's arms. They were comforting each other and needed their privacy. Plus, it was hard to watch Ace cry. It was something I'd never seen before and my stomach didn't sit well at the sight.

Most of the group had awakened with the ruckus and it took me a minute to find Trevor in the crowd that had formed. He was sitting on the floor by Rebecca and held Callus in his lap. His face was pale and his skin was stained with grime, just like Ace's. Rebecca was massaging his shoulders soothingly as he recalled the events that occurred to the pack.

Kane and I listened and it was the exact thing that Ace had told us, except he left out the part about killing the girl. Trevor chewed his lip each time he paused and it was now bleeding. His expression was troubled and he had to be reliving the incident with the girl. I wondered if he would tell Rebecca about it. I wouldn't because it wasn't my place, but she'd be able to console him if she knew why he was really hurting so bad.

When he was finished talking, I approached Trevor to give him a tight hug, letting him know I was glad he'd made it back safely. This felt like it was my fault because it was my idea in the first place to do internal attacks.

I mentally groaned. Kane was right. I needed to stop putting the guilt on myself. It wasn't healthy. I couldn't control everything, even though I wanted to. Outcomes were always going to be unpredictable.

"At least you're all alive," a member of our pack said. His name was Drew and he was normally very quiet. This situation had everyone riled up, even the timid ones like Drew.

Murmurs of agreement broke through the group. A few threw in cheers of triumph and some moved forward to pat Trevor on the back. Trevor didn't appear to be wounded externally, but his haunted eyes said everything about how he was feeling on the inside.

The chatter continued for a little while longer. Ace and Marie came out of the dining area to join us, but Ace didn't look any better either.

"Alright everyone," I interrupted. "Let's go ahead and let these guys rest. I think they've earned it. Ace, Trevor, take tomorrow to rest up and then tomorrow night we'll need to have you report in officially."

The two boys nodded their heads in understanding and the others scattered to their makeshift cots. Seeing them sleeping on the floor made me want to go and check our territory to see how it looked. We couldn't thrive like this.

I went to find our usual sleeping spot, but Trevor caught my elbow and halted me. I turned to him with quirked eyebrows.

"There's something I need to tell you. In private." He gestured to the door that led to outside.

"Okay." I twisted my head to address Kane. "Go ahead and go to sleep. I'll join you in a bit."

Kane left us and Trevor and I walked outside until we were a little ways from the pack house. It was dark and took my eyes a minute to adjust. The moon was set high and bright in the sky and the air smelt of rain. A storm was coming.

"I already know about the girl," I stated when I realized he was struggling to find words. I didn't want him to relive it by telling me since I already knew.

He had been looking up at the sky too, but his head jerked down to face me. I thought he would be relieved, but his face went even whiter instead. "That wasn't what I wanted to tell you, but I had to do it. She was very skilled for her age and I knew we wouldn't have been able to escape with her in our way."

"I understand," I spoke softly. "I know you did what you had to. That's the type of person you are. You aren't going to be judged for it. It just makes the Order look worse if anything."

His lips pulled back tightly into a frown. "They're terrible for having kids fight so decidedly, but I actually wanted to tell you that I saw

your mom there. She was in the lab, but she appeared to be working for them instead of being used as a test subject. She had one of those white lab coats on that the other workers were wearing.”

My teeth chewed at the inside of my cheek. I knew she worked for them, but I didn’t realize that she was helping with the human serum. It was hard to believe she was the same person. Trevor knew about my run-in with her, but I guess he thought she wasn’t in that deep either.

“Thanks for telling me.” I tried to smile at him, but it didn’t work. It just kept falling into a sad frown.

“Of course. I figured you’d want to know.” He rubbed his fingers through his dirty hair awkwardly. “I wasn’t sure if it was something the others should know, so that’s why I wanted to tell you in private.”

“Do you think she survived the blast?”

His shoulders lifted into a shrug. “Most likely. The blast was far enough away from the lab, so she’s probably uninjured.”

“I’m not sure if that’s good or bad, but I guess it all just needs time to process,” I admitted.

“Sounds about right. Why are things always so chaotic around here?”

He was joking, but it still struck a cord in me.

“Because I’m around.” I grimaced.

Trevor rolled his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous. Why do you like torturing yourself like that?”

I gave him a light shove. “I’m a hybrid and that draws all the attention to me, which means my pack too.”

“Well your pack doesn’t blame you, so you shouldn’t either. Let’s go back in and rest while we can. Things are probably going to be getting crazy soon.”

Trevor threw his arm around my shoulder and guided me back to the house. When we walked in, just about everyone was passed out. You wouldn’t have thought there was a big commotion only moments ago, but fatigue did that to a person, even werewolves.

Trevor left me to go to Rebecca and I went to Kane. Kane was awake and told me he was waiting for me to return before he got too comfortable. This time I was able to smile and cuddled up next to him. He rubbed my belly as we both relaxed into each other and drifted off.

~\*~

The next few days were rough as we held our breaths and waited for something to happen. But, a whole week went by and there was still nothing.

After Trevor and Ace gave their official report to Knox, Kane, and me, we'd all agreed to hold off on attempting anything else. We figured we had just played our piece, so we would see what their next move was. The suspense was worse than facing them head on and my nails were nonexistent with me anxiously biting at them.

Kane didn't leave my side. We had gone back to him keeping a constant watch on me. I didn't see much of Stark since he stuck close to Kayla. Ace and Trevor were both doing better, but they were still bothered by the incident. Leto was completely healed and up and about. That was a huge perk about being a werewolf and another reason I wouldn't want to be human.

When the week came to an end, I brought up the hunters that we still had locked up to Knox and Kane. Tony kept pestering me about it now that he was doing better. It took plenty of bickering, but I finally got the boys to agree to let them go since we didn't know how much longer it would take before the Order struck back. We decided to release them this afternoon when lunch was over.

Tony spent the remainder of the day in the cells to prepare them for their journey. They were going to figure out a way to merge themselves into the human society. Well, some were. I was certain a chunk of them would be making their way back to the Order. I would probably regret this decision, but at least my conscience wouldn't be eating at me from the inside like it currently was.

Katie wanted to stay with Knox, but I could tell it was hard for her to come to that decision. She admitted that she wanted to make sure her people reached safety, but I reassured her that Tony was an excellent leader and would do right by them. He had proven himself on so many occasions.

Lunch came and passed quickly and soon, the hunters were being led out. Wolves from both our pack and Knox's were chosen to escort them to the outskirts of the territory. They were stripped of weapons and Tony

was in charge of the ones we allowed them to keep as long as they weren't given out until they reached the edge of Knox's land. Kane wanted to send them without anything at all, but that was just barbaric. We would be sending them to their deaths if they weren't properly equipped with the essentials.

Katie and I watched them leave. The hunters were pale and gaunt, but still strutted with confidence. They shot us dirty looks and some spewed threats in our direction. I brushed them off, but Katie took them to heart. It wasn't long before she was crying again.

Knox and Kane gave us kisses bye and were going to lead them part of the way to make sure there wouldn't be any confrontations.

I steered Katie back to her house and Alex and I kept her entertained. We cheered her up the best we could but only time would truly make her feel better.

Knox and Kane weren't gone for too long and met us at the house. We spent the rest of the day relaxing and pondering about what would happen now that there were no hunters in our territory. Would that give the Order more motivation to make their move or less? We must've done a good bit of damage since they hadn't done anything to retaliate yet. That or they didn't realize we were the culprits.

It was maddening having to keep a constant eye watching your back. The Order had to be doing this on purpose. They had to know we were here, especially if my mom knew we were. So what were they waiting for?

Katie fell asleep on their couch while we'd been talking and Knox offered us his spare bedroom again. We declined and wanted to be with our pack. It didn't feel right to get a comfortable bed when they didn't.

So, letting them settle in for the night, we went back to the pack house to eat dinner with our wolves. All the members, including some of Knox's, hung out after we ate and shared stories of childhood memories. It was good to see them all getting along. It was also nice to hear everyone's stories and it also made the evening pass within a blink of the eye.

Tonight was the first time I felt completely relaxed and it probably had to do with the release of the hunters. Their stay in the cells had put a huge weight on me, but I hadn't noticed it until now.



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## Chapter Twelve

The trees flew by as my paws thundered on the ground. My wolf's eyes were sharper than my human's and focused on every leaf that fell, searching for anything out of place. Footsteps clumped behind me. I was being chased. Gunshots rang through the air, piercing my eardrums. *The Order*.

I turned off at a ravine and darted towards the rapidly flowing river. I knew that the water would be my sanctuary. If I could make it there, I would be safe. *50 feet to go. 20 feet.* I plunged into the cold water and my paws paddled swiftly to bring me back to the surface. Gasping for air, I pushed myself to the other side and almost kissed the ground I was so relieved to make it. Once I was safe, I looked back and saw the members of the Order on the bank yelling obscenities. They wouldn't dare try to cross it. They couldn't swim like a werewolf.

My wolf breathed a sigh of relief when I realized they really weren't following. Looking into the water, a different wolf stared back instead of mine, but it was so familiar. The eyes weren't their usual purple color, but I still recognized them. *Dash's eyes.*

Blackness engulfed my vision and my airway became restricted.

*Dash? Where'd you go?*

My question was silent and lost in the darkness.

"Lena," Kane's scream broke through my frantic thoughts.

My eyes popped open. Sweat caked my skin and my chest heaved up and down rapidly. Blurred faces surrounded me and I had to blink the sleep away to make them out. At first, I was still stuck in the nightmare and the faces of the Order stared back at me. When my eyes focused and my brain started working again, I saw Kane, Marie, and Stark hovering over me, along with other members of my pack.

Kane grabbed my shoulders and eased me into a sitting position. He wiped his palm on his shirt after pulling his hands away. My clothes were as drenched with sweat as they felt. I wrapped my shaky arms around myself, trying to pull myself together.

“Are you okay? You were screaming out in your dream and almost shifted into a wolf.” Kane’s face was full of concern.

“I almost shifted?” I asked. That would’ve been terrible.

Kane nodded his head. “Good thing we were able to wake you.”

“Yeah,” I agreed with a trembling voice.

“You projected your dream into mine,” Stark stated as he moved closer. “It was about Dash. Do you think this means he’s still alive?”

“You were dreaming about Dash?” Kane questioned with a curious look.

“He was escaping from the Order,” Stark answered for me.

“He got away from them? Do you think he’s coming here?” Marie sounded worried.

Dash was probably the last person she wanted to see. I could see the haunted memories had resurfaced behind those brown eyes.

When I found my voice, I said, “He’s alive, but I don’t think he’s a hybrid anymore. In my dream, his eyes were yellow instead of their normal purple. I wonder if the Order tried to make him human but only managed to strip his hybrid power.”

“If that’s the case then they could use it against you,” Kane inputted nervously.

“Why haven’t you created more hybrids to help you win this fight?” Knox asked from behind Stark.

I hadn’t seen him there and was thrown off by his question. “I guess I just wouldn’t wish this on anyone.”

Knox stepped closer. “Why not? Strong powers and larger wolves. Sounds like an army that could overtake anyone or anything.”

Stark growled and Knox visibly bristled. They glared at each other with stiff postures.

“Strong powers aren’t everything,” I replied, ignoring their hostility. “I don’t want to be linked to anyone else. Plus, not all can survive the transition, so I don’t think it’s worth the risk. Stark and I can’t enjoy privacy because we’re connected. We even share dreams. I can also make him do whatever I want through the blood connection. We’re constantly being hunted and we aren’t even sure what the long-term effects are. Dash thinks his hybrid powers are going to dissipate. Does that sound like fun to you?”

Knox shrugged. “Doesn’t sound too bad of a price to pay to be more powerful.”

“I think Stark being connected to her is more than enough for my taste,” Kane intervened. “So, not happening, Knox.”

“Then why doesn’t she turn you into a hybrid? You *are* her mate after all.”

Knox’s comment made me realized that I’d never considered it. Would Kane want to be a hybrid?

Sensing my thoughts, Kane said, “I’m happy with the way I am and with the way she is. I wouldn’t change a thing. Plus, one fuming, crazy hybrid is enough in a relationship. We probably wouldn’t make it through the day if we both were hybrids.”

Knox huffed, but didn’t say anything else.

