

THE KEEPERS OF THE SACRED SERIES  
BOOK ONE



# Still Waters

Brandee Paschall

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BOOK ONE



Still  
Waters

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One**



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Brandee Paschall Books, LLC

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# Content Warnings

**W**hile intended for the Young Adult audience, this novel does contain mild profanity and scenes with underage drinking. Brandee Paschall Books, LLC does not endorse nor recommend the use of alcohol under the legal age limit. If you or a parent is uncomfortable with these attributes, please do not read this book.

To every twelve-year-old out there with a story stuck in their brains, and to every eighty-year-old still trying to figure out what they want to be when they grow up. Keep dreaming those magickal dreams.

# Still Waters Playlist:

- Anxiety by Julia Michaels (with Selena Gomez)
- 7 Minutes by Dean Lewis
- Perfect by Ed Sheeran
- Home by Dotan
- Centuries by Fall Out Boy
- Demons by Imagine Dragons
- Boulevard of Broken Dreams by Green Day
- Waves by Dean Lewis

# The Pythagorean Theorem

## Emelia

**S**crew Calculus. Screw math. Screw this textbook. Screw Mr. Campbell and his creepy ass mustache. Why on Earth was this course even required for graduation? I could not see a future where I decided, ‘Hey, you know what would make studying these whales better? The fricken Pythagorean theorem.’

“Why are we even taking this class, Em?” Kristine moaned.

“Don’t ask me. I copied down what Mer put on her schedule request. I wasn’t going to take this course until college,” I whispered, trying to stay under the radar.

“Actually, Em, if you researched it, AP Calculus is a great class to take before college. I’m pretty sure it’s also required to get your Bachelor’s in Marine Science. Think of it as getting a jump start. The more AP classes you take now, the earlier you

can graduate with your bachelor's and work towards your PhD," Meredith babbled.

"LADIES. As interesting as your conversation must be, I am trying to teach the rest of the class the importance of Accumulation Functions. Would one of you rather come up and teach it?" snarled Mr. Campbell.

I instantly covered Kris's mouth with my hand, earning myself a glare from Campbell.

"No sir, we were merely discussing how excited we all are to have the opportunity to study under such a renowned mathematician as yourself. I mean, you should have won Teacher of the Year over Mrs. Michel last year. I'm calling BS," Mer answered without an ounce of sarcasm. A slight blush played on Campbell's cheeks, and he cleared his throat before resuming the lesson. One of the boys sitting in front of Mer turned around to give her a fist bump.

"What. The. H. E. Double hockey sticks?" voiced Kris and me simultaneously. Mer shrugged her shoulders and smirked. A not-so-subtle throat clearing from the front of the classroom caused both Kris and Mer to turn their attention to the extremely dull 'mathematician' standing by the whiteboard.

I turned my attention to the ticking clock over the board. Yes, I do have ADD. There were only five more minutes before the first day of junior year would end. I knew I should be more excited to be back to school but today was August 1st.

August 1st marked four years since the disappearance of my sister Mia. It wasn't as hard of a day as it used to be, but I'd

still rather spend the day at home in bed crying. Mia deserved that. It should have been easier as time went on, but every time this day came around, all I could think about was the despair on my brother Mason's face when he'd told us Mia was gone. I knew that Mia wouldn't want me to dwell. She'd want me to be living my best life, and I tried to do that. I tried to be happy and live a normal life, like she should've been able to. My best friends helped me a lot with that. They knew how hard of a day this was for me and my family, so they tried to be even more of their crazy fun-loving selves. I didn't know what I'd do without them or my brothers.

The bell rang for the end of class, so my friends and I left for our lockers. The hallways were crowded with students heading to their bus or the parking lot. Covington High School wasn't extremely big, but it was extremely populated. I would sometimes get claustrophobic around all these people, but that's what we got for living near New Orleans. Students rushed about the halls, impatient to leave and get their weekend plans started, so that they could soak up the last of their summer vacations.

"I was thinking we go see the new horror movie at the theater tonight. Be a good start to the year," Kris proposed, adjusting her long blonde hair as she looked into the mirror that hung on her locker door.

"You know I love horror movies, so I can't say no. Which one is it?" I asked.

"Slasher IX, right?" Mer smirked.

A muscular arm sprung out from the masses and wrapped itself around Mer's shoulder. "Oh, we're going to see Slasher IX. That sounds great," interrupted my older brother, Jackson.

Standing at six-foot-one, he towered over Mer who was only five-foot-three, similar to myself. Mer stared at the ground to hide her blush behind her short, dark curls. For some odd reason, these two tried to hide the fact they were into each other. Maybe it was because he was my brother, but I knew he would be an amazing boyfriend to Mer. If she'd let him. Jackson was my hero. While he could be a sarcastic asshole, ever since I'd known him, he has never been anything but accepting and loving towards me.

When I was young, my birth mother passed away. My birth father had been a one-night stand in New Orleans, so he wasn't around, and I had never met him. After my birth mother died, I was stuck at St. Bernard's Orphanage alone. I know. Gloomy. But five years later, while I was playing by the water on a lake trip with my age group, a young boy with sandy brown hair and blue eyes walked up to me with his mom and asked me if I wanted to go swimming with him. I was only eight and had never swum before, but that day Jackson taught me how and held my hand every time I was scared. The perfect brother from day one. His mom, Victoria, invited me over to their spot in the sand to eat lunch with them since she had packed extra and begun asking me all about myself. Jackson introduced me to his two siblings: a young Mason who was a tiny version of Jackson, and his older sister Mia with shiny black hair that was braided down her back.



It was the best day I had ever had, a shining memory I would keep close to my heart when I had to return to Bernard's. I never wanted that day to end, but it had. I exchanged a tearful goodbye to the Lyall family. Jackson cried too. But before leaving, Victoria talked with the orphanage director about my situation. A few weeks later, the Lyalls became my foster family, and I was officially adopted into their family a year later.

“Excuse me, who invited you?” I scoffed.

“Why I did, of course, little sister. That's not a problem is it, Meri?” Jackson looked down at Mer, with what I was sure was his smolder.

Meredith's face turned beet red as she let out an angry scoffing sound. As her full name was Meredith Terran, she absolutely hated being called Meri. While Jackson called her this to be flirtatious and get a rise out of her, others had called her Meri as an innuendo for ‘The Virgin Mary.’ Being that all three of us were virgins, I never understood why they chose her to bother. Not that it was a huge issue anymore since we became friends with Kris.

My other bestie, Kristine Aguya, was five-foot-five, had long blonde and caramel highlighted hair and was a beautiful badass. While she was one of the most outgoing, rambunctious people I knew, she was also one of the most irresponsible and trouble loving people in existence. She became extremely protective of Mer and me after meeting us and is—to this day—the reason Nelson Jeers won't look in Mer's direction. You

would think she had sent him a restraining order, but no. When a fifteen-year-old girl of Kris's small stature managed to hang him upside down from a tree with a rope, he learned to veer towards his flight response.

"If you're coming, we might as well make it a group thing. You have any friends you can bring, Jack's-Ass?" Kris grinned.

"Excuse me?" Jackson's head snapped towards Kris.

"Oh, simply admiring is all," murmured Kris, who then ogled Jackson's rear end and earned herself an elbow in the ribs from Mer. Kris's smile widened. "So, any friends?"

"I'm sure I could round some people up." Jackson frowned, begging me with his eyes for help with my ridiculous friend. Jackson let out an awkward cough. "I'll meet you at the car, Em."

"I need to go guys. I'll see you at the movies," muttered Mer as we arrived in the parking lot.

Kris and I watched as Mer zigzagged through cars, bumping into other students as she went. I held up a hand before my other friend could say anything.

"Don't even think about it, Kris, just let it happen," I groaned, already knowing what my friend was thinking.

"But you know I love playing matchmaker!" she whined.

"It'll happen on its own, I'm sure," I said.