“Stop causing problems,” Katie stated as she came up from behind Knox. “We have enough to worry about other than creating more hybrids.”

Knox’s shoulders sagged. “I’m sorry, babe. I won’t bring it up again.”

She had him wrapped around her finger and it sometimes made me forget she wasn’t a werewolf. She sure acted like one sometimes.

Katie just shook her head at him before turning to me. “So this Dash situation. He’ll probably bring the Order with him if he’s making his way here.”

I nodded my head. “Most likely. I don’t think he has anywhere else to go either, so finding me would be his first action. If he isn’t a hybrid, then he can’t sense me like he used to. It’ll be harder for him to find me here. I’m surprised I still dreamed about him.”

“How do you think that happened?” Kane asked.

I looked towards him to answer, but noticed that the whole pack was crowded around, listening to our conversation. Kane followed my stare and cocked his head at the prying eyes.

“Do you think the hunters will make their move soon then?” one of the guys in the group asked.

“I think we need to be ready for it just in case,” I replied.

Muttering broke out and the atmosphere became thick. They were scared, but we would be ready for anything.

“Alright everyone, it’s still late so let’s get some rest so we can face tomorrow with fresh eyes,” Katie spoke loudly to address everyone.

“Why should we listen to a hunter?” someone asked and I couldn’t see who.

“Yeah. How do we know you aren’t working with them either?” another added.

Katie stumbled back into Knox. Stricken grief morphed onto her face.

“Who said that?” I demanded in my Aluna voice.

Two guys immediately stepped forward. It was Drew and Marcus from my pack. They hung their heads at my fuming stare.

“Apologize this instant,” I commanded.

They quickly spoke their apologies, but it didn’t sound genuine, so I added, “Like you mean it.”

Their expressions changed and they said sorry with more feeling this time. They turned to me with pleading eyes, but I just growled at them.

“You two will sleep outside tonight and report to me in the morning,” Kane instructed. “I will have a punishment for you by then.”

“That’s unnecessary,” Katie intervened. Her voice was almost as soft as a whisper. “They have every right to be wary of me. I’m not a werewolf.”

“Nonsense. They should be reprimanded. You’ve proven yourself to be trustworthy time after time,” I stated. “They’ll be punished accordingly for being so rude.”

“We trust you,” Mrs. Carmina said with a gentle smile, stepping closer to us. “Those two are the only ones who whisper about conspiracies. There always has to be someone like that in each group.”

Mrs. Carmina gave Katie a tight hug and patted her shoulders. Katie thanked her and Knox pulled Katie away, claiming it was time to go back to sleep. I gave Mrs. Carmina a quick embrace before she left to rest a little longer with Mr. Scott before dawn broke.

Everyone else seemed to be ready to get back to bed, but there were still some nervous whispers bouncing off the walls. Tomorrow, I'd have to make sure Katie's name was completely cleared. I didn't want to hear it spoken negatively again. She did enough for both packs and didn't deserve her name to be dragged through the mud.

Kane was already nestled back into our cot and held his arms out for me to join him. I eagerly climbed back into him and snuggled into his neck.

"I can't believe I just woke the whole house up. Was I really screaming that loud?"

Kane kissed my forehead before answering. "If you wouldn't have been lying next to me, I would've thought you were getting killed. Your screams were full of sheer terror. To be honest, I thought you were getting attacked right beside me when I first woke up."

"I felt Dash's panic though my dream. When the dream first started, I thought *I* was being chased by the Order. His emotions were mine and it was my life that was in danger. But along with his emotions came his thoughts. He knows something that can help us. He's also no longer a hybrid. I think we should track him down and I believe I can do it. He may be the most important piece in this game."

"It's not just a game, Lena. It's our life and I don't like the idea of bringing him back into it. He tried to destroy us."

"I understand that, but he's a broken man now. He can't hurt us and may be just what we need to gain an edge over the Order."

"Can we talk about this tomorrow? I'm too exhausted to argue with you."

He ran his fingers through his hair and yawned. I nodded my head and watched as he closed his eyes and passed out almost immediately. His light snores were soothing, but images of Dash prevented me from completely relaxing. He nearly ruined my life, but here I was, wanting to work with him. I really was a fool.

I sighed and stared at the ceiling, listening to Kane's breathing until the sun came up.

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It seemed these days we wasted more breath and time arguing rather than talking normally. Kane and I were going back and forth about the subject of Dash. Katie and Knox had decided to stay out of this one and were off doing their own things, so it was between Kane and me.

An angry grunt left me as I looked away from Kane. We never had problems agreeing on things before this whole mess. It wasn't even the Order's fault. It was the possessiveness that Kane's wolf felt about me being pregnant. My slowly growing belly only reinforced that instinct.

While Kane continued ranting that Dash needed to remain as far away from us as possible, my eyes traveled to Marcus and Drew. They were following closely behind Katie. As their punishment, Kane assigned them to be Katie's servants. They were to be there at her beck and call until they registered how amazing of a person she was.

Katie had yet to use them, but I was hoping that she would put them to work soon enough. They were going to assist her until Kane or I said otherwise and they were to do it with a smile. They'd only be reprieved for a bit if Katie wanted her privacy or for them to sleep.

"Are you even listening to me?" Kane barked, jolting me out of my people watching.

A sheepish grin made its way onto my face and I tried to look as innocent as possible. He didn't buy it.

"I'm sorry, Kane. It's just that I feel like you're holding me back. I'm your equal, so you can't tell me what to do. I'm going to go after Dash, so you can either join me or I'll get someone else to go."

A snarl bubbled in his chest. "Why do you have to be so hard-headed?"

"Why do you?" I challenged, narrowing my eyebrows.

We stood, glaring at each other for a solid minute before he finally broke.

"I want to at least be the one to accompany you," he muttered. "We'll leave Ace and Marie in charge while we're gone. I'd like Trevor to come with us, along with a few others. They just have to be from our pack so we can stay in contact through the link."

“Fair enough.” I smiled.

I couldn’t believe he actually caved.

“I take back what I said before. You’re more demanding and irrational with pregnancy.”

“Are you serious? I have to be demanding because if it was up to you, I’d just be locked up in the house all day.”

“You sure would be.”

“I could stumble and slip in the house or while bathing. Should I just be confined to a bed with rails to prevent me from falling out?”

“I’m not that bad. It’s just that you don’t know what you’re getting yourself into. What if it’s a trap?”

“Those emotions were too raw to be a trap.”

“They could’ve been fake.”

I shook my head. “No. There’s no way.”

He groaned. “You’re going to be the death of me. My only other stipulation is that we take today to prepare and leave tomorrow when the day is fresh. Agreed?”

My grin widened. “Agreed.”

Kane and I filled everyone else in on what we’d decided and they were all in accordance. Knox wanted to accompany us, but we talked him out of it. We needed an Alpha to remain here. Plus, he wasn’t connected to us through our pack link so we wouldn’t be able to communicate in wolf form. That would be too much of a risk.

Kane was the one to choose the other three warriors to join us. It was no surprise that Stark wasn’t one of the three, but I wasn’t going to bring that up. Kane needed to feel like he had some type of control and I didn’t really care who he picked anyway. I was just glad he was coming with me and it was willingly.

Kane and I hadn’t gone on an adventure together in a while. Was it bad that I was looking forward to this even though it was dangerous? I was starting to feel like an adrenaline junkie, but at least my mate would be at my side this time. It didn’t make me feel as guilty for taking action.



## Chapter Thirteen

The next day, we left at daybreak and were out of Knox's territory in no time. I was perched on Kane's back as he ran. His muscles were taut as his feet thundered on the ground and I could feel them move through against my legs. I hadn't noticed this with Stark, so that just proved that Kane and I were more in tune with each other. Boy, did I enjoy that feeling too.

Getting my mind out of the dirty gutter, I focused on directing our group in the right direction. Dash wasn't a hybrid anymore, but something new had sparked between us with that dream. It was as if his emotions were leading me to him, and he didn't feel that much farther from us.

I'd been right. We stumbled across Dash after only running through the morning. He had been heading in our direction so it made finding him faster. He was asleep in human form when we finally stumbled upon him. He must've exhausted his wolf with the escape. His familiar jagged scar that ran across his face sent me back into a dark place.

Dash had been the sole reason that my pack and I were tortured three years ago. He'd told Jack about my whereabouts and notified him about my hybrid powers. He was the reason Stark was a hybrid and he was also the reason my mom had abandoned me. Okay, maybe that one was unfair because she probably would've ran off eventually anyway.

I jumped off Kane's back and they all remained in wolf form while I called Dash's name until he stirred. None of us wanted to get too close just in case it *was* a trap. After the seventh time I said his name, an eye peeked open weakly.

"Selena, darling, is that you?"

His voice was so broken, but I didn't feel remorseful for him. What goes around comes around and this was his punishment. He deserved so much more, but now wasn't the time. Not when he had information to share.

I nearly gagged at the 'darling' part. Dash had always called me pet names in hopes that I would grow fond of them and in turn, develop feelings for him. Instead, it just made my skin crawl and the repulsion sink in deeper.

"Looks like the mighty fall eventually. I see you really aren't a hybrid. Can you shift? We need to get you back to Knox's territory before I force information out of you," I stated bluntly.

Dash snorted. At least he still had enough energy for humor. "Selena, I think I can manage a simple shift, but know that you won't have to force anything out of me. Look what they've done to me. I'm nothing but a broken man."

I wanted to yell at him about how much he deserved it, but restrained myself. It would do no good to hash out how I really felt. Not here at least. There would be time for that later. After we learned as much as we could.

"Just shift and Trevor and James will flank you."

Shockingly, Dash didn't argue and transformed into his wolf. It was slow and obviously hurt him. The shift wasn't supposed to be painful, so his wolf must've been burnt out of his reserve energy. I just hoped he made it back to the territory still breathing.

*At least we don't have to worry about him doing a sneak attack.* Kane told me.

*True and I don't sense anyone else around so he made it here without the Order following him,* I replied.

It was pretty cool being able to have secret conversations. I never thought about it until now because I didn't know any different. It was something all us werewolves took for granted.

Wow that was a random thought...

That revelation only distracted me for a few minutes before my thoughts traveled back to Dash. He said he would comply and tell us whatever we wanted to know, but I needed to feel out whether his information was valid or not. I would probably be able to sense it through his emotions. The hybrid link was gone, but something new replaced it and I was eager to learn what. I wanted to determine whether it was something the hunters did or something new on my part.

We were all relieved that the trip back to the territory went smoothly. Dash cooperated the whole way and no hunters tried to stop us. They must've lost track of him after Dash plunged into the river.

All eyes were on us when we returned to Knox's territory. Well, they were actually on Dash and they weren't looks of joy. Resentment, anger, shock. Their sentiments were palpable and I was amazed Dash was able to keep his head high as we escorted him all the way to Knox's house.

*Have him change back into human form. We won't until he does,* Kane instructed.

I hopped off his back and passed the order onto Dash. He submitted and was soon looking back at me with human eyes. His eyes were hazel and it was stranger than their previous purple color. It made him appear less aggressive.

Knox opened his door and stood in front of us with crossed arms and an intimidating stance. Kane and the others shifted back too.

"Should we do this here or in the cells?" Knox inquired.

Glancing at Dash, I took in his frail body. His muscle mass had deteriorated and I wondered how long he'd been trapped in their clutches. He looked like he could be easily shredded, just like paper, if he decided to turn on us.

Because of this, I stayed out of the decision and figured I'd continue to pick my battles wisely. I was glad Kane had let me do this and that it'd gone so smoothly. Hopefully, this meant that Kane and I would bicker less and he'd let me do more without having to fight for it.

After a moment of discussion, they determined that the cells would be the best place. Even though he was nothing compared to his former self, we still didn't know exactly what he was capable of. He still possessed his witty, cunning mind and that was a powerful weapon by itself.

Dash didn't struggle as he was put into a cell. It smelled foul down here and I recalled the hunters that lived with us were stuck here not that long ago. They'd been forced to live with this stench. We probably burned the bridge that had been partially built with them thanks to that stunt.

Before we could start grilling him, Dash requested a meal. We stared at him incredulously, but he just shrugged his shoulders.

"Hey, I haven't eaten in days and think I've earned it with how cooperative I've been."

Trevor scoffed. "You deserve nothing. We lost so many because of you, including my dad. You deserve to deteriorate and rot bit-by-bit."

Dash just chuckled in response and offered no words of apology. Trevor growled and his eyes flashed bright green as he prepared to transform into his wolf. His whole body quivered with his raging anger and his teeth lengthened into sharp daggers.

"Trevor, I think you need to step out to cool off. Anger isn't going to help," I reasoned.

Trevor's muscles tightened as his wolf gnawed to get out, but he seemed to regain enough control to stiffly leave the dungeon. Each step seemed harder and harder, but he finally pushed himself through the door.

*Go check in with Rebecca and get some rest. You deserve it,* I told him.

Trevor didn't say anything in response, but I knew that it was exactly what he was going to do. I refocused on Dash to find him smirking. It was the first time he resembled his old self and it sent chills up my spine.

"Do you realize you're the reason I was able to escape?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I quirked an eyebrow at him.

"Thanks to your explosion, I was able to get away. It created a large enough diversion that I was also able to release some of the wolves that had been turned into a human, but I doubt they made it too far. They were a pretty pathetic sight and many had lost their will to live. Some actually stayed in their cages even after the doors were opened."

Kane snarled, but didn't say anything.

Dash was still as heartless as always. At least that hadn't changed and it reminded me that he still couldn't be trusted.

"How did you know it was us that did that?" Knox questioned in a cheeky tone.

Dash laughed again. "I could smell it, duh. Just because the Order didn't know who the culprits were doesn't mean that I didn't. It was the most obvious deduction to me and the Order will figure it out eventually. They aren't that bright and are over confident about their security measures. They wouldn't believe that lowly werewolves were capable of such a thing. They underestimate us and don't think we're clever enough to formulate planned attacks. That will be how you gain the advantage in this mess. Now, my food please."

It didn't take long for his cockiness to return. He must not be as broken as I suspected and probably could go longer without food if we wanted him to. Starving him would keep him weakened and less likely to get away.

*It's up to you Kane,* I informed him.

I didn't want to be the one to make that call because I didn't know what to do. On one hand, I'd like to see him suffer for all he'd done. On the other, I'd like him to remain compliant and continue feeding us information. Plus, I figured Kane would enjoy the control a little longer and it showed how thankful I really was.

Kane scratched his cheek in thought before making up his mind. "We'll give you a nibble for now. You'll have to give us more before earning a meal and that'll be at my discretion."

Sounded reasonable to me. I watched Dash's eyes darken with anger before accepting Kane's stipulations. I wondered if he was mad because Kane decided instead of me or if it was because his back was against the wall once again.

When nobody opened their mouth to say anything, I made the first move. "I'd like to know what they did to revoke your hybrid power. Am I at risk?"

Dash shook his head. "Nope. I'm not giving you anything else until I've at least had that nibble we agreed on. Otherwise, I'm going to pass out from starvation and then you'll get nothing."

"Very well," Kane sneered. "James will remain posted here while Lena and I get you something."

"I'll take some meat please," Dash said smugly.

"You'll get what we bring you," Kane retorted.

Dash flashed his teeth, before calming himself down again. “What’s the matter, Lena? You’re oddly quiet. Cat got your tongue?”

My eyes narrowed at him and I didn’t give him the satisfaction of dishing back an answer.

As we started to leave, Dash added, “Is the pup in your belly the reason you’re holding back? I know that’s why I haven’t seen your delicious wolf yet.”

My feet froze and my skin paled. Of course he knew. He could most likely smell it like the other males. Plus, my belly was showing more as it poked through my shirt. I just wasn’t prepared for him to bring it up.

“It smells like a girl if you ask me,” he continued. “She smells just as delightful as you.”

That I couldn’t ignore and turned back to glare at him. “I hope you enjoy your night in this cell with only your hunger to keep you company. You’ll get the nibble in the morning if I’m feeling nice enough.”

Knox and Kane followed me as I stormed out of the dungeon and James lingered behind to keep watch. Knox left us to check on Katie, which gave Kane and I some much needed privacy.

“Don’t worry about him, Lena.” Kane rubbed circles on my back. “He can’t hurt you or our pup. He’s in no position health wise and is highly outnumbered. Don’t let him get under your skin.”

“How can I not after he brought our pup into it? I’m surprised you didn’t snap his neck with how protective you’ve been lately.”

“I know you’re safe, especially if you stay by me. I think you were right about him having useful information and as much as I hate to admit it, he’s still valuable to us. We need to keep him at arms length, but also need to hear him out.”

“What gave you the change of heart?”

“You mean besides my faith in you?” He asked, sounding cheesy, but I stared at him with a hard look. He sighed. “You were right that it’s worth a shot. What else do we have to gain an advantage over the Order?”

“How about we go eat dinner and then get a good rest in before facing Dash again?” I offered.

“I think that’s an excellent idea.”

Kane kissed my lips and deepened it for about thirty seconds before the clearing of a throat interrupted us. That throat belonged to Katie and she

was looking at anything besides us. The tint of her cheeks matched her red hair.

“I was coming to see if you were going to eat with us. We’re hosting the meal in the dining hall with everyone again. Knox and I thought it would be appropriate to celebrate the fact that Dash was in our clutches. It was something we quickly threw together.”

I giggled at her awkwardness and told her we were heading to get something to eat anyway. The three of us walked to the dining hall together and found it had been decorated with accents of red. Oddly enough, it set up a romantic atmosphere instead of a traditional partying one. The room was also already full of our pack members and most were cuddling or sharing whispers. After walking a little farther into the room, I noticed rose petals scattered here and there.

“What’s with the love fest?” I asked her. “And where are the children?”

“We figured that the parents earned a little celebrating for themselves. The children were taken into the back room of the pack house where Alex is keeping an eye on them,” Katie explained. “Trevor and Rebecca were going to eat quickly and then go check on them. Considering the fact that I don’t see them, they’ve probably already made their way over there. After everything that’s gone down, it’s hard for them to be away from the children for too long.”

“That’s understandable,” Kane inputted. “I couldn’t imagine being apart from my pup with all this mess piling up around us.”

“But your pup isn’t here yet,” I teased.

“He’s close enough.” Kane chuckled.

Despite the girl comment Dash threw at us, we were still referring to the pup as a boy.

Katie led us to the table we were sitting at. Knox, Marie, Ace, Kayla, Stark, Leto, and a female I didn’t recognize were already sitting and chatting.

“How do you guys know it’s a boy?” Katie asked after we were comfortable.

Kane and I glanced at each other before I responded, “It’s just a feeling we have. We’re almost positive it’s a boy, but will be happy either way.”

“I don’t know how you stay sane being pregnant at a time like this,” the unfamiliar female stated. “I would be out of my mind with anxiety if I was in your shoes.”

I cocked my head to the side and raised my eyebrows at her as if to ask ‘who are you’ and she seemed to pick up on my unspoken question.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” She smiled brightly. Her light brown hair bounced up and down and her green eyes glittered as she spoke with enthusiasm. “My name’s Rylee. I’m Leto’s mate.” To emphasize that statement, she kissed Leto on the cheek. “Sorry for not introducing myself sooner. My mouth tends to spew words before I have the chance to think about them.”

“She’s always talking and laughing no matter what’s going on in the world around her.” Leto grinned and gave his mate another kiss. “This atmosphere doesn’t really help things either.”

“It’s strange if you ask me.” Stark pulled a grossed out face. “Werewolves shouldn’t need to set up a romantic atmosphere. We’re part animal. A predator at that. Romance really isn’t our thing.”

I agreed with him but didn’t want to say it out loud in fear that it would hurt Katie’s feelings. I was certain she was the one who decorated because no werewolf would’ve come up with this red, passionate theme. Although, there was nothing wrong with spicing things up for a change.

“Whose idea was this anyway?” Stark added.

As anticipated, Katie raised her hand and shot Stark a fiery look. “I did and I think it was a good idea too.”

The two stared at each other heatedly, but Knox’s laugh shook them out of it.

“I told Katie werewolves didn’t do romance either, but it seems she proved me wrong.” Knox gestured for us to look around.

It was true. Werewolves were cuddling together and planting innocent kisses on each other’s lips and cheeks. They whispered in each other’s ear and shared food with the same fork. It was an odd sight, but endearing at the same time. Werewolves had it in them after all. Who would’ve thought? I never would’ve guessed it considering our animalistic nature.

Stark didn’t say anything about the red colors again. Instead, he diverted his complete attention to Kayla and the rest of dinner went smoothly after that. Kane and I even gave into the mood that was set.



So, like Katie had hoped, we enjoyed the night and didn't let our thoughts slip back to the hunters or Dash. Tonight, it'd been just us and it was perfect. We all made sure Katie knew it too.

Katie admitted that Drew and Marcus helped her set everything up and they'd come to an understanding. My eyes found them immediately to find the two of them laughing. They were even having a good time.

“Well, Katie, you're pretty amazing. You've surprised us all I think and we couldn't be happier to have you on board with us.” I beamed at her.

She shrugged her shoulders and ducked her head timidly. “I just thought it would be nice to change things up and enjoy the night since we aren't sure what tomorrow will bring.”

“Well, you did excellent.”

We smiled at each other a little longer before turning back to our guys.

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## Chapter Fourteen

Dash got his little ‘nibble’ as soon as we woke up and then it was all business. At first, Dash spoke in circles and was trying to be as difficult as possible, but he started to answer questions eventually. It probably got boring trying to be difficult all the time. The questioning started out rocky, but once we got him started, he wouldn’t shut up.

“I’m sure you know by now that you’re mom is part of their little group,” Dash started. “She paid me a visit in the lab and apparently she told the Order the truth about silver and that it doesn’t affect us. She also told them that our true weakness was Cesium and now the Order is in the process of developing bullets that contain Cesium. With her help of course.”

“I can’t believe she would do something like that.” I swallowed the lump that formed in my throat.

It was hard to think of my mom as a traitor. She’d helped shape me as I grew and now we stood on opposing sides. She was a new type of Lost. One that I knew nothing about and had no idea how to handle.

“Well, she’s their number one assistant now. Also, the reason the Order is getting so defensive is because of your baby. They fear what the child of a true hybrid will bring to the table and how strong it’ll be. They truly believe that your baby will bring on the end of the world. Its birth will bring the apocalypse.”

“It’s just a baby. That’s ridiculous.”

Dash shrugged his shoulders. “Be that as it may, the Order is scared of it.”

I sighed. “So, why aren’t you a hybrid anymore? I can’t sense it in you.”

Dash bowed his head in what looked like defeat. It was an odd, but satisfying look to see on him. “Alister tried to make me human with the concoction they developed, but instead of turning me human, it stole my hybrid powers. Now, I’m just an ordinary wolf and it’s killing me. Part of me died that day and I probably won’t ever get it back.”

I could understand what he meant. Being a hybrid now defined who I was. It was what made me an Aluna. Losing that would pretty much throw my title in the trash. But, at least they were unsuccessful at turning him human.

Dash went into more detail about how we were the reason he’d been able to get out. He was in the lab during the time of the explosion. The force from it fried their electricity, so the mechanical locks that had been on his cell were opened. It took them a while before they realized he was missing and chased after him. Unfortunately, he was so weak that he didn’t get much of a lead, but it was enough.

Then, he went on and described the dream I had in full detail and I found myself trapped back in it with the Order’s faces all around me. That had really happened and I had really been in Dash’s head. When he got to the part of the river, I recalled the fear he’d felt while crossing it and nearly drowning.

“How did I witness your escape through my dreams if you aren’t a hybrid anymore? We’re no longer connected so it doesn’t make any sense,” I inquired.

“You are the purest of hybrids being born one. I think that you will always have a small connection to the other hybrids out there, even if it’s stolen from them,” he hypothesized. “I bet that if you tried, you could reach out to every other hybrid out there.”

“But I thought we were the only hybrids. How could I reach out to others if they aren’t there?”

Dash shook his finger with a smirk on his face. “That’s something the Order discovered. There are more out there somewhere and you’re most likely the ticket to finding them.”

I chewed my lip as the information processed. Kane and Knox remained silent at my sides. They hadn't said much during the interrogation. It had been mostly me. The two Alphas thought he'd be more responsive to me and they'd been correct.

"So what's the key to defeating the Order?"