“If it was going to happen on its own, I think it would’ve happened already, don’t you? I think you should give her the idea. You know she won’t go through with anything unless she thinks you’re okay with it,” Kris said, poking me in the chest repeatedly.

“I wish she didn’t feel like she needed my permission. Jackson would be great with her,” I said, grabbing Kris’s finger and placing it back on her hip. I patted it for good measure. She knew I hated it when she did that.

“She loves you too much, Em. She would feel awful if Jackson came between your friendship,” Kris explained.

“I’ll think about it, okay? You know I’m awkward when it comes to this kind of thing. What if I made the situation worse?” I let out a puff of air that momentarily shifted my bangs out of view. “Oh well. I’ll see you at the movie later, girly.”

“Bye, chick.” Kris waved, shaking her head as I walked towards my brother’s Jeep at the far end of the parking lot.

## Voodoo Man

### Emelia

As I was searching through my closet for something to wear, I sensed eyes on me and smirked. I turned to see my younger brother, Mason, standing in the doorway.

“Yes, Mason?” I raised a brow.

“Mom told me to tell you to wear a sweater and don’t be out too late,” he stated, running a hand through his short sandy blond hair.

“And you’re creeping in the doorway to tell me that?” I crossed my arms and cocked my hip.

“No, I ...” He trailed off, entering my room and plopped down on my bed. He glanced towards my night stand where a picture of Mia and I stood. “It’s nothing. I wanted to check on you. Make sure you bring your pepper spray, okay?”

I sat beside him and embraced him. My little brother, Mason, was taller than me at five-foot-six. He was similar to Jackson, in that his eye color and hair were the same. However, while my brother Jackson was confident and carefree, Mason was insecure and uptight. Both of my brothers were severely protective of our family, but Mason was only eleven when Mia had disappeared, and he was also the last to see her alive. I thought he must blame himself. We all blamed ourselves, honestly.

My adoptive mother, Victoria, was working late one night, and Jackson and I had gone to spend the weekend with friends, so Mia had been stuck at home babysitting Mason. Mason had told us and the cops that Mia had gotten a phone call and walked out. She never came back, and when Mason realized how long she had been gone, it was too late. Who could blame him when he was that young? The authorities couldn't trace where the number had come from on the phone records, nobody ever knew what happened. Who had called her? The cops convinced Victoria to call off the search a year later, saying there was no hope left. She hadn't wanted to listen, but her ex-husband had convinced her otherwise ... saying that our family had been through enough trauma.

"I have it in my purse. And Jackson will be with us the whole time. I'll be fine. You keep Mom company, okay? Today is hard on all of us, but mostly her," I requested, keeping one arm wrapped around his shoulders.

"I will. I know you'll be safe with Jay." Mason sighed, glancing back at the picture on my nightstand. It was a picture

from Mia's fifteenth birthday, just a few weeks before she'd disappeared.

The loud horn of Kris's 1996 Mustang dragged my attention from my forlorn-looking little brother. I hit Mason lightly on the back of his head before running out the door and down the stairs. Mason laughed and threw one of my throw pillows down the stairs after me. I yelled a quick goodbye and love you as I ran out the door.

"Get in, Em!" Mer yelled from the backseat, "Let's blow this popsicle stand!"

"I'm coming, I'm coming! Keep your panties on!" I shouted back, laughing.

"Nerds," shouted Jackson as he hopped into his Jeep. "See you at the theater."

He backed out of the driveway and sped down the road similar to a bat out of hell, the clear opposite of Mason. While Jackson was disobeying traffic laws, Mason was reminding me to bring pepper spray...

Jackson could be protective of his family, but when it came to his own safety, why bother? I rolled my eyes before getting into Kris's passenger seat.

"Damn. Why didn't we ride with him?" Kris joked.

"I wish he'd be more careful in that death machine," muttered Mer.

"Maybe if he had some precious cargo in there with him, he would be, Mer," said Kris as she shot me a 'come on, let's do

this' face.

“Like what? His PS5? I doubt—” Mer started.

“No. Like you, Mer,” I interrupted.

Kris grinned triumphantly, throwing a fist into the air as if she had won a war or something. While Kris was ecstatic, I was already going over the fifty million different ways I could've broached this subject better.

“What? No- I don't- I wouldn't-I would never,” Mer stuttered, her face turning red.

I held up a hand. “Mer. How long have we been friends?”

“Um. Almost eight years,” she answered.

“Yes. A long time. We're practically sisters,” I said.

“I know Em. That's why I—” Mer began.

I let out an obnoxious cough to get her to listen to me, “And I don't know about you, but I wouldn't let Jackson get between us.”

“I wouldn't either. You know that, that's why—” she started.

“Why you keep pushing him away?” I stared at her point blank.

Tears welled up in Mer's green eyes. *Shit. She thinks I'm mad that she has feelings for him.*

“But you don't have to push him away, Mer. I know Jackson wouldn't hurt you and I think you'd both be good for each other. So, stop running. Go. For. It,” I ordered, clapping between each word.

“But if he hurts you, I’ll beat his deliciously plump ass and dump his body on the streets of NOLA during Mardi Gras,” Kris announced with a wicked-looking grin. “Any-who, we are here ladies and gents.” Kris pulled into the parking spot by the Covington Cinema.

“Kris, not that I don’t agree that if he hurts her, he shouldn’t be punished but—” I started.

“—The streets of NOLA not good enough? How about Disney World? We could tie him up in the ‘It’s a Small World’ ride for the rest of his life?” Kris grinned wickedly.

Mer shook her head from the back seat, but a small smile was playing on her lips.

We got out of the car and waited by the front door for my brother and his friends. I felt a tingle run up my spine, and I got the sense that I was being watched. I’d always had this ability to feel eyes on me, but it had grown worse these past few years. I glanced around slowly, reaching my hand into my purse for the pepper spray. I didn’t see anything, not that it meant there wasn’t anyone there.

Luckily, my growing sense of panic was washed away by a sudden wave of calm . I frowned, scouring my purse for that small medicine bottle I rarely touched. I didn’t remember taking my anxiety pill. Perhaps the tea I had at lunch was helping to calm my nerves. *My mother would love that*, I thought, rolling my eyes at myself. My adoptive mother was a firm believer in herbal remedies, which I had always found odd considering she was a nurse. Maybe it was all the opioid



filled patients she had to see that drove her desire to avoid regular medications such as my Xanax.

“There he is, Mer. You ready to make your move?” Kris asked, interrupting my thoughts and giving a light push to Mer’s back.

“What? Now? I wouldn’t even know what to do!” Mer whined.

“Be yourself Mer. Be real with him. He already likes you. I’m sure his reason for holding back is because he doesn’t know you want him also,” I encouraged her as my brother walked up with two other guys.

*Crap. A triple date. AWKWARD.* I thought he would have brought more friends so this could have been more of a group thing. Kris’s hand reached for mine, knowing I wanted to run. For a split second, I thought about running for the bathroom and pretending to be sick, but I knew Kris would come drag me out. Without looking or saying hello to anyone, I ducked my head and walked to the ticket booth. I browsed the monitor for *Slasher IX*, trying to decipher which seats were best for a group of six.

“I don’t know girls, I heard this movie is pretty rough,” Jackson joked, trying to distract everyone from my awkward exit, I was sure. “You might have to hold me, Meri.” Jackson smirked down at my friend.

Mer took a deep breath and straightened her shoulders before staring my brother dead in the eyes for the first time. My

brother's baby blue eyes widened and sparkled for a moment before he stumbled back a step and blinked it away.

“Don't worry Jay, I'll hold your hand if you get too scared.” Mer smirked before grabbing Jackson's hand and turning him towards the cinema doors.

I struggled to keep my laughter in check as I saw the utter shock that crossed my brother's face. He glanced towards me with hopeful eyes. I smiled and winked at him in return, letting him know all was well.

“Yes, well, you know I am a big scaredy-cat when it comes to these things,” Jackson flirted, placing his arm around Mer and guiding her into the building to get in line for popcorn.

“Man, fricken finally, Em. I could not bear their ‘will-they-won't-they’ BS anymore,” Kris snickered before turning to the young boy next to her. “Let's go, Romeo, you can buy my popcorn. But there will be NO hand-holding for you. You'd need to buy me dinner first for that. But you get the instant urge to make out? I'm open to it.”

The guy standing next to Kris, Carter, looked at her incredulously before following her into the building. I was finishing picking our seats when I felt that tingle from earlier run up my spine again.

“You know, this row would be better,” came a deep velvety voice to my side, and a dark-toned arm now blocked my vision from the screen. I rolled my eyes.

“Pu-lease, I don’t know who you think you are, but I think I know how to pick seats for a—” I caught my dropped jaw just before it hit the floor.

All that pulsing anxiety now resurfacing and I began to hyperventilate as I stared into the most entrancing emerald green eyes I’d ever seen. *So much for the herbal tea.* I fought the urge to reach out towards those emerald eyes. I was so entranced that I didn’t even realize he had reached for my face until it made contact. A warmth spread through me as his muscular fingers caressed my cheek, and I was once again made calm. An overwhelming scent of burning wood and leaves infiltrated my senses, and I became disoriented. I was stuck in that entrancement until I could hear a faraway voice asking if I was okay.

“I didn’t mean to scare you, Luna, or offend you. I just know that this row is closer to where they have the speakers,” he apologized.

His green eyes sparkled as I was still staring directly into them, speechless.

He tilted his head with a knowing glint in his eyes, causing his long dark hair to hide his eyes. “Should we go in and find our seats?”

He removed his hand from my face then and must’ve noticed my disappointment, because he let out a small laugh. That knocked me back into reality. *What the hell is wrong with me? Who even is this guy with his freaky voodoo powers over me?*

I scoffed. “There’s this thing called personal space. Heard of it?” I yelled before stomping off into the theater, certain my face was beet red from embarrassment.

He followed closely behind. *Shit, I totally overreacted, didn’t I?* Jackson was going to be pissed when he found out I yelled at his friend.

“Dude. Where have you been? The movie is about to begin,” Kris paused, assessing my dishevelment. “You good?” Her face went from bemused to ready for battle.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I said, taking my seat and noticing not only were we closer to the speakers, but there was also nobody below to block our view. I grumbled under my breath about ‘know-it-all’s’ and ‘arrogant jerks.’

“That was a little harsh, Emelia. I see you’re going to be a stubborn one,” Mr. Voodoo whispered in my ear, taking the seat beside me. Jackson chuckled from the end of the row. I glanced towards him and saw an empty seat where Mer should’ve been. *What is he laughing at?* This trailer for the new World War II movie was in no way funny. I knew he couldn’t have heard us, he couldn’t even hear me talking to him across the breakfast table...

“Excuse me,” Mer said as she nudged past voodoo boy and stopped beside me. “Em? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing Mer, I’m good. Just ready for the movie to start,” I said.

She peered down at me with her stern ‘don’t you lie to me’ eyes and I knew I was about to get lectured. I was saved by the beginning of the movie as the title flashed across the screen.

“Your friends are protective,” whispered Mr. Voodoo Asshole in my ear, “I like that.”

I stared at him incredulously before shushing him and turning to watch the movie.



“*What’s your favorite scary movie, Olivia?*” asked the killer in the movie.

I smirked, knowing that the killer was probably hiding in the closet behind this poor, dumb girl. Honestly, she deserved it—just ,—for running up the stairs instead of out the front door.

I peeked over at Kris to comment on this, but was stopped short at the sight of her and Carter sucking face. *Gross*. I bent forwards to see where Jackson and Mer were sitting, hoping to God they weren’t making out, and luckily, they were only holding hands. I loved them, but I didn’t think I could handle watching them suck face this close to me.

Mer’s eyes were glued to the screen as she watched the movie intently, but my brother was gazing down at her. He watched her as if she was the only thing worth looking at, like it was a miracle he was near her. If he wasn’t my brother, I might have swooned. I didn’t think Mer noticed the way Jackson always watched her, and Mer was too humble to

realize how gorgeous she was. Mer had brunette waves that stopped at her shoulders and mossy green eyes, but these attributes weren't what made her beautiful. It was her. She was kind and loyal. She was outgoing and smart. She was down to earth and the most loving best friend I could have had while going through the disappearance of Mia.

“I'll never understand why they run upstairs. Go out the front door! Run away! He'll probably trip over his cloak before he gets to you with how he runs,” groaned mystery dude.

I muttered back a, “Me neither,” without tearing my eyes from the screen. I peeked through my lashes, trying not to turn my head, wanting to get a better view of my brother's strange friend. He was around my brother's size in muscularity, but maybe shorter? His hair was as dark as midnight and had that styled overgrown appearance. He had it brushed into messy waves, with a little shaved part underneath on both sides of his head. He was wearing a short-sleeved, skin tight black T-shirt and jeans. *Maybe he was more muscular than Jay.* Although it was nice to stare at his abs, I couldn't stop peeking at his eyes. I couldn't pull my vision away from them. It was almost inhuman how vibrant his emerald eyes were. I'd never seen that shade of green in someone's eyes before. They were mesmerizing.

A throat clearing pulled me from my reverie, and I realized those emerald eyes were staring back at mine. *And I've been caught gawking, that's not embarrassing at all ...* I rolled my eyes at myself, knowing my face was probably red as a

tomato. He smiled sweetly, moving one of the curls from my face and caressed my cheek again. All the air in my lungs seemed to dissipate. His eyes softened as his fingers ever-so-slowly traced down the side of my neck. *Who needs oxygen anyway?* He removed his fingers from my neck and stood up abruptly. My eyes widened as I glanced towards the screen and saw the end credits rolling. *Shit!* I had missed the end of the movie.

“The sister was the killer,” whispered voodoo guy.

“Oh,” I murmured, still dazed and unable to locate the oxygen in the room. “I’ll be back.”

I stood up, leaving the theater and darted towards the restroom. I stood in front of the mirror and placed my hands on either side of the sink, trying to take slow, deep breaths. The bathroom door swung open behind me, and my two best friends appeared beside me.

“What happened, Em? Was that dude rude to you?” Mer asked, glaring back towards the door like she’d go beat his ass if he had been.

“I’m fine, I only need a minute,” I said, closing my eyes and leaning my head against the cool mirror.

“You’re not fine. You’ve been on edge ever since we got to the theater. I’ve never seen you this flustered. You look like you’re going to have a panic attack. Do I need to get Jay to take you home? Do you want me to get one of your pills?” Mer asked in her maternal voice.

By instinct, I reached for my bottle in my purse, but only found my jeans. I'd left my purse in the theater. I groaned, banging my head against the mirror.

"It's that guy. I saw the way he was checking Em out. I'd hyperventilate too if that sexy-as-hell guy stared at me with those smoking green eyes," Kris squealed, fanning herself.

I pinched the back of Kris's arm and glared at her. She smirked at me but held up both hands in an 'okay, *I'll back off*' manner. *Why did I do that? I don't even like this guy? Well, not his personality anyway ...*

"I don't know what's wrong with me, you guys! I am freaking out! Who is that guy? I've never even seen Jay hang out with him? That dude has some freaky voodoo powers, and it's giving me anxiety," I responded, closing my eyes before resuming my breathing exercises.

"Em, I know we live pretty close to NOLA, but I don't think the guy has voodoo powers." Mer snorted.

"You doubt my wicked powers, Mer?" Kris raised a brow.

"Come on guys, let's go. I'll be fine," I said, ignoring their banter. Mer and Kris exchanged concerned glances. *I need to chill out.*

Jackson turned towards me as I exited the cinema and his brows furrowed together.

"Jay, can you take me home please?" I said quietly, not wanting to make eye contact with the two guys next to him.

"Yeah sure. Get in and I'll go say bye to Mer." He frowned.



“Shoot.” I didn’t want to ruin their first date. “You know what? Never mind. I’ll get a ride from Kris. You should drive Mer home.”