"I've already given it to you. Your best bet is to take a stab at the Order before they have a chance to think about it. They'll never see it coming because they believe that they have the upper hand just because they're hunters."

"If that was the case then they wouldn't be experimenting on us and trying to make us human," I snarked.

Dash shrugged his shoulders. "Don't let them see you coming. In addition, you could try to reach out to the other hybrids to see if they'll help with the fight. And that's all I have for you. Do what you want with the information."

After thinking for a minute, I asked, "So, what do we do with you now that you've given us everything? Most of the werewolves want your head."

"I say we give it to them," Kane inputted.

Dash sighed and sat down on the floor of his cell. We thought it would be best to leave him in there during the questioning so there wasn't a chance of being attacked when our guards were down.

"To be honest, I don't care what you do to me. I see no reason to live without my hybrid power. I'm just a lowly, normal wolf."

The defeat was evident in his eyes and his whole body sagged with it. He looked so pathetic hunched over in the middle of the cell. He definitely wasn't the same wolf who'd almost destroyed us all those years ago.

"You do realize that you're the reason we lost so many people, right?" I questioned, bringing that subject back up to try to get a reaction.

Dash picked his head up, but his forlorn expression didn't change. "Are you asking for an apology? Because don't hold your breath if so."

I growled at him. Even though he was depressed, it didn't stop him from being the same pompous ass that had no regard for others. It was only him in this world who mattered. He was only giving us fuel against the

Order because they'd wronged him in the ultimate way by stealing his hybrid power.

"Yep, we should kill him," Knox snarled. "You killed my Beta."

Dash stared at him blankly. He really didn't care about the people that were lost during the fight three years ago. Bile rose in my throat at the thought of being so inconsiderate of other people's lives.

Dash blinked at Knox. "Go for it."

Kane and Knox baulked. Dash said it with such finality that it was obvious he'd given up.

I stared at Dash for a few seconds longer before saying, "I think we should let him live and suffer being a normal wolf. I think that'd be worse than death to him."

"What if I just kill myself?" Dash quipped sarcastically.

"Either way it won't be by our hands. Have fun with that," I replied with the same tone he had.

Dash lunged at the bars and bared his teeth at me. He didn't say anything, just glared at me with what could only be described as hate. Low growls slipped through his lips and his eyes started to glow yellow.

"I won't give you a choice," he snarled before completely shifting into his wolf form.

Dash slammed his body violently against the metal and it creaked with each hit. That flimsy crap wasn't going to hold up. Sure enough, by the time Kane and Knox transformed, Dash was diving at me and went through the bars.

His teeth almost reached my throat, but Knox and Kane were too fast for him. They had him tackled to the ground and he was dead within seconds. He didn't stand a chance with two Alphas on him, but that was probably what he was hoping for.

"Well so much for letting him suffer as a weak wolf," I told to the two wolves.

They cocked their heads and gave me lopsided grins before shifting back to human form. They didn't even break a sweat.

"I can't believe you two idiots are happy about that." I shook my head at them.

"Hey, we just saved your butt," Kane retorted.

I didn't respond as I watched Dash turn back into human form. It always happened when werewolves died. We never stayed in our wolf form. It was to protect our existence in case a human stumbled upon our body.

No sadness crept into my mind at the sight of him. My emotions were blank as I stared at his still frame. I wasn't sure how his death made me feel. There was no happiness, no relief, no grief. Just nothing. He was gone and that was that.

Trevor burst through the door of the dungeon. His face was pale and he was panting to catch his breath. He didn't even acknowledge Dash's death so this had to be bad.

"It's Tony," he said breathily. "Our patrols found him on the outskirts of the territory. He was badly wounded. I'm not sure if he's going to make it."

"Does Katie know?" Knox asked.

Trevor nodded his head. "She was there when the patrols brought him in."

Knox swore under his breath. "She's had enough on her plate. Let's go. She's going to need us."

We followed Knox out and Trevor explained that Tony was with the healer. Last Trevor saw, he was in a lot of pain and barely staying conscious. Our pace quickened the closer we got and screams could be heard once we were outside the healer's building.

When we opened the door, the yells became deafening. Tony was in agony and we found his room with no problem. Katie was at his side, squeezing his hand, while the healer worked swiftly but meticulously on his wounds. They were from gunshots and I only needed one guess at who had inflicted them. Tony's eyes were squeezed shut and his whole body convulsed with pain.

"Hang on," Katie kept repeating. "Hang on. You're going to be okay."

Sobs racked her body as she continued to try to reassure him. There was so much blood that it had seeped into Katie's clothes. He wasn't going to make it.

"What happened?" I asked Katie but was surprised when Tony answered.

He struggled to get each word out. “T-the Order attacked u-us. T-they demanded that w-we fight w-with them o-or d-die. They l-left me f-for d-dead.”

He stopped talking to let out another yelp and started breathing rapidly. Sweat glistened on his dark skin and his muscles tightened as he struggled to remain conscious.

Tony tried to sit up, but the healer and Katie both forced him back down. The healer was working to remove the bullets and stitch his wounds, but there were too many to count. The blood kept pooling out and after a few more minutes, the healer stepped back and shook his head. Tony wasn’t going to make it.

Katie cried louder and it was heart wrenching. Tony’s breaths were coming in faster and faster until they just stopped. He let out a deep breath and then stilled.

“No,” Katie yelled. “I should’ve gone with them. I could’ve prevented this.”

There was nothing she could’ve done except die with them, but I wasn’t going to be the one to point that out.

Her hands were white from clutching onto Tony so tightly. Knox tried to pry her hands away, but she wouldn’t allow it. Instead, her grip became firmer and she kissed Tony’s hand.

“I’m so sorry, my friend. They will pay for this,” she vowed in a serious whisper.

Finally, Katie let Knox pull her into his arms. Kane and I stood there silently as Katie continued to cry in Knox’s embrace. Kane put his arm around me and that was when I noticed I had hot tears flowing down my face as well. I couldn’t believe this had happened. They would’ve been better off in the cells here because the Order was trying to build their numbers back up by any means necessary. They wouldn’t leave any possible enemies behind, even ones that were werewolf hunters like them.

No, they weren’t ordinary hunters. These were Katie’s people. She led them for so long and they were her family. They had been ours at one point too. Before the Order had to destroy our peace.

“It’s time we finished this for good,” I demanded. “This is the last straw and we have to get them while their numbers are still down. We can’t allow them to rebuild more than they already have. They’re cocky and Dash

said this was their biggest fault. We need to use it to our advantage and take a strike.”

“Lena’s right,” Katie agreed. “Now’s our chance.”

“We can’t just run in blindly because we’re upset,” Knox stated while shaking his head. “The mission is going to fail before we even begin if we do that.”

“But we aren’t going in blind. We know their territory and can project it into the minds of our pack members,” I argued.

“They would’ve changed their security routes up by now. We can’t go off what we knew before. It’s a whole different game now,” Kane added.

“Well then, what do you boys suggest?” Katie inquired with a hot glare.

“We need to talk through it and have a solid plan. One that doesn’t involve Lena running in like the stubborn girl she is.” Kane shot me a ‘this is not up for discussion’ look. Like hell it wasn’t.

“If you think I’m going to stand for that then your dumb side must be showing,” I growled.

Kane bared his teeth but didn’t retort anything.

“Before we do anything, we need to hold one of your ceremonies for Tony. He deserves it.” Katie started to weep again.

Poor thing. She’d been crying a lot lately and I was so ready for happier times. They were long overdue. Hopefully, they would remain this time and not be so temporary.

“I’ll get started on that immediately,” Knox replied and left to get everything prepared.

Katie lingered at Tony’s side and Kane and I went to see how we could help.

I stopped on the way and looked at Kane. “I think we need to do something about Dash. Sure, he isn’t the best person in the world, but he doesn’t deserve to just be ignored.”

“He’s a monster and doesn’t deserve anything,” Kane sneered.

“Kane.” I grabbed his arm and tugged him towards me. I placed my head on his chest. “He’s dead and the dead should be buried at least. We don’t have to have a ceremony, but his body shouldn’t just be tossed aside.”

Kane sighed. “Alright. We’ll bury him before the ceremony for Tony. I’ll get on that if you want to see how you can help Knox since Katie



probably won't be up for it."

My eyebrows shot up. "You mean you're actually letting me do something besides stay in bed?"

"Very funny, Lena." He kissed my nose. "Just go see what you can do before I change my mind."

My eyes trailed after him as he headed in the direction of the dungeon. Thoughts of him not making it through this fight invaded me. It was painful and I wasn't sure what I would do without him. The Order wasn't to be taken lightly and not all would make it.

I smacked myself in the head. I shouldn't be getting myself so worked up over something that hasn't happened. It was pointless and foolish.

Shaking off the lingering thoughts, I went in search of Knox, but James blocked my path. A frown was set on his face.

"Forgive me Lady Aluna, but I read this before deciding to give it to you." He passed me a crumpled piece of paper. "I wanted to make sure it wasn't something that would hurt you. It's from Dash. He gave it to me last night before going to sleep."

My eyebrows narrowed as I opened up the paper. 'Open your mind and help will come' was written messily in the center. I immediately realized Dash was referring to the other hybrids that were out there. The fact that he'd given this note to James just reinforced the notion that he desired death. He knew he wasn't going to make it.

"I'm sorry I read it," James repeated after I didn't say anything.

I blinked at him again. "It's fine. You were doing what you thought was best. Do me a favor and don't tell anyone else until I decided what to do with it."

"Yes, ma'am."

James left me and I stood there for a moment longer before heading to Knox's house. I had to wrap my head around this new bit of information and I knew it would be empty. Did Dash really believe that I could find the other hybrids and that they would help? He mentioned it but he never exactly explained how it could be done. Just that I was the key.

I didn't know how long I'd been sitting there before Kane and Knox came in.

Kane sat across from me at the table and took my shaking hands into his. “Dash is buried. Now, how about you tell me why you’re here instead of helping Knox. I can sense that you’re upset. I know it’s hard losing people, but it’s okay to grieve in public. You didn’t have to come here and cry alone.”

He reached over and wiped the wetness from my cheeks. That was the second time I didn’t realize I was crying today.

“It’s not that. I mean, Tony will be missed and it hurts, but there’s something else.”

Kane followed my eyes to the note that was discarded on the table. He lifted his left eyebrow before picking it up and reading it. Knox stood over his shoulder to see the contents. They both were quiet for a moment.

Kane finally asked, “What is he referring to?”

I reminded them about the discovery the Order made about there possibly being other hybrids and how I was the one who could find them. They’d be helpful in the battle if I could do it. The two boys agreed and thought it was worth a try too.

“Tomorrow, we should see what you can do,” Kane stated.

I bit my lip before agreeing hesitantly. What if the other hybrids weren’t good wolves? We hybrids were definitely more vicious than your usual werewolf.

“Yeah, it’s worth a shot,” Knox agreed. “I’m going to go get Katie. They should be moving Tony’s body to the fire soon, so I’ll meet you guys at the ceremony.”

Kane and I bobbed our heads before talking a little bit more about hybrids. It was a risk but it could be one with a very high reward. Kane figured that Dash didn’t elaborate about it with Kane and Knox around because he wanted me to make the ultimate decision. I didn’t tell him that they were the ones who’d chosen after all. I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t like the idea.

Kane and I made our way to Tony’s ceremony to find the grounds already littered with wolves. Everyone from both packs was here to mourn his death. The two of us pushed our way to the front to stand by Knox and Katie. Katie seemed to have gotten all her despair out and was now standing tall with her head held high.

People went up to her to offer their condolences and she thanked them and smiled in return. Drew and Marcus were two of the ones who did so and they truly seemed upset about his death. They'd taken on new thoughts in regards to the hunters after getting closer to Katie and I was proud of them. That was how I wanted my pack members to be: nonjudgmental and aware of every life's importance in the world. They'd been reprieved of their punishment after helping Katie last night.

The ceremony was beautiful with white daisies littering the ground. Katie explained that it was Tony's favorite flower and that his grave would have heaps of them. She made certain of it.

After Tony's body was cremated, Katie said a few words of remembrance before scattering his ashes in the grave that had been prepared. Many werewolves were crying and it was saddening, but made me proud that they had the heart to grieve for his loss. The fact that he was a hunter was overlooked.