“Are you sure?” his frown deepened.

“I can give her a ride home, Jay. If that’s okay with her?” Asked the exact reason for my panic attack, I turned to glare at him . *This guy is trying to kill me.*

“That would be great. Thanks, Nolan,” responded my ex-brother.

“I’m sorry what? Jay, I don’t know this guy? We are complete strangers!” I whispered to Jay, hoping Nolan wouldn’t hear me.

“You only sat next to him for two hours, Em. I wouldn’t say strangers. Nolan’s a great guy. Give him a chance,” Jackson said, squeezing my shoulder and leaving me alone to stand beside Nolan.

I stared piercing daggers into my brother’s back as he walked away from me.

“Emelia?” Nolan whispered in my ear.

The warmth of his breath traveled down by back, causing my breath to hitch. I leaned back into his chest, wanting to be closer to him. *I’M LOSING MY DAMN MIND! Somebody, call the psych ward ...*

“I found this in your seat,” Nolan said, placing the thin strap of my purse over my shoulder.

“Which car is yours?” I sighed, not bothering to thank him. He placed his hand on my lower back and guided me over to a black motorcycle with two helmets hanging off the side.

*Oh my.* He handed me the smaller of the two helmets. I silently placed it on my head and waited for him to get on the bike. *I’m going to die.*

“I think you should sit on the front.” Nolan smirked.

“Why?” I frowned, glaring at him.

“Trust me,” he said with a lopsided grin.

For some reason I chose to trust him. Jackson wouldn’t send me home with a weirdo, right? *Did I somehow get stuck in Beauty and the Beast and nobody told me about it?* As if he could hear my inner monologue, Nolan’s eyes softened and his smile grew bigger. I frowned back at him and threw my leg over the bike. He sat behind me and wrapped his arms around me, placing his hands on the handlebars. Warmth seeped through his shirt, and I relaxed back into his chest. The scent of his cologne washed over me, disorienting my senses.

“What is happening to me?” I whispered to myself, not realizing I’d spoken out loud.

“Take a deep breath, Emelia. And hold on tight,” Nolan said, chuckling.

He revved up the bike before I could comment and turned into the street. As the breeze rushed over us, I couldn’t help feeling like I was in a dream, and at any moment I would wake up. How else could I explain my reaction towards a guy I

didn't even know? I didn't understand it, but with him I felt safe. Safe with this guy I had literally met two hours ago, but I was more relaxed than I had been in a long time. Before I knew it, we arrived back at my house. The only light on was in Mason's window, so I knew he was still awake. *Probably waiting for me to come home.* I frowned.

"Thanks for the ride home, Nolan," I said and could have sworn his chest rumbled against my back. I took off my helmet and handed it to him.

"Any time, Luna. I'll see you at school on Monday?" he asked, causing a blush to spread up my neck. *Luna again?*

I cocked a hip and smirked at him. "I don't know where you got this Luna from, but my name is Emelia or Em."

"I know." He chuckled.

"Oh, you know? So, you're choosing to mispronounce it?" I asked with a raised brow.

"It's a nickname." Nolan smiled, his green eyes softening as his gaze roamed over my face.

"You don't know me enough for nicknames." I snorted.

Nolan's grin widened at the sounds. "Not yet, but I will soon. Goodnight ... Emelia," Nolan said, touching my cheek one last time before getting back onto his bike.

He revved the bike and turned back into the street, zooming off out of sight. I found myself feeling disappointed in his absence. How did I go from wanting to shove this guy into the popcorn machine to being sad at his departure?

Wait ... *Did he say Monday?*

## This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things

### Emelia

I didn't see him at school on Monday. I wanted to ask Jackson where he was, but I didn't want him to ask me why I was interested. I hadn't been able to stop thinking about him. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw his emerald green eyes staring back into mine. Every time I dreamed; I would feel his fingers traveling down my cheek as he stared into my eyes. I looked for him all week. Every so often that tingle would run up my spine and I would sense his eyes on me, but when I turned to look, he wasn't there. I was beginning to think it was all in my imagination. That maybe I'd finally gone bonkers.

My friends didn't mention him. I didn't mention him. I had this foreboding idea that if I spoke his name out loud, that would be it. I would have finally known that I'd lost my mind.

That he wasn't real. Just a figment of my imagination. The rest of the week went by slowly as we began to get into the routine of the new school year. The only interesting thing to happen was AP Calculus. *Ha ha. Just kidding. I still hate it.*

By the time Friday rolled around I had convinced myself it had been a popcorn and Diet Coke induced daydream. It was lunch hour and the girls and I were lying in the school courtyard outside the café on Mer's blanket. Kris was flirting with Allen Dursley, having moved on from Carter. She tended to spend her time with guys she knew wouldn't hold up to her standards. She was still hopeful she would find someone worth her time, but for now she found entertainment in the eager boys of Covington High. Mer was lying on the ground with her eyes closed, soaking in the sun on her already tanned skin. I sat with a book on my knees and my eyes checking every hidden corner of the courtyard.

Looking—but not looking—for him. I finally broke.

“Was it real, Mer?” I asked, groaning.

“Was what real?” Mer replied, peeking one eye up at me with one green eye open.

“Him. Did it actually happen? Or did I drink too much Diet Coke?” I asked, laying my face inside the pages of my novel.

“I highly doubt a soda could cause that nice of a hallucination, Em.” Kris snorted, but stopped short when she saw me glaring.

“Oh, you mean—” Mer started, finally realizing who were talking about.

“Nolan. I can’t stop thinking about him!” I groaned, face still planted between the pages. I loved the smell of books, it was calming. I could almost imagine myself walking through the aisles of an old bookstore just from the scent.

The blanket shifted under me as Mer sat up and placed a hand on my back. “I’m crazy, aren’t I?”

The blanket shifted again as, I assumed, Kris sat down. That tingle ran down my spine ...

“Crazy? I don’t think so. Stubborn, to be determined,” Nolan said, announcing his presence.

I stared wide-eyed at him. I was so shocked I involuntarily reached out to touch his arm just to make sure he was real.

“I’m gonna go find Jay. You okay Em?” asked Mer, excusing herself.

“Uh huh,” I muttered, staring at my hand on his arm. Realizing what I was doing I pulled my hand back and shoved my face back into my book. That familiar sense of panic rose in my throat.

‘Breathe, Luna. Breathe,’ I heard in the back of my head.

I sucked in a gulp of air and my pounding heartbeat evened out. My mind opened and my body relaxed for the first time in a week.

“Where have you been?” I asked, trying to pull in the strange calming waves that surrounded me. I took another deep breath.

Nolan smiled down at me as if my being able to breathe brought him joy or comfort. He grabbed my chin gently, turning my face so that my eyes were only on him.

“I wanted to give you time to breathe,” he stared me in the eyes, “I could tell I overwhelmed you last week. Unfortunately, I think I made your anxiety worse.” he frowned. I’d upset him?

“I’m sorr—” I stuttered.

“Nothing to apologize for, it was my mistake. I didn’t think you would want me near you after all the confusion I brought you. Would you rather I stayed closer to you instead?”

“Yes,” I blurted.

*Bloody hell.* I was turning into a nut job. Was this normal? I had dated guys before but I had never felt so utterly desperate. Growling pulled me from my reverie and Nolan’s green eyes had shifted to a dark amber color . *Are his eyes ... glowing? Weren’t they green before? Maybe they’re hazel? Don’t hazel eyes change colors like that?*

My eyes widened, and I instinctively reached for his cheek wanting to help calm him. His eyes softened, turning back to green. He stared deeply into my eyes, with a wanderlust I had never seen before.

“Nolan ...” I gauged.



“Yes,” Nolan whispered, his warm breath washing over my face.

“Are you okay?” I asked, causing him to blink rapidly. As if he had been in an entrancement. He pulled away, leaving me bereft.

“I’ll be okay,” he promised, clenching his fists.

“You said I would see you on Monday?” I asked, raising a brow.