Katie was right about his grave being full of daisies. Knox buried the ashes and daisies while everyone remained silent. Katie knelt there for a few more minutes before addressing everyone for a closing speech. Dinner was going to be held after, but I didn't feel much for eating.

Instead, I just wanted to enjoy Kane's company. He agreed and steered me into the woods. We lied on the ground to stare up at the stars with a blanket wrapped around us. We talked for hours about plans for the future and enjoyed the beautiful night. We spoke a little about the hunters' deaths but tried to avoid that topic because it just got me worked up. I had enough crying for the day.

The rest of the night would be full of smiles, laughs, and kisses with Kane. Tomorrow would be a new day with new promises.

## Chapter Fifteen

Katie, Knox, Trevor, Kane, Ace, Stark and Leto were with me in Knox's house. Alex had been sent to spend some time with the other children and Rebecca, while I tried to reach out to the hybrids.

We explained the situation to everyone and that I needed quiet considering I didn't know how to go about contacting them. They were here to be kept in the loop and so they could help plan attacks afterwards. We needed several brains to come up with and finalize a good idea.

Everyone remained a couple feet away from me to give me space. Stark was the closest and I looked at him to see if he was ready. He nodded his head in response. I figured I would need his help to initialize contact with the other hybrids. That thought made me feel like I was trying to get in touch with aliens instead. Stark's smile said he heard that thought and felt the same way.

Reaching through our hybrid bond instead of our blood one, I connected my mind to his. He focused solely on me as I shifted my concentration to other hybrids that were hopefully out there. I reached and reached with my invisible cord. I felt a little silly, but it was the only way I knew how to do it. If only Dash would've given me more instruction then this would be so much easier. Dash was never one for the easy way though.

Stark's curiosity pulsed between us. That was the strongest emotion he was feeling and it was almost palpable to me in this state. I could feel

every thought that flowed through his mind and it deafened all the background noise.

Kane and the others swirled out of my vision and brain as I continued to reach beyond this territory. My eyes pressed closed tightly and my breathing became ragged. This was starting to get painful and I vaguely felt hands clasp over mine. They belonged to Stark and he was stealing some of the pain from me. It allowed me to refocus on the task at hand.

My head continued to pound as time passed with no success. That wouldn't deter me though. I reached and searched and reached and searched. It had been hours and I was starting to feel light-headed. Finally, there was a spark and it flared between Stark and me. Our link and senses heightened to a point that I'd never reached before.

*What's this?* an unfamiliar voice asked.

*Who's there?* questioned another.

Soon, my mind erupted with chatter and I didn't recognize any of the voices. They kept asking what was going on and who I was.

*My name is Lena*, I explained, while trying to keep my voice strong. This link between all of them was overwhelming. *I am a born hybrid and was told that I could connect to other hybrids. Are you hybrids or normal wolves?*

Choruses of the word 'hybrid' broke out and I grinned. I'd been successful.

*Do you all know each other?* I asked.

The main answer was a 'no' but a few said 'yes'.

*I'm in need of help*, I told them. *A group of werewolf hunters called the Order is trying to turn werewolves into humans and are finding ways to make it work on hybrids. They've already attacked my pack once and will be moving in again soon. We need all the aid we can get.*

*I've heard of them*, one answered.

*Me too*, a few more chimed in.

I hesitated for a split second. Could these wolves really be trusted? What if they were merciless killers?

*You contacted us, lady. If you doubt us then don't bother asking for help*, someone said.

My muscles tensed. They could hear every thought.

*Yes, we can and I'm willing to help take them down. They've tried attacking us before too.*

More voices of help responded. Some were looking for a good fight, others wanted to meet a pure hybrid, and a good bit truly just wanted the Order out of the picture.

*Are any of you pure hybrids?*

All of the answers were 'no'.

*How were you made into hybrids then?*

Multiple stories rang out, but they all had the same ending. They were turned into hybrids, but their maker was killed. There were no other pure hybrids that they knew of besides me.

Counting the minds that I was linked to, I came up with ten individual ones. Since I was connected to their minds, I focused on their intentions. Three of the ten had dark minds and they were most likely rogues. They would be too blood thirsty and untrustworthy, so I severed the link from them. I was proud of myself and that I'd successfully only cut out those three. This was easier than I anticipated and was like second nature once the bond was formed. It was just a little too painful for my taste. I gave them our location so they could join us if they were willing to help with the fight.

When we completely disconnected the link, I filled everyone else in on what had happened. I was a little disappointed that there weren't more I'd been able to reach out to, but we were happy for any assistance we could get.

The hybrids would hopefully be trickling in over the next few days. When they got here, we would have a plan ready to set into motion. The Order's days were limited and they would finally get what was coming to them.

The eight of us spent the remainder of the day talking through ideas and what was the best route to take. Everyone contributed to the plan, and by the end of the day, we were all satisfied and ready to begin. Now, we would just impatiently wait for the arrival of the hybrids, me being the most impatient of them all. I wasn't very good at waiting for things, especially when they were life changing.

The hybrids started to show up over the next few days as expected. I had been worried that they wouldn't all come, but all seven arrived and each with a few friends in tow. We held a feast in their honor as thanks for helping us during our time of need.

When they first got to Knox's territory, they were in awe of my presence and gawked for a while. It'd apparently been awhile since they'd seen a true hybrid and they informed me that I put off a different aura than a turned hybrid.

Stark could feel the difference between us after being introduced to them. He told me I had a sweeter smell, while the others were bitterer. I sniffed the air and they all had the same scent to me, but it *was* a little bitter.

The hybrids introduced themselves to both of the packs. The first one was Melina and she had long black hair and tanned skin. Her mate had accompanied her and his name was Atlas. He had matching black hair and dark skin, but his eyes were dark like his hair. She'd also brought her sister Stella who had yellow hair and hazel eyes. They didn't say much after introducing themselves.

The second hybrid had come alone. His name was Daxton and he had dirty blonde hair, pale skin, and a scar on his chin from a previous fight. He was excited for the upcoming battle and didn't want to involve anyone else from his pack. He was the only one of the hybrids that didn't bring anybody along. His voice was rough when he spoke and it was obvious he was the type that was always up for a fight.

The third and fourth had come together. Their names were Isaac and Elaine. They were actually mates and had been changed by Elaine's aunt before she died through her blood. Isaac had dark brown hair and Elaine had long, light brown hair with blue tips. She was the first werewolf that I'd seen with dyed hair. I'd heard of the humans doing it, but I'd never witnessed it first hand. Now that I had, I wanted to color my hair too. They were both soft spoken and didn't seem to enjoy a fight, but knew when it was necessary.

The fifth one was Wendy and she had medium length auburn hair, freckles, and light skin. Her mate Zeke, who had black hair and bright blue eyes, and her friends Art and Keri, who both had curly, medium brown hair

and brown eyes, came with her. All four of them had southern accents and were very polite when they spoke. They'd even taken to calling me ma'am.

The sixth and seventh ones also came together and their names were Tina and Elizabeth. They were sisters and both had matching dark brown hair. Tina's hair was cut to her chin and Elizabeth's ran past her shoulders. They brought Gerald and Oscar, their mates. They both had brown hair and brown eyes too and the four of them made a cute family. They also kept to themselves, but were very sweet when they did interact with others.

I was shocked that so many of the hybrids were quiet and withdrawn instead of rambunctious. I figured they'd been more volatile and rough around the edges.

All of the hybrids had matching purple eyes like Stark's and mine. It was strange to see so many purple eyes, but it was refreshing to not be the only one anymore. Out of all of them, none were Lunas or Alphas of their packs and that came as a surprise to me. I'd assumed they would help lead the pack just because of their strength, but they enjoyed just being part of a pack and didn't like the limelight. They were all sweet and more than happy to help out. They agreed that the Order would come for them next once they caught wind of their existence and they were probably correct. The Order certainly wasn't going to stop with just me. I just happened to be the one currently on their radar.

I committed all the hybrids' names to memory so I'd pick them out during the battle. I didn't want to get them confused and mess things up during the fight. Stark did too and seemed to enjoy interacting with other hybrids. They had more information on the blood bond and why I was able to control him. It had been the same way with their makers, so Stark didn't feel as much like a freak and I didn't either. It was nice to clear the air and see how alike we were, instead of constantly being the oddballs of the group. This experience had been good for both of our dignity so far.

They also told us that they hadn't heard of a hybrid losing their abilities as long as it'd been done by a born hybrid.

"I actually tried to make more hybrids, but it was a complete disaster," Wendy admitted. "Of course it was at the discretion of my Alpha, but those werewolves I'd tried it on either died from the transformation or the effects were temporary. By temporary, I mean it only lasted a few hours so wasn't even worth the pain of the transformation."



“My sister and I actually were instructed to try the same thing,” Tina stated with a grim expression. “We had the same outcomes too. It was a disaster.”

“Our Alpha wasn’t pleased either, but was happy to at least have two of us,” Elizabeth added.

“Is it safe for me to make hybrids?” I inquired.

“Maybe,” Tina answered. “We were the only ones turned in our pack, so I can’t say for certain.”

“Well it’s something to think about,” Wendy said with a smile. “We could always use more of us in this world.”

I wasn’t sure if that was true or not. More powerful wolves just meant more chances of creating greedy ones who only want a good fight and to gain more strength.

~\*~

We took a couple days to train with them in order to see how they held up in a fight. All were tougher than the average werewolf, but they each had their own fighting style. My pack and I were able to learn a few new techniques thanks to them. They were receptive to new ideas and open to teaching anyone who wanted to learn. It was humbling to see these wolves come together and help people they didn’t even know. It made me look at hybrids in a different light. We weren’t just hot-tempered, power-hungry wolves. Hybrids wanted to help their neighbors and interact with others in a civilized manner. So why were we such a big target?

The hybrids were excited to see what would become of my pup once he was born. Born hybrids usually died before they had a chance to conceive, let alone make it those months before birth. My hybrid powers probably came from farther down the ancestry line since neither my mom nor dad was one. Because of this, it was possible that the hybrid gene could skip our baby and show up generations later.

A baby from a born hybrid was a big deal to these wolves and they wanted to see it come into this world. Strangely enough, it added more fuel to the fire and got everyone pumped up for the upcoming battle.

Another day passed and we went over the strategy we had set up. I wasn’t going with them since *everyone* was against it. I understood since I

couldn't shift into my wolf, but the real reason I agreed to stay behind was because I had a much larger role to play. I would be the link between everyone. I would connect my pack to the hybrids and report any changes or obstacles that popped up. The only ones I couldn't join were those from Knox's pack, but a good bit of them were instructed to stay here to protect those women, children, and elderly staying behind. We didn't want to deplete all our forces just in case something went unplanned.

Before we knew it, the eve before the battle arrived. After going over the plan one more time, we threw a huge party to celebrate today. Not all were coming back after the fight, but everyone was more than ready to end this, including the hybrids.

The night was spent with loved ones and friends. We shared stories and memories of good times. The majority of the hybrids participated in the conversations and had settled in with our packs. Isaac and Elaine were inducted into my pack after telling us the story about how the Order attacked their previous one. They'd killed just about everyone, so the two were more than ready for revenge. They'd been searching for a new pack to join for months now but hadn't had any luck until I contacted them. It was as if it was meant to be.

The other hybrids would be returning to their homes once this was over, but with promises of visiting to see my baby.

Before we went to bed, we toasted to those we'd already lost and vowed that their deaths wouldn't be in vain, including Tony's and the hunters that were killed fighting for us. We also toasted in honor of the people the hybrids lost already because of the Order. The Order's reach was long and far, but their time on this planet was limited.

The next morning, everyone slept in to get as much rest as possible. That day was used for last minute preparations and running through the plans again and again. Half the day passed and the troops set off. They would be reaching the Order's territory by the time night fell and the darkness would be their cover.

To conserve my energy, I only stayed connected to Kane as they traveled. Katie and I were sitting at her house, waiting for the signal that they'd arrived from Kane. Katie lingered behind since she wasn't a werewolf and Knox didn't want to have to tote her while fighting. I thought it was for the better so she would be here to support me anyway.

Marie and Rebecca were helping with the children and Kayla had gone into battle at Stark's side.

Time trickled slowly. My heartbeat threatened to pound its way out of my chest as Kane gave the signal. The link was formed and the battle began.