Nolan smiled. “I know. I didn’t want to come on too strong and freak you out.”

“Why would it freak me out?” I asked.

Nolan chuckled. “You did run away from me at the movie theater as if I had burned you, and like I said I didn’t want to make your anxiety worse.”

“How do you know about my anxiety? Did Jackson tell you?” I asked, ready to stick Jay’s toothbrush in the toilet if he’d told this guy all my embarrassing secrets.

“I could just tell. Body language and personal experience I guess.” He smiled.

The bell rang signifying the end of lunch and I whipped my head towards Nolan, panicked that he was going to disappear again. I reached for his arm, but pulled back when I realized how nuts I was acting towards a guy I barely knew.

“I will see you later today, okay? I promise,” he reassured me.

I smiled, trusting that I would see him again. He intertwined his fingers with mine and guided me towards the gym. We met Mer and Kris at the door. Mer smiled knowingly, and Kris was downright smug. Nolan said nothing but brushed a stray curl behind my ear as a goodbye and turned to head towards the north wing of the building.

“Woof,” blurted Kris, causing Mer to elbow her in the ribs and give her a berating glare. Kris rolled her eyes in response and entered the gym.

“Em?” Mer called, as I stared off into the direction Nolan had gone.

“Are you gonna come to class, or are we following him?” Kris grinned from the doorway.

“No, we’re not following him...I’ll see him later.” I nodded before floating into the gym.

“Ah, romance. How sweet,” sighed Kris, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

Mer elbowed Kris in the side once more, but I made no comment as I walked down to the locker room to change, not realizing I had left my gym bag in my locker.



“Why didn’t you wear your gym clothes today? I’m surprised you didn’t pass out wearing those jeans while running in this heat,” Victoria, my adoptive mother, scolded me.

She placed her palm on my forehead as if I might have had a fever because my clothes were still ruffled and sweaty from gym class. Yes, I could have made myself more presentable before letting Mom see me, but I had been stuck in my own head. When would I see him again? Why was I this excited to see this guy I barely knew? He had said I'd see him again today, but now that I was home, I doubted that was true.

*I've never been devastatingly infatuated with a guy this quickly before ...*

“Sorry, Mom. I don't know what I was thinking. But you know Coach Liz won't let us leave once the bell rings,” I explained.

“She should when it's as hot as it was today You could have had a heat stroke, and she would have lost her job. Trust. Me,” she ranted, but I merely smiled lovingly at her.

She was wearing a short-sleeved white T-shirt under some old overalls covered in paint. There was even some paint splatted in her sandy colored hair. My adoptive mother was a single parent, a full-time surgical nurse, and a part-time artist. She mostly did small things for the local art studios and the school auctions, but she was great. You would think after everything she had been through, she would be strict with us, but she wasn't. After Mia disappeared her husband, Jackson and Masons dad, had left her. He blamed her for Mia's disappearance, saying Mia was too young to be home alone taking care of Mason. I was never a fan of him, anyway. He hadn't even tried to contact Jackson or Mason since he'd left .

The boys tried to act as if it didn't bother them, but I knew they missed him. I would catch them both staring at the only family photo we had kept up with him in it. Mia's smile was so big in that picture ... It had been taken not long after I was adopted, and she was so excited to finally have a sister. Her blue eyes shined brighter than the clearest sky.

"Mom, I'm going to go change into something more comfortable," I said, turning to leave the room.

"Okay, but nothing too comfortable Jackson invited a friend over for dinner. So best behavior, okay?" she shouted as I neared the staircase.

I mumbled a half response, checking my text messages from Kris as I ascended the stairs. I wasn't surprised that Jackson had invited someone over . Carter usually came over every weekend and dude had seen me in my footie pajamas.

I read the new message that had appeared on my phone screen:

**Kris: what are your plans tonight?**

**Me: nothing. Dinner with the fam, I guess. HBU?**

**Kris: 'rentals are still out of town so it's just me. Think Victoria would let me sleepover?**

**Me: I'll ask :)**

**Me: she said dinners at 5:30 p.m. Also asked if you could pick up some avocados? :P**

**Kris: I'm on it. See you soon!**

“Why does Mom need avocados?” Mason asked, and I turned to find him sprawled out on my bed like he owned the place.

I pretended to scoff as if I’d been annoyed he was in my room without my permission. “She’s probably planning to make avocado toast tomorrow morning.”

“Gross. Why are all women obsessed with avocado suddenly?” He shook his head.

“It’s the ‘in thing’ right now. Now can you please leave, I need to change before dinner.” I held a hand up towards my opened door.

“Sure,” Mason grunted, walking out of my room.

I glanced around my room to see if anything had been misplaced. Why had he been in here? I didn’t mind that he had been, but usually he waited until I’d at least been in here ten minutes before barging in. Everything appeared to be where I had left it though. I opened one of my dresser drawers and pulled out some cute joggers and my *Panic! At the Disco* T-shirt.

*Much better!*

I popped my headphones in and pressed play on this acoustic guitarist I had found. I wasn’t usually one for instrumental music, but I had found this guy’s music really soothing. I sometimes found myself making up lyrics to go with it, the words coming to me with a second thought.

These days I found my anxiety getting worse and worse. I tried to hide it from Victoria and my brothers because I didn't want them worrying about me. Mason had his own anxiety when it came to me already, and Jackson would be angry I hadn't told him about it when it first started getting worse. But how could you tell your grieving family that sometimes you lied in bed and waited for the inevitable panic attack to pass so that you could finally go to sleep ...

I had begun to dose off before that familiar tingle ran down my spine. I shot up onto my elbows and saw that my door was wide open. Sadly, the only person I saw in the doorway was Jackson, smirking down at me.

“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT YOU WEIRDO?” I threw one of my stuffed animals at him. He caught it with ease and walked away with it while laughing at me. I caught a glimpse of myself in the long mirror by my door, my dark curls were sticking up all over the place in wild disarray . I mirrored a frazzled cat. No wonder he had been laughing.

“Your friends are here, Emelia! Come down and greet them and to tell me goodbye!” Victoria shouted.

*Goodbye? Where was she going? I thought we were all having dinner together?*

I threw my hair up into a messy bun on top of my head and looked at myself in the mirror. *Good enough.*

I hurried down the stairs almost knocking Mason over in my excitement and muttered a, ““Scuse me, sorry.” My mom was

talking with Kris and Mer at the door as she wrapped her stethoscope around her neck.

“Sorry, sweetie. I got called into the ER for a major trauma. I’ll probably be gone all weekend. I told Kris and Mer they are welcome to stay if they’d like. Jackson mentioned maybe having a LITTLE back to school party.” She stared sternly towards the kitchen where I assumed Jackson was watching.

“You girls have fun. No drinking, no drugs, no sex. Keep an eye on Mason for me. And Jackson’s friend is staying for the weekend also if you could pull an extra set of blankets and pillows out for him, okay? Love you!” She hurried out the door, kissing me on the cheek before she went.

“So, not that it’s good she got called into work ...” Kris trailed off. “But I forgot the avocados. I brought you this gem instead.” She nodded her head towards Mer, who was staring at me with wide green eyes and a dropped jaw.

*Was I missing something?*

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I asked just as the front door swung open and Mason walked in from taking the trash to the road. *What the—?* I caught a glimpse of a black motorcycle parked by the mailbox before the door swung shut. *But wasn’t Mason just on the stairs?*

I made eye contact with Mer before taking a deep breath to center myself and turning around. Right there ... standing on the staircase ... was Nolan Adolfo. A wry smile was on his face as he stared down at me. I had a mental rewind of

knocking into him on the stairs and barely muttering an apology.

“Sup, Nolan! Nice to see you again, man.” Mason exchanged some sort of ‘secret’ guy handshake with him. *The Hell?* These two knew each other already? Was I not cool enough for Jackson to introduce me to his friends anymore? I sent Jay a quick glare, but he only smirked back at me.

“So, are we thinking beer or liquor ladies?” Jay asked, staring pointedly at Kris.