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## Chapter Sixteen

The wolves were able to slink through the darkness and go undetected as they approached the mansion. I watched everything unfold through the eyes of different wolves and was able to flash back and forth between all of them, except for Knox's pack. Knox stayed by Kane, so I was always aware of what he was doing, but the others were lost from me.

The werewolf hunters had been sleeping for the most part when they arrived and the security that was set up was easy to take out. Until they got to the last one that is. It was going smoothly until the last remaining post triggered an alarm. A loud siren erupted, nearly deafening the wolves.

The Order was caught completely by surprise. Their numbers weren't as high as we were expecting either, so our internal attack had been a success after all. But once the buzzing went off, they filed out by the dozen armed and the game plan changed.

The wolves tried to stick to the woods and hide behind anything they could to avoid being shot. Thanks to my mom, I was certain those were Cesium bullets instead of silver. Cesium inhibited our werewolf powers and if we were given enough of it, we died. Never had anyone been shot by a Cesium bullet though. That was on a whole different level. If a Cesium bullet punctured any major organs, their healing ability would be halted so the werewolf would most likely die quickly.

It was a good thing that Dash had passed on that bit of knowledge because I was able to warn them. Now, they could tread carefully.

Half of the troops broke off to come around the other side of the property, by their office building that we'd nearly destroyed. Well, we'd damaged at least half of it. Through Stark's eyes, I could see it had been rebuilt. Stark and Trevor were the leaders of this convoy and it consisted of four of the seven hybrids. The other three were in Kane and Knox's group. Instructions were passed to the others through them. Kane and Knox's group were taking the most heat from the Order since they were on the frontline. Stark's group still hadn't been detected yet and hopefully, they'd make it into the lab to get the remaining hostages out. That was step one of the plan: to get them out first. Knox and Kane were just the diversion for now.

I kept the link open between the hybrids and my wolves so they could talk through me, but I was focusing on Stark. They were the key piece at the moment and had to be successful before phase two was enacted. Trevor was with Stark and was guiding him the best way to the building since he'd been there before. As they edged closer, several hunters came into view. They were stationed outside their lab and all it took was for one of them to spot the wolves.

At first I thought they were going to get in without a problem, but one spotted Trevor and a shot rang out with several bullets following the first one. I felt the bullet as if it had pierced me and I fell out the chair I had been sitting in at Katie's table. The link disconnected between the two groups and I screamed in agony. I was still in Trevor's head. He'd been shot. The fight hadn't even really started and he'd been shot.

Trevor. My Beta. My second-in-command.

His pain was mine and I was blinded by it. Stark's wolf was standing over me, no Trevor, trying to drag him back to the cover of the woods. As they withdrew backwards, I felt Trevor's last breath leave his body as if it was my own. It felt like I was floating into nothingness and was slowly being consumed by blackness.

Hands were shaking Trevor, or was that me? I blinked the pain away and saw Katie hovering over me. Her hands were on my shoulders and she was jolting me back to reality. She was begging to know what had happened, worried it was Knox. After passing the news of Trevor to her and telling her to go check on Rebecca, I refocused on the link. I bit through the

pain and tears. They needed me now and I reformed the connection between them. I would grieve later no matter how much it hurt now.

The first thing I felt when the bond was recreated was Trevor's absence. It was a gaping hole that threatened to swallow me up again, but I turned my attention to Stark. The news of Trevor traveled through the link and the mood of the attack changed. There was hesitation that fluttered between everyone. This wasn't good or else it would be a complete failure and all of them would end up dead.

*Don't let Trevor's death be for nothing, I barked. Stark, half of you flank the hunters and take them out. We need to get into that lab. We don't want them to have the chance to make you guys human.*

Listening to my direction, Stark shifted position and started advancing from the rear of them. His tar black wolf blended into the darkness as he tore into the first hunter. The other wolves followed his lead. Two more wolves dropped and I felt their pain too. It had to be because of the bond. The others pressed farther and soon enough, we had the advantage on this side of the battlefield.

Kane and Knox were still playing the distraction and were doing well at keeping most of the firepower targeted on them. Alister still hadn't made an appearance and I wondered if he was hiding somewhere. He had to be kicking himself in the butt for underestimating us werewolves.

The hybrids tore through the hunters outside the lab with Stark and it didn't take long before they'd made it inside. The lights in the building were out and I could smell the metallic twang of gunpowder.

*Withdraw into the nearest room, I commanded. Now!*

Being on the outside, I could see everything that was going on through their eyes. It allowed me to analyze the situation instead of acting recklessly like I normally did. And boy did something feel off. The hairs on the back of my neck rose as I took in the different scents around the wolves. They wouldn't take the time to repair the building, but not fix the electricity.

Footsteps approached and another tangy smell filled my nostrils. This one was unfamiliar.

*Close your eyes and brace yourselves, Daxton yelled.*

They did as he said, not knowing what was happening. I peeked into Daxton's thoughts and saw it before it happened. He'd smelled that scent

before and it was something called flash bangs. It wasn't seconds later that the room they were hiding in erupted into a blinding light.

I remained in Daxton's mind as he skillfully ducked his eyes and jumped on top of the first hunter. He'd been in this situation before and had learned from it. Sending his moves through the link, the others were able to copy it and get themselves out of the room.

The next obstacle that was thrown at them in the hallway was gas. That gas could only be one plausible thing.

*Hold your breath as you charged through it, I directed. It has to be the cure.*

I took in a deep breath with them and they plunged forward. Three more wolves were hit, but one hadn't been killed. It was Marcus and I experienced the same stinging, suffocating sensation as he did when the gas entered his lungs. He clawed at his throat, but his nails were withdrawing and transforming into human hands. After a few more seconds, Marcus was in human form and the link snapped from him. He'd been turned into a human.

Stark glanced back at him to witness the death of Marcus's wolf, but I urged him to keep his focus in front of him. The hunters were coming into view and they were loaded down with armor and weapons.

*Aim for their legs first since it has the least protection, Stark stated.*

His voice was shaky and this had to be the first time he'd been so uneasy. He was scared for his life just like the others. Fleeting thoughts of Kayla flickered in his mind. She was with Kane's group and I reassured him she was fine.

His brain switched to wondering where the lab was. His thoughts and emotions were all over the place, but I realized that they didn't know where they were going now that Trevor wasn't with them.

I ignored the stab my heart took at that thought and searched for the thread of Ace's mind. Finding it, I told him to project the directions to the lab through me. He'd been taking cover behind a log and did as I asked.

Stark's group received the directions before refocusing on the hunters in front of them. Their numbers were dwindling, but ours had taken a hit too. They threw some more gas at the wolves, but they were keen to hold their breath. It seemed that breathing it in was the only way for the gas to work so they just had to be mindful of when it was around them.

Stark froze as they made it to the entrance to the lab. My mom stood with the next line and she was pointing a gun at Stark. By the look on her face, she didn't recognize him or any of the wolves from her former pack. Since she was the previous Luna, I figured she would distinguish at least a few of them, but her eyes were just vacant. Her memories of her pack life had vanished with her wolf.

"Is my daughter with you guys?" she asked loudly. Her face was a mask of anger and it made me think that her gentle smiles she'd showed me before were just a ruse. "If so, she should step forward now and surrender."

Nobody moved as they waited for their next command. I could tell Stark didn't know what to do since it was my mom. Heck, I was still in shock at seeing her holding a werewolf hunter's gun. Her eyes had gone back to being as cold as they were when she was one of the Lost.

"You guys shouldn't be fighting change. We were not meant to be animals. I was once a werewolf like you guys too, but now look at me. I can actually function in society without having to live in secret. It's unhealthy and we are an abomination as wolves."

Mom sounded so convincing that I was waiting for some of the wolves to give in, but that didn't happen. I felt the anger blossom within the connection and it was enhanced by the growls that started slipping through the wolves' lips. I didn't have to be in their heads to hear their thoughts loud and clear. They believed Mom was the abomination for turning her back on her wolf and her pack.

Stark asked me what they should do and I hesitated, even though I knew the answer.

*Get those victims out no matter what it takes. Just watch your fronts and don't get shot or gassed,* I instructed.

The wolves immediately punched forward at my words. Mom and her hunter friends opened fire, but my wolves were getting good at dodging the bullets by now. One grazed Stark's right shoulder and the burn seared mine. Stark clenched his teeth and reassured me he was fine.

He was getting closer to Mom and the sweat was visible on her face. She wielded the gun as if it was always what she was meant to do. There was no sorrow on her face at what she was doing. It was just sheer determination to take us out. Alister had been successful with making her



into one of them. Now, if only he would show his face so we could take him out too.

I flinched as my mom was taken down. Stark had been the one to do it and I could tell he wasn't too excited about it. He was as gentle and fast as he could be and I was thankful for it because it felt like I was the one who did it since I was in their heads. Everything they did felt like it was me, so her blood was on me too, not just Stark.

My mom was part of the reason Trevor was lost today and I had to remind myself about that. She'd chosen her side and made her intentions clear. Now, I had to refocus on the task at hand.

The wolves made it into the lab and there were only four werewolves in there. All of the others were made into humans. There had to be over twenty of them and they all looked underfed with their muscles deteriorating.

The members of the Order were more animal-like than we were. They were still forced to be locked in here even though they were turned human. It made me wonder if the Order ever had any intention of releasing them or did they have to join them like my mom did?

The relief that they were finally okay was written all over their faces, but so was horror. Not all exited when their cells were forced open. The ones who jetted out thanked us and were escorted into the cover of the woods with the unwilling left behind. Drew and Marcus were to accompany them back to our territory, or at least get as far as they could on foot. But now that Marcus was human and struggling to stay on his own two feet, two other people from my pack were to aid them.

Phase one complete.

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Phase two began as soon as the hostages were a good distance away. This phase consisted of destroying the remainder of the Order's forces and weeding out Alister. Stark's group reformed and rounded around the property to the mansion.

Stark, Isaac, and Elaine broke off to go into the mansion. Their objective was to find Alister. The others continued forward to take the

hunters out from the back. That way, Kane and Knox's group could get enough breathing room to join the fight.

The sun was starting to come up so we'd lost the cover of darkness. Thankfully, most of them were taken out by the time the sun broke the horizon. I made sure they were all able to stay in contact and work with each other. The wolves all moved in sync like they'd been fighting together for ages. The Order didn't stand a chance when we were like this.

After Kane's unit got the upper hand, I turned to watch things through Stark's eyes. Since the three of them were connected through the pack link, I hadn't been with them until now. They were on the second floor of the mansion and there still had been no sign of Alister.

His white marble floors had been stained red and bodies littered the ground. The three hybrids were a force that couldn't be stopped now that they were banded together. Their paws echoed in the empty rooms as they continued their search, but so far everyone had been sent to the battlegrounds.

When they reached the third floor, gunshots started flying at them. They retreated down the stairs before bracing themselves for the fight. They moved so fast that the hunters couldn't keep up. Bullets grazed the wolves, but never penetrated them and the scratches did nothing to slow them down.

The hunters were handled and Stark realized they'd been guarding two huge, solid white doors. The handles were golden and the doors didn't budge when Stark nudged them with his nose. That had to be where Alister was. The chicken barricaded himself inside this room instead of fighting with his men. It sickened me to see how weak of a man he truly was. He cheerfully and shamelessly let other people fight his battles instead of stepping up to the plate himself. How pathetic.

The three hybrids worked together to smash open the doors. Furniture had been pushed against them and it was disorientating for a second when they broke through only to reach chairs and dressers.

After assessing what was around them, they noticed Alister quivering in the corner of his room with his snooty wife Zandra. Both looked terror-stricken. Alister fired the gun he'd been holding, but no bullets hit the wolves. In fact, his aim had been way off and it made Stark hesitate. This couldn't be the same person from the ball. He looked like a frightened child instead of the leader of the Order.

Alister shot a few more times before giving up and tossing away the gun. He rose to his knees and clasped his hands together in a pleading position. Tears of fear broke from his eyes and I was pretty sure he peed himself. Stark sniffed the air to confirm my thought. Yep. He peed.

“Please don’t kill me,” he begged. “I only wanted a better world for us humans. That better world didn’t include werewolves. You can’t blame me for watching out for my race.”

Stark cocked his head. In wolf form, he wasn’t able to speak to Alister, but there was no way he was shifting back. It was too dangerous even though Alister wasn’t holding a weapon anymore.