“Neither, Jackson. You heard Mom,” I snapped. Jackson’s head whipped towards me, shock and hurt coated his blue eyes. I had never talked to him like that before . *Man, I’ve really got to calm down ...*

“Don’t worry about me, Em. I’m gonna stay in my room and avoid you guys. I swear.” Mason promised from the step above Nolan.

Mason must have seen the doubt on my face because he came down the stairs and put his pinky in the air. I smiled lovingly at him and held my pinky up to give my fifteen-year-old brother a pinky swear .

I glanced back towards Jackson who was gazing at me with puppy dog eyes. Pinky swears and puppy dog eyes ... you would have never guessed I wasn’t the oldest sibling.

“Liquor. We’ll need snacks and two liters too. Where are we throwing this shin-dig?” I asked reluctantly, but Jay grinned and picked me up in his arms to spin me around.



He placed me back onto the floor and began barking orders, “Mer and I can go get the supplies. Kris, do you think you could convince your brother to bring the liquor and call some people from your grade to come?”

“Aye aye, Captain!” Kris saluted.

“Nolan, if you could get a bonfire going in the backyard near the lake. Em, you and Mason can pull some chairs from the garage and set them up,” Jay continued ordering.

“Gotcha,” Mason and I said in unison.

We all dispersed to do our respective party duties.



It had hit 7:00 p.m. and the guests that Kris and Jay had invited were arriving. Even with the short notice, we had managed to get the house and backyard ready. You’d be proud to know I had managed to keep my cool while helping Mason and Nolan to set up chairs and start the fire. And by ‘keep my cool,’ I meant I had managed NOT to hyperventilate while close to Nolan. It had helped that Mason had kept my attention for most of it by talking about a crush he had on a girl in his grade.

Normally, I wouldn’t have been interested because Mason tended to go through girls quickly, but this girl he had described sounded nice. She was in choir and on the student council. I couldn’t believe I hadn’t met this girl yet. There was no way I hadn’t seen her during school assemblies.

“You’re rather close with your brothers,” Nolan gauged, appearing beside me on the back porch.

“I am. I don’t know what I’d do without them,” I confessed. “Do you have siblings?”

“I do. I have a younger sister named Ashlynn. Not to say that we aren’t close, but you and your brothers appear closer than normal siblings,” he assessed.

I nodded. “I think after what my brothers and I have been through that makes you closer.”

“What you’ve been through?” He furrowed his brows. *Jackson hadn’t told him?*

“Our sister Mia’s disappearance.” I glanced away from him, not wanting him to see the emotion on my face. “She went missing when I was thirteen...I think that after something tragic like that it brings a family closer together. Well for some of us it does, Victoria’s husband left soon after what happened with Mia. He blamed Victoria.”

*Wow, he did not ask for all that information ...*

“You call your mom Victoria?” Nolan asked after a while.

“I was adopted by the Lyall’s when I was eight,” I explained, “Victoria is my adoptive mother. I call her Victoria and Mom. Depends on the day, I guess.”

“Where were you before you were eight?” Nolan asked.

I grimaced. I don’t normally talk to anybody about this stuff besides my family and two best friends. Will I see pity in his

eyes like I normally see when people find out about my past?

“Hey, I’m sorry for prying.” Nolan winced, running a hand through his long black hair and revealing the shaved sides. “You don’t have to tell me anything you’re not comfortable with.”

I smiled sweetly at him. “I lived in an orphanage from age three to eight. Before that I lived with my birth mom in New Orleans. She died when I was three, but I don’t really remember her.”

“I see.” Nolan nodded. “But you are happy now?”

“Most of the time.” I nodded.

Nolan frowned, turning his emerald green eyes on me. “How do you feel right now?”

My breath hitched, how was it that when Nolan gazed into my eyes it was as if he could see all the way to my soul?

A loud noise from my right tore my attention away from Nolan’s piercing gaze and I looked towards the fire. There were about twenty people surrounding the fire, all with a red cup in hand. Loud voices from inside had me glancing back towards the house.

*Wasn’t this supposed to be a ‘small’ party? Who are all these people?*

“JACKSON LYALL!” I yelled, walking back into the house in search of my brother.

“Wasss wrong, Em-Emmy?” Kris slurred as she leaned on the island in my kitchen.

*How long was I outside?* Kris was already drunk as a skunk. Where was Mer?

Kris trotted over to me with two cups in hand. “Come on”—*hiccup*—“we’re playin’ Truth or Dare.” She grinned wickedly, handing me a full cup and stumbling into the living room.

I mumbled to myself about dumb brothers and drunk friends as I followed behind her. I knew Nolan stood behind me because goosebumps erupted over my back causing me to shiver. I could almost feel the grin that was on his face. It wasn’t fair that he caused this type of reaction in me.

“You’re not much of a partier, are you?” he asked .

I whipped my head towards him. “What—I like parties! Who doesn’t like parties?”

*OMG. He thinks I’m a boring do-good-er.* I took a big gulp of my drink. *Shit.* Had she put the entire bottle of tequila in this? No wonder she’d been already half in the bag...

Around the living room table sat Kris and Carter—*welcome back, Carter*—, Jen and Lily from our grade, and two other people I didn’t recognize that must have been from Jackson’s class. In a big beanbag at the end of the table was Jackson with an obviously buzzed Meredith in his lap, she couldn’t seem to stop giggling as Jackson played with one of her curls. I took another big gulp of my drink. *This is kinda good.* I sat down next to Kris on the couch and Nolan took the seat next to me.

*Gulp. Is this straight tequila?*

Nolan smile turned into a grimace.

*Gulp. Definitely just tequila.*

Nolan's jaw clenched, and I thought I saw his green eyes change colors, appearing almost amber.

*Gulp.*

“Truth or Dare Mer-Mer?” asked Kris, her normally bright blue eyes duller.

I was going to end up putting these two in the bed I just knew it.

*Gulp. Who's going to put me to bed?*

“Truth.” Mer smiled triumphantly. Kris did hard dares. She'd once dared Jackson to go skinny dippy in the lake behind our house. Our neighbors had put up a fence after that.

“Is it true that you've been in love with Jackson Lyall since the fifth grade?” Kris smirked.

Mer's face turns three different shades of pink.

*Mannn, Kris ... they don't need this already . They JUST got together!*

“Dare,” Mer changed her answer, choosing not to let Kris win.

Kris blew a raspberry back at her. “I dare you to sleep in Jay's room tonight.”

I burst out laughing involuntarily. *Shit am I drunk already? No way.* I placed my drink down on the side table. Nolan's shoulders relaxed as he let out a slow breath. I glanced over at him, he didn't have any sort of drink in his hand.

"Deal," Mer said bravely, causing me to whip my head back towards them.

Mer glared at Kris, and I knew she was definitely going to freeze her bra later. Kris was unfazed, still smirking at our usually innocent friend. *She's up to something...*

Music had begun blaring through the speakers and I realized they'd connected to Kris's phone. "Shot! Shot! Shot!" started pounding through the room.

*Gulp. When did I pick that back up?*

Kris came over and dragged Mer and I up out of our seats and into the kitchen to take a 'ladies' shot together. *More tequila.* While Mer and Kris weren't looking, I switched all the shots out for water. I spotted Nolan in the doorway smirking. I'd been caught, but honestly who cared. If Kris and Mer had taken that shot, they wouldn't have made it another hour. *Damn, maybe I'm not a partier.*

"To you two! The best friends I could ever ask for!" Kris proclaimed, teary-eyed. *Oh no we've reached emotional drunk ...*

We downed the 'shot' in unison. Neither of them appeared to notice the switcheroo I'd pulled. Upon returning to the game of Truth or Dare that had continued in the living room, I

spotted Jay smiling adoringly at Mer as she resumed her spot in his lap. It had almost made me less mad that our ‘small’ party had turned into such a rager.

“Alright, your turn, Meri,” Jay crooned, placing a chaste kiss on Mer’s shoulder.

Mer smiled back at him as if she hadn’t loathed the nickname since she’d been eight.

“Okay, Em.” Mer smiled towards me. *Phew. I was worried Kris would get me.* “Truth or Dare?”

“Hmm. Dare,” I said with a ‘give it your best shot’ look. Something wicked glimmered in my best friend’s eyes. I was screwed.

“I dare you to go into the closet below the staircase and play seven minutes in heaven with whoever we send in there after you.” She grinned.

*Shit.*

“OOOOHHHH, I LIKE IT!” Kris exclaimed, clapping like a drunk toddler.

“Okay.” I frowned, clenching my fists. Bile rose in my throat at the thought of being in a closet alone with some stranger.

*I mean technically the rules of seven minutes is you only have to stay in the room with the person for seven minutes, right? Right?!*

I sighed but stood up and walked into the closet, closing the door behind me. It was pitch black in there, so I couldn’t see a

thing. I faced the wall since I didn't have a blindfold on so that I wouldn't see whoever they sent into the closet. I knew nobody was dumb enough to try anything I didn't want with my brother being right outside the room, but I could still feel myself on the brink of hyperventilating. I waited in the darkness for what seemed like ages, only the sounds of my quick breathing to keep me company. Finally, I heard the door open and shut. Whoever it was didn't say anything, but I could hear them shifting from one foot to the other and breathing deeply .

*They were nervous too?*

I sighed. "Listen dude, it's fine. Just because they forced you in here doesn't mean we have to—"

He stepped closer to me, and my breathing quickened. Maybe there was somebody dumb enough? Suddenly I sensed what was becoming a familiar feeling. That tingle. Before I could turn towards him, he placed his hands on my shoulders gently. I stopped breathing. He stepped so close to me then that his chest was pressed up against my back. Warmth seeped through my shirt, his intoxicating scent washed over me. I was surrounded by evergreen and smoke. Small lights flashed across my vision, I needed to breathe. His fingertips slid slowly down my arms in a caress, before he grasped both my hands, swirling his thumbs on my palms. He bent his head down, his long bangs tickling the tip of my ear as his nose skimmed over my shoulder as he traced it towards the crook of my neck. He inhaled deeply.



*Oh my.* Instinct had me turning my head towards him so that our lips were only an inch apart. His breath washed over my face. I was entranced. Patiently waiting to see what he'd do next. He made no movement. None. The enchantment shriveling up and dying as I realized I must've smelled like the bottom of a *José Cuervo* bottle. I attempted to extract myself from his embrace, but he tightened his grip, chuckling. It was a deeply attractive sound. Who needed oxygen anyway?

'Luna, your scent. It's everything.'

"Luna again? What is your odd obsession with that nickname?" I asked, my voice sounding soft and breathless.

'Luna means moon, Emelia.'

"Wow, most men compare girls to the sun or the stars." I snorted.

Another chuckle. He moved his head back towards my shoulder. This time he placed the tip of his lips upon my skin, planting light kisses across my skin. My knees buckled, a soft moan escaping my lips.

'I think we should probably return to the party.'

"You're probably right," I whispered reluctantly.

*Probably a good thing, since I'm acting like a horny dog in here.*

Nolan let out a full-blown laugh as if he'd heard my inner dialogue. He placed one more kiss on my cheek before leaving me to stand in the closet alone.

It hit me then that his lips had been on my shoulder at the same point I'd heard him say we should leave. How could he have said that with my mouth on my skin?

*He was speaking into my mind. He was speaking to my mind the whole time. His eyes change colors, and he can speak to me through my mind. Is this really happening or am I still drunk?*

I ran out of the closet to find the living room empty. Where was everybody? I headed to the backyard and saw the bonfire was still in full bloom. There were a few couples slow dancing around the fire still or walking along the shore. Jay laid on a lounge chair with Mer asleep on top of him. He was staring down at her like waking her would be the end the world. A knocked-out Kris lay sprawled out on a chair by herself. *I knew I'd have to put her to bed.* I finally spotted Nolan beyond the fire. He stood on the shoreline looking out at the water. I walked past my sleeping friends, deciding Kris would be fine on the chair a while longer. Nolans shoulders tensed as I approached him, causing me to slow my pace.

*Did I freak him out in the closet? Did I come on too strong? He was the one sniffing and kissing my neck like some sort of vampire ...*

Nolan chuckled as he glanced back over his shoulder at me, "You didn't freak me out. I'm afraid I may have freaked you out." He frowned, looking back out at the water.

"Should I be freaked out?" I asked, coming to stand beside him and gazed out at the incoming waves.

“I will never hurt you,” he promised, grasping my hand and interlocking our fingers, “I know you don’t know me yet, but I hope you can trust me when I say that. Trust me. Trust this,” he said, squeezing my hand and causing a shiver to run up my arm and down my spine.

“Are you afraid?” he asked after a few silent moments of us just standing there, our hands still entwined.

“I’m ... ” I paused, unsure how I was really feeling. There was this part of me that wanted to trust him, but there was also that voice in the back of my mind screaming, *Girl, RUN!*

“I think I need some time. To process.”

Hurt flashed in Nolan’s eyes only for a moment before being replaced by a tight smile, “Of course. I completely understand. Take your time, I will be waiting. However long it takes. I will see you on Monday.” he said, removing his hand from mine and stepping back.

“Nolan, I-” I stuttered, reaching out for him.

His green eyes softened, and a real smile crossed his lips. “I promise it’s okay. I will see you on Monday. Tell Jay I had to go home. Goodbye, Luna.” Nolan turned and walked back up to the house and around to the driveway. I stood there silently as I listened to the roars of his motorcycle disappear down the street.

I walked past Jay and Mer quietly, stopping to see if he needed anything.

“She’ll be fine, Em. I’ll carry her to bed soon,” Jay whispered.

“I know she will. Are you actually going to take her to your room?” I raised my eyebrows.

“I am. Kris dared her to sleep in my room tonight. She didn’t say anything about me having to be in there.” He smirked.

“Wow. You’re smart, but you could sleep on the floor you know. She’d probably be okay with that.” I encouraged him.

“Maybe. Are you doing alright?” he asked, glancing in the direction Nolan had gone.

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?” I asked, avoiding looking at him.

“He’s a good guy, Em. I know it seems complicated and intense right now but trust him. It’s worth it.” He peeked down at Mer and for a brief second, I thought I saw my brother’s blue eyes swirl to an amber glow.

My breath hitched. Jackson stared back up at me with a confused expression, not realizing what I’d seen. “What’s wrong, Em?” he asked.

*He’s the same. He’s like Nolan?*

I looked towards Kris, deciding she’d find her own way to bed. I turned towards the house mumbling a quick, “Night,” to Jackson before he could ask any more questions. Once I was in the house, I ran through the kitchen and living room and up the stairs. I found myself standing in front of Mason’s door. The door swung open, Mason stood there as if he’d heard me

coming. “What’s up, Em?” Mason asked, glancing over my shoulder for whatever threat I seemed to be running from

*Think. Think. Think, Emelia. Just be honest.*

“Mason?” I asked, looking him right in his eyes, trying to see if I could see the truth buried there. Was Mason the same too? Surely, they wouldn’t have lied to me about this, “Tell me, please?” Tears began to well up in my eyes and a panicked expression crossed my brother’s face and then turned to anger.

“What did he do, Em? I’ll beat his ass, I don’t care if he’s going to be the next—” He stopped short. But I saw it. There in my little brother’s eyes, I saw it. A small swirl of amber broke through his beautiful baby blue eyes.

“Next what, Mason? What is going on here?” I demanded, tears streaming down my cheeks.

Regret shined in his eyes, he wasn’t supposed to say anything. I took a step away from Mason, before turning to sprint to my room across the hallway and slamming the door shut. Had Nolan told them not to tell me? Had he done something to my brothers? Jackson’s earlier statement flashed through my memory ...