*He can’t blame us for watching out for our kind then,* I told Stark and that was all the initiative he needed to lunge forward at Alister’s throat.

His cry of terror was the last thing that escaped him. His wife wasn’t spared either. We couldn’t take any risks this time and needed to ensure that there was nobody to come after us again for revenge.

## **Chapter Seventeen**

The werewolves made it back to Knox’s territory by dusk. They all took turns in carrying the humans here, so it wasn’t just one person with the burden. I was waiting outside with the others and greeted them as soon as they arrived.

Their furs were matted with blood and their pace was significantly slowed. I ran towards Kane and threw my arms around him before he had the chance to shift into human form. Katie did the same thing with Knox, but they both turned back into humans once we allowed them to.

Stark and Kayla approached me hand in hand with broad smiles on their faces. They each hugged me tightly and I congratulated them on the victory. Stark's shoulder was bleeding heavily, but he reassured me that he was okay. It was just a scratch and would heal once the Cesium lost its effect.

Ace raised an eyebrow at me and asked where Marie was. My face must've said it all because he nodded his head and went for the pack house. Marie was with Rebecca, trying to console her as best she could while I'd waited for the troops. Kane and I trailed after Ace and I finally allowed the tears to flow freely.

Even with the link broken, I could still feel Trevor's absence. There was a constant, dull pain in my chest. If I was feeling this way and he was my Beta, I didn't want to imagine how Rebecca was feeling.

Once we got closer to the pack house, Rebecca's wails were loud and full of anguish. When we opened the door, we saw Marie trying to comfort her while Rebecca was trying to pull out her own hair. Rebecca kept kicking at Marie and I was nervous she was going to catch her stomach by mistake. Ace must've had the same concern because he quickly intervened.

Ace and Kane tended to Rebecca and were trying to calm her down. I went to make sure Marie was okay but she just nodded her head. She was crying, but I was relieved it wasn't from pain.

"Where's Callus?" I asked, worried for him.

"He's with Alex. Rebecca just started freaking out of nowhere and screaming Trevor's name. Callus became frightened so I had Alex take him somewhere else. Katie arrived not too long after and tried to calm Rebecca. She was unsuccessful and was worried about you being alone. So, she had a few others tend to Rebecca while she went back to you. It's like Rebecca has lost her sense of reality. All she knows is that Trevor's gone. I can't imagine what she's feeling."

Those words hung between us as we watched the boys try to soothe Rebecca. We had to calm her down before she became one of the Lost. Callus would be alone if that happened and I couldn't let him lose both parents in one sitting.

Shoving through Kane and Ace, I grabbed ahold of Rebecca's shoulders and forced myself into her mind. It was as hectic as the winds of

a hurricane. Her thoughts were only on Trevor's death and the emptiness she felt without him. She'd felt their mate bond snap and I could feel how painful it'd been.

Getting a good grip on her brain, I pushed thoughts of little Callus into her mind. It was memories of Callus and Trevor playing together and it was also from the day Callus was born. Rebecca and Trevor had been so happy that nothing could bring them down. Their son soon became their world.

*Trevor is gone, but Callus is still here. He needs his mom, so you can't go Lost, I told her through the pack link so only she could hear. You need to be there for him and help him get through this as well. You don't want to leave him alone in this world, do you?*

Her erratic breathing slowed and I could tell she was grasping what I was implying. It took her a few more minutes before she gathered herself enough to start thinking rationally again.

"Where is Callus?" she asked in a soft, but rough voice.

Katie and Knox had walked in by now and Knox told Rebecca that Alex was bringing him back. About a minute later, Alex walked in with a crying Callus. He was calling for his mom. Rebecca quickly took him into her arms and showered him with watery kisses.

"I'm sorry, sweetie. I will never forget you again," she promised.

Callus was shaking in her arms and we thought it was best to give them some privacy. Rebecca seemed more grounded now that Callus was in her arms. They would make it through this. It was what Trevor would've wanted, so I would make certain of it.

Knox, Kane, and I made sure that everyone got a meal that night and had a place to rest. We thanked everyone for their hard work and congratulated them on their success. The Order was gone and completely out of our lives.

As happy as we were for that, the night was still spent shedding tears. We'd lost some amazing people along with Trevor and Daxton and they wouldn't be forgotten. Even though everyone was exhausted, we had a bonfire that night and stayed up sharing memories of those that were killed.

There was no way we were coming out unscathed, but I was glad that we didn't lose as many as we'd anticipated. If Ace and Trevor wouldn't

have blown up that conference like they did, I was sure there would've been a lot more casualties and maybe even a while different outcome.

Rebecca and Callus didn't join us. They had most likely cried themselves to sleep and I would make sure to check in on them before heading to sleep. I would be there to make sure they pulled through. It was the least I could do for my Beta. His memory would live on through his son and his mate.

Kane and I were lying on a blanket by the fire and watched the stars in the sky. I told him about how I could feel every time someone got hurt as if it was me getting shot. I also claimed that I never wanted to be connected to that many people again. My head was still pounding from the after affects.

"We couldn't have pulled it off without you though," Kane admitted. "You're such a special person for being able to bring us all together to fight for the same cause. I think the attack would've been a failure if we didn't have you guiding us. It was strange to be connected to all those people, but it allowed us to warn each other. We fed off one another's strength and were able to come out with a win. I'm sorry about Trevor though. I felt your pain through our mate bond. I know how much it hurt."

I sighed as the tears returned. "We'll have to have a proper ceremony for him once we get back to our territory."

"And when do you think that'll be?" he asked with quirked eyebrows.

"As soon as everyone is up for the journey. I'm ready to get back home."

"I couldn't agree more." He kissed my lips and I deepened it.

There was sheer passion and need behind that kiss. He rolled on top of me, careful to not put weight on my stomach. The clearing of a throat interrupted us and it felt like *déjà vu*. Pulling away, we saw a bashful Katie standing over us.

"We really have to stop meeting like this." She laughed awkwardly.

Kane groaned and asked what she wanted. Knox was with her and he was looking at anything except us.

"She wanted to share her thanks with Lena," Knox answered quietly, still keeping his eyes averted.

Katie kicked at the dirt. “I wanted to get to you before the others start surrounding you to offer their thanks. Knox probably wouldn’t be with me now if it wasn’t for you. You were incredible and I’m relieved to have you on our side. I’m sure you want to get home, but just know that you’re always welcome here. Also, I hope that you will stay in our guest bedroom tonight so you can get some good rest in. You deserve it.”

I looked at Kane quickly before grinning up at Katie. “Thanks for the offer, but I’m sure you understand that we want to stay with our pack again tonight. How can they celebrate properly without their Alphas?”

“I guess you’re right.” Katie scratched the back of her head. “Well we are turning in, so just come on over if you change your mind.”

“Will do,” I replied.

Katie and Knox left, but were quickly replaced with the hybrids. Daxton’s absence was noted too and I could tell they were thinking the same thing by their solemn expressions. They took seats around us and wanted to share their gratitude. They were happy to be given the chance to fight at my side. Isaac and Elaine were thankful for becoming a part of my pack and couldn’t stop expressing it.

The others would most likely be leaving in the morning to get home so wanted to spend a little more time with me before they went to sleep. I pushed the fatigue aside and tried to focus on holding conversations with them.

Members from my pack soon joined in and we ended up talking until dawn. The majority of us passed out in the yard and I ended up being one of them.

It wasn’t until midday that we were woken up by Katie and Alex for lunch. The food was delicious and the meal went by quickly. Afterwards, the hybrids set off for their journies.

After Kane and I discussed it with the members of our pack, we determined that we would be ready to leave tomorrow. Our wolves were just as ready to get home as we were.

Since I didn’t check on Rebecca and Callus the night before like I’d wanted, I made sure to do it after lunch. I found them in the same room they’d been sleeping in. Rebecca was cuddling with Callus and telling him stories about when Trevor was younger. Callus’s eyes were half-lidded and he was about ready to nod back off.

Rebecca smiled weakly at me before continuing to talk to Callus. My eyes watered at the sight. Callus probably didn't realize what exactly was going on since he was so young. He didn't realize that his dad wasn't coming back.

Rebecca read the thought in my eyes and soon started crying again. I hugged her as we sobbed together. Callus joined in, not knowing what was happening. All he knew was that his mom was upset and he didn't like it.

I sat with her for a little while longer and left them when she and Callus fell back asleep. I rejoined Kane and the others. Once again, we just spent the remainder of the day resting up and enjoying each other's company.

Kane didn't remove his hand from my stomach once as we cuddled into each other. My stomach had gotten a little bigger and finally, Kane felt the pup kick a hard one. I wouldn't trade this moment and the look of excitement on his face for anything else in the world. This was perfection and how things were meant to be.

We could finally breathe easy and I didn't feel the need to watch my back anymore. Everyone else shared the same relief.



## Chapter Eighteen

Time went on, unyielding to the lives that were lost and the damage that had been dealt.

With the fighting over, we were more than ready to get back to our land. Our territory was still in the same area, but only our werewolves resided in it now. It was quiet without the hunters and their absence was apparent every day. All of the ones who wanted to reside with us were killed by the Order, but they would always hold a special place in our hearts. We could've coexisted if the Order wouldn't have intervened, but hopefully the opportunity would present itself again.

Tony had his own tombstone in our territory. His ashes had been scattered in a grave in Knox's land, but we still wanted to pay our respect here. He'd been a wonderful person and a strong warrior. Now, we had a place to send him our best wishes in the afterlife and he deserved nothing less. He'd spent his last breaths trying to warn us of the Order's intentions. Not many would've done that.

The hybrids that banded together to help us take down the Order still kept in touch. They visited frequently and were eagerly awaiting our pup. It seemed my baby was still being viewed as a test subject. I was disappointed to still be the only other true hybrid. It was sad that the others that existed had died, but maybe more would resurface. We owed the hybrids for their aid and I was grateful to have them in our lives now. They

would remain our strongest allies and we could face anything now. They even helped with the rebuilding here and there.

Elaine and Isaac had settled into our pack without a problem. They informed me that our pack already felt like home to them. They had been welcomed with open arms. Their house had just been finished and now that they were settled in, they were going to start trying for a baby too. They unfortunately wouldn't be able to pass the hybrid gene down to their offspring since they were turned.

The houses some of us were currently staying in were still makeshift ones made of sticks and leaves. It had only been a few weeks since the Order was taken down, but we'd been working nonstop to get everything in order. Kane and I were going to save our house for last. We wanted our pack to be taken care of first.

My belly was huge and our pup was due any day now. I was thankful that everything was okay after all the drama from the Order. Katie was certain the Order would be our last obstacle since they were the last standing major front for the werewolf hunters. I hoped she was right because I didn't want to bring our baby into another struggle. I was hoping this rebuild would be the last one, even though we seemed to be getting good at it by now. The houses were going up even faster than the last time. The only annoying thing was that I couldn't help with it. Kane and Stark both made sure of that.

So, I was forced to relax at our house. Marie and Kayla would stop by to check in multiple times a day. The healer wanted me to do the bare minimum activity after the situation with the Order. She didn't want me to strain any more than I already had, especially since I was so close to popping.

We didn't lose as many pack members this go round thanks to the internal attack we did. That took out most of their numbers.

Trevor was still the hardest hit for me. We held a ceremony for him before we started to rebuild. It was beautiful with purple tulips everywhere since they were his favorite. We were able to recover his body, so we had three bonfires around him for his ceremony. After he was cremated, Rebecca was given his ashes. This was something we couldn't do often because we weren't always able to retrieve the bodies. Either that or there wasn't anyone to pass the ashes on to because their mates usually went Lost

or were so fractured that they had trouble coping and the sight of the ashes made it worse.

Rebecca seemed broken for a few days after hearing he'd been killed, but Callus and the orphans seemed to pull her out of it. We would keep an eye out for her, but it seemed that with each day that passed, she was less likely to become Lost.

Little Callus didn't really understand that his dad wasn't coming back. He was so young and would just cry for Trevor. It was hard to watch, but our pack had been helping every way they could. Mrs. Carmina made meals for Rebecca and the children and Kayla had been over there the majority of the time to help with them. She kept them entertained and happy while Rebecca tended to Callus.

A part of me snapped with Trevor's death. I'd lost my Beta. We had Ace who would remain as our only Beta, but there would always be that empty hole with Trevor's absence. It probably wouldn't ever be filled.

The humans we discovered that were once wolves were currently living with us until they got back on their feet. It was strange watching them try to adapt without their wolf. They were like babies trying to learn how to walk. Two of them committed suicide, so the others were on edge. That was when we first got back home, so hopefully that would be all the death amongst them. I couldn't imagine not having my wolf, so it was hard to determine how I would react. I could probably live without her, but it'd be very grueling. Mr. Scott and a few other guys were helping them the best they could. When they were ready, they would decide to stay with us or try to live with the humans.

Since Marcus was now one of the humans, he was struggling to adjust too. He wanted to remain with the pack either way and was working with the other humans to help them decide what they wanted. He and Drew were still close friends, but Marcus missed doing patrols and running with him. He wouldn't be able to do patrols again safely since he didn't have the pack link anymore or his wolf, but we would find a good place for him. Everyone had a job to do and it didn't feel right when it was taken away. That was the thing Marcus was most upset about. He hadn't found his new place in the pack as a human, but it would all work out with time.

Even after everything that happened, Katie and Knox were still together and going strong. They were certainly in it for the long run and I

couldn't be happier for them. Katie didn't consider herself a hunter anymore and just wanted to be considered a strong human. At the moment, they were searching for a way to turn her into a werewolf. If there was one. We'd always been taught that you had to be born with your wolf. It wasn't something that just happened, but that didn't stop them from searching.

Knox didn't care that she wasn't a werewolf, but it would be nice for her to join his pack on runs. Then, she could take her place fully at his side as a Luna. Knox's pack recognized her as their Luna, but she didn't have the pack link, which limited her and was a problem when the pack went for a run. Katie was staying tough and didn't let it faze her too much. She just continued to do as much as she could and that was all they could ask for.

Hopefully, they would find a way to make Katie a werewolf and then that would also help the werewolves that were turned human. We were still hoping there was a way to get their wolf back.

A knock on the door pulled me out of my thoughts. Marie opened it up and stepped over the threshold.

"Ready to go by the river?" she asked with her bright smile.

Her stomach had grown as well and she was relieved she got to watch me go through the pregnancy first. Now she knew what to expect. Marie still had a little ways to go, but I was more than ready. Ace and Kane were excited to be dads, but that thought brought back the memory of Trevor. He was a great dad and Callus wouldn't remember it.

Tears pooled into my eyes and started to run down my face.

"We don't have to go to the river if you don't want to. I just thought you liked to soak your feet since the swelling started." Marie's voice was laced with surprised concern.

I shook my head. "It's not that. I was just thinking about Trevor again."

"Rebecca's doing a lot better and Callus is now consolable. It's hard to pick up the pieces, but he'll stay in our memory."

She rubbed my back soothingly until I was ready to go. We didn't talk as we strolled to the river, but started chatting contentedly as soon as we got there. Marie walked me to the edge of the water so I could dip my feet in. Well, she walked and I waddled.

It was refreshing to breathe in the air by the water. It was always crisper. It was springtime and the flowers were blooming, the birds were chirping, and the temperature outside was perfect. It was the best day to be outside.

My wolf stirred at the thought. She'd been quiet since I hadn't been able to shift. It was frustrating not being able to stretch her legs. Her agitation put me in a bad mood on several occasions. Poor Kane had to deal with it too. His wolf missed running with us, but it wouldn't be too much longer. Eventually, we would be able to enjoy our pup running with us too.

After I was comfortable, Marie joined me. It was still easier for her to get around. I, on the other hand, had trouble bending over. She used to make fun of me for it until I told her that karma would bite her in the butt because she would be in the same situation soon. That stopped her because she knew I would return the favor if she kept at it.

Our conversations were light. They involved how great of a job everyone was doing, baby excitement, and the weather. It was peaceful, but this time it would stay that way. Katie had to be right.

After a few hours, we were ready to get back to the territory to eat. Stark met us as we were walking back to the houses.

"May I escort her the rest of the way?" he asked.

Marie threw me an indecipherable look before leaving us.

"Hello," I said with a grin.

"Hello yourself," he replied.

His hair was a complete mess and even had sticks poking out.

"Why does it look like you've been rolling around on the ground?"

He swiped at his hair and chuckled. "Because I was. In wolf form."

"Ugh, I miss those days. The dog came out in you today?"

"Ha-ha, real funny. You'll probably act the same way when you can shift into wolf form. Only crazier. Then, it'll be my turn to laugh."

He got awkwardly quiet for a minute and I quirked my eyebrow at him. His nervousness flitted through our bond. I was relieved Dash had been wrong for now. Stark was still a hybrid and we were still connected. It hurt losing Trevor's bond and I certainly wasn't ready to lose Stark's too. I could only take so much at one time.

"What's going on?" I questioned with my eyebrows still raised.

He scratched the back of his head and started rocking on his heels. “This is harder than I thought it was going to be so I’m just going to come out with it. Kayla’s pregnant.”

He said the last two words so quickly that I almost didn’t catch them. He averted his eyes from me as he awaited my reaction. Did he think I would be mad? It surprisingly didn’t hurt as bad as I thought it would. Sheer happiness invaded me, not jealousy or anger. We’d worked through that and now could genuinely be excited for the other at times like this.

“That’s great news. What the heck is in the water around here? We’re going to have three little ones to keep us busy now. When did she find out?”

“About a week ago. She didn’t want to come out with it immediately, but her hormones started producing the same scent as yours did. She couldn’t really hide it then.”

“Why would she try to keep it secret?”

“In light of everything, she didn’t want people to be distracted from the clean up. She wanted to give it time for everyone to settle back in.”

“So, she was worried about how I’d react.”

He laughed. “I can’t hide anything from you. That was part of it, yes. She wanted me to be the one to tell you too. She should be telling Kane right now.”

“Well, let’s go congratulate her too.”

Stark beamed as he led me to their house. It was almost complete and looked so much better than my makeshift one. I was patiently waiting for my turn though.

Kayla was sitting outside under a tree with Kane and they were both smiling from ear to ear. Kane stood up and gave Stark one of those man-hugs and congratulated him while I shared my excitement with Kayla.

“I’m so happy for you,” I cheered. “I can’t wait for our children to grow up together.”

“I know. Me either. It’s still so surreal.” She sighed.

“Just wait, it gets better once it all sinks in. Then, you get to my stage and start begging for the pup to come.”

“Can’t wait.” She giggled.

That was the first time I’d ever heard her giggle. It was cute and I hoped to hear it more often, but that was just who she was. She wasn’t a

smiley person.

Kane and I hung out there for a little longer before returning home. On our way back, Kayla blasted the news through the pack link.

I shook my head. “That girl’s crazy.”

Kane laughed with me. “She’s definitely something.”

As I entered the house, I was forced to stop as it felt like I suddenly peed myself. A gasp of pain escaped me and my wide eyes landed on Kane. “Kane, it’s time.”

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## Chapter Nineteen

Kane freaked immediately, yelled profanities, and started running around tugging at his hair. It would've been funny if I weren't hurting so bad. This pain was terrible and worse than anything I'd felt before.

"Get the healer," I hissed, hoping to snap him out of his panic.

It worked because it brought him back to the present. He nodded his head and called through the link. I probably could've done it faster but my brain wasn't fully functioning at the moment. The pain was hindering my thought process.

Kane forced me to lie on the couch and I was more than willing too. The healer was there in record timing with Stark on her heels. Kane forced him out once Stark was reassured I was okay. He had felt my pain through our bond and was worried something had happened. He insisted on waiting outside the house though and told me he would notify everyone that it was finally happening, including the hybrids. Ever since the fight, he'd been able to contact the other hybrids through our special link.

The healer moved me to the ground and walked Kane and I through step by step. Her words were the only thing I focused on and I was so excited I was finally going to be able to hold our little boy.

The delivery went by smoothly, but painfully. Kane was at my side the whole time and let me squeeze his hand so hard that I was pretty sure it was broken. But, he took it without even wincing.



After what felt like forever, the healer held the pup up and exclaimed that it was a girl. Kane and I were both shocked since we had convinced ourselves that we were having a boy. But, she was perfectly healthy and that was the most important thing. My little girl was placed in my arms and the sobs of joy escaped me. Her eyes were squeezed shut as she cried. Kane and I both cooed at her and begged for her to look at us. We were dying to see the color of her eyes.

“What are we going to name her?” Kane asked.

Our boy name was going to be Ryker, but we hadn’t thought of a girl name.

“How about Eden?” I offered.

Kane kissed me. “I think it’s perfect. Hello little Eden.”

Kane took her small hand in his. Eden finally opened her eyes for the first time and Kane and I were both stunned to see purple gleaming back at us. Our little girl was born a hybrid. It didn’t even wait for the first shift to appear and hadn’t skipped a generation like we’d anticipated.

Kane met my gaze and grinned. Tears of joy clouded his eyes. “She’s beautiful like her mom,” he whispered and kissed my temple.

Her hybrid blood wouldn’t change a thing. She would be loved and cherished by her parents and her pack.

Speaking of the pack, people started piling in once I was decent to see her. Each person offered their words of congrats and best wishes while they gazed at her. Nobody held her or even attempted to take her out of my arms. I wasn’t ready for it. I’d just gotten her and wasn’t ready to part just yet. They all seemed to understand and respected my space.

The hybrids sent their congrats through our link and promised that they would be visiting shortly. Isaac and Elaine were elated to be in the presence of another born hybrid. They predicted that she would be strong and live a healthy life. She’d most likely follow in my footsteps and become the second Aluna in history. I hoped they were right.

After what felt like a lifetime, the crowd thinned and Kane forced me to go bathe so I could rest. It was hard to leave her, but he was right. Once I was finished, we kicked everyone out, including a not-so-happy Marie and Kayla.

My wolf begged to go for a run since I hadn’t been able to shift into wolf form in forever, but sleep would have to come first.

After feeding her, Kane and I put Eden to sleep in the crib that was next to our bed. We observed her for a few more minutes, while holding each other in a loving embrace. She was everything we'd hoped for. She was the definition of perfection and Kane and I forgot all about the boy thing.

Crawling into bed, I cuddled farther into Kane's arms and sighed in content. Exhausted wasn't a strong enough word for how I felt. My eyes struggled to stay open from the excitement that coursed through me, but it was in vain. It didn't take long at all before they closed shut for the night. Well, until Eden started crying and woke us up to feed her. The fatigue was still there, but she came first. Kane and I better get used to sleepless nights. This was only the beginning and a werewolf pup had stronger lungs than a human baby. It only made their cries louder.

Eden wailed louder, as if to prove my thoughts.

And so it begins....

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**Looking for more from this author... check out her other novel, *Dark Lightning*:**

Ever dreamed of having control over an element? Ava Sparks didn't. She was just a normal girl without a passing thought that there could be something out there other than humans. Until her seventeenth birthday. In a moment of panic, something unthinkable happens: lightning surged out of her hands. Soon after, she is swept away into the world of elementals. At Westville Boarding School, she is drawn into a society full of dark secrets, power, and rivalry, and she must find her place in the battle Ms. Masters, the leader of the elementals, is set on instigating against humans. Aided by her best friend Harper McGee, she realizes her true potential and the benefits of wielding lightning. However, reoccurring nightmares are testing the limits of her sanity and the fact that an unavoidable darkness follows the lightning doesn't help. When the past and present starts to collide, secrets are revealed and fate is hard to avoid. Throw in the infuriating, but mouth-watering, Nathan Yates and life is no longer easy. She instantly feels drawn to him, no matter how rude he is or how hard he pushes her away.

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## About the Author



Bethany Wicker resides in Louisiana and is a pediatric nurse who loves to read and write any chance she gets. Her sun conure, Apollo and her two dogs, Jasper and Drake, usually keep her company while she writes, throwing in ideas of their own. She has a loving husband, Lucien, a beautiful daughter named Henley, and an amazing family who support her passion for writing. Her inspiration comes from her friends Mariah and Jenni, and the support from BB. She loves young adult fiction of all sorts and thanks God for giving her the strength to finish novels of her own. She is obsessed with Disney, Dr. Pepper, and White Chocolate Mochas, especially from Starbucks. She also loves food and is always excited to try new things.

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