*Trust him, it’s worth it.*

*I’ll kill him...*

## Entering The Twilight Zone

### Emelia

I didn't sleep well that night, and couldn't stop tossing and turning. What was going on? Who was Nolan Adolfo? Where had he come from? How could he read my thoughts and speak to my mind? What had he done to my brothers?

The next morning my brothers were gone, only my friends and I were left in the house alone. The house was a mess, half empty cups laid in various places throughout the house and back yard. It was going to take all morning to clean the mess up, and my lying brothers had abandoned me to clean it alone. Mer and I were cleaning the last of the mess in the kitchen when Kris finally broke. "Alright, Em. Spill," she said, crossing her arms.

"Spill what?" I asked, throwing the last of the cups into the trash bag Mer held open.

“Spill what’s making you look like a sour lemon,” Kris said, her blue eyes pointing daggers at me.

“Kris, lemons are always sour. Saying she looks like a sour lemon is counterintuitive,” Mer interjected.

A small smile broke through my perpetual anger. “I’m fine, guys.”

“That’s BS and you know it. What happened?” Kris asked, coming around the kitchen island to stand in my way. “Did you and Nolan get in a fight?”

My eyes widened, how could I explain to my friends what was going on without sounding like a complete nut job? Am I a nut job? Is this all in my head and I’m imagining it all? My vision blurred and my knees weakened, I grabbed the counter to steady myself, but it was too late. My heart was pounding, and blood rushed in my ears as panic grabbed hold of my heart.

“Em! Em!” I heard one of my friends yelling, “Quick go get one of her pills!”

Arms embraced me, squeezing tightly. “Breathe, Em. Slow deep breaths,” a distant voice said.

I started to do my breathing techniques I’d learned in therapy years ago, counting to ten. My vision started to clear, and I rested my chin on the thin shoulder of my tough friend. Kris’s long blonde hair scratching my nose. It stunk.

“Kris, you should really take a shower, you smell like crap,” I whispered, hugging my friend tighter.

“I’m going to let that comment go because you’re clearly going through it. I’m sorry I pushed you, Em . We don’t have to talk about it right now,” Kris said, pulling out of the embrace as we heard Mer come back into the room.

Mer sighed in relief as she saw me breathing normally, she held up my pill bottle and shook it, “Pill or herbal tea?” she asked.

I grimaced and held out my hand. “Give me the darn pill.”



I spent the rest of the weekend alone in my room. My brothers had returned Saturday night but avoided me. I gave up trying to ask them questions and by Sunday, I had locked myself in my room. I didn’t sleep Sunday night either, my mind was never able to stop thinking of all the possibilities of what Nolan could be? Of what he could have done to my brothers? Or if maybe I was only crazy?

By Monday morning I was more than exhausted, and my anger had, by that point, turned into white hot fury. Of course, I hadn’t seen Nolan all day. I hadn’t seen Jackson or Mason either. I looked everywhere for Nolan, ready to confront him about what he had done to my brothers. I had to protect them. I couldn’t let something happen to them, I couldn’t. I couldn’t lose another sibling.

Nolan wouldn’t exist until he made himself seen, until he *wanted* to be seen. I was heading for my locker to put my



books away when that familiar tingle went down my spine. I threw my books in my locker and slammed the door, causing Mer and Kris to jump. Mer tried to grab my hand, but I turned away from her and faced the end of the hallway. There he was, standing by the lockers with Jackson by his side. They were having a whispered conversation with Mason who kept shooting me worried glances. I made eye contact with Nolan, and that was it. My vision blurred, and I found myself walking towards them at an increased speed. When I got close enough, Nolan turned towards me and I shoved him into the locker behind him. It was with so much ease that I knew he'd just let me push him, and for some reason this made me even angrier. We didn't say or do anything, merely stared into each other's eyes. I continued pressing him against the locker with my right arm spread across his chest. He held my left hand in his to keep me from punching him.

“Em,” Jackson scolded, trying to grab my shoulder.

I glared at him, feeling betrayed. I was trying to protect *him*, and he was scolding *me*? I stared back into Nolan's green eyes.

‘What’s your game here, Adolfo?’ I thought.

Nolan's eyebrows lifted, shocked that I'd spoken to his mind like he had done to me. I honestly wasn't sure it was going to work. At least I know I didn't imagine it all.

‘There is no game, Luna,’ he thought back.

The nickname sent me over the edge, and Nolan's eyes widened as if he was seeing something for the first time. My

anger flowed through my veins, my fingertips started to tingle wildly, almost like they had fallen asleep. All I wanted to do was hit this guy. I needed to protect my brothers from whatever mess Nolan had gotten them into. I would protect them. I would—

*Burst!*

Suddenly, there was water spraying all around the hallway and I was brought back to the CHS hallway. I dropped my arms and became aware of the crowd I had drawn in, but what really caught my attention was the water fountain next to us that had exploded. It was spewing water everywhere.

*What the heck?*

I looked back at the boys, all three of them were looking at me with wide eyes. Like I had been the one who broke the fountain. Murmurs erupted throughout the hall and all eyes were on the broken fountain. I looked back at Nolan, panicked. He reached for my hand, but I pulled away. I ran. I was out of the front door and jogging down the street with no destination in mind. I just needed to go somewhere. Anywhere but that hallway ...

I found myself in the City Park and took a seat on one of the park benches. My shirt was cold and wet, the fabric sticking to me, I hadn't realized I'd been hit by the water spraying from the fountain.

*Did I break it? There's no way. It's Nolan and his freaky voodoo powers.*

“Emelia?” Nolan appeared beside the bench.

I scooted further down the bench and held my hand up to keep the distance between us. Hurt flashed in Nolan’s green eyes.

“Nolan, I can’t. I don’t—” I couldn’t even think of anything to say.

Seeing the hurt in his eyes pained me. Why though? Why was I so attached to this guy? How could he control my emotions like this? Why did I want him to hold me? This guy, who had turned my world on its axis in such a short time. This guy who only moments ago I had wanted to punch? My eyes widened as the realization hit.

*I did break it. I felt it. I sensed the power in my fingertips. I felt the water burst from the fountain. As if it was coming to protect me and my brothers from whatever threat I had felt at that moment. I had wanted to hurt Nolan. Nolan, who had promised he would never hurt me. Nolan, who had asked me to trust him.*

I stared into Nolan’s eyes, searching for answers.

“Em, I-” He hesitated, running his hand through his dark hair in what I was starting to realize was a nervous habit of his.

Suddenly, I felt it. Felt *him*. The anxiety that pulsed off him and towards me, the fear of rejection, the guilt from keeping secrets, the inexplicable desire to be near ... me ? How much he wanted to hold and comfort me. I felt how much compassion he felt for me even though we barely knew each

other. He wanted to tell me, but he was scared. He was scared I was going to run. I had run...

I sighed. "You're not a voodoo man or vampire, are you? Cause I gotta tell you I'm not really into curses or the whole bloodsucking thing."

Nolan busted out laughing, his shoulders shaking as he bent over his knees and I watched some of the tension leave his shoulders. He sat down on the bench and patted the spot beside him. I scooted closer to him, knowing that whatever he was about to tell me, my life was about to change.

"No, Luna. I'm not into voodoo nor am I a vampire. Though your guess isn't too far from the truth, as far as I know vampires are a myth," he said, staring down at his clenched fists.

"Okay, so not a vampire, but also not human?" I asked, laying a hand over his fists and searched his eyes. There was no trace of the amber color I'd seen before though, only his vibrant emerald stared back into my gray ones.

Nolan took a steadying breath. "No, I—and most recently your brothers—are Lycanthropes."

"Werewolves?" I raise my brow, remembering the word that was used is some of my favorite YA books.

"Yes, more specifically, we are from a Canis Lupus pack that was started here near Covington," he explained.

"Canis Lupus?" I butchered the phrase.

“Gray wolf. Your brothers only recently shifted for the first time. When they came within close distance of our pack, it caused the fever to set in. I’m not sure exactly where they are descended from, but we’ve accepted them and your family into our pack,” he said.

“Oh. So, not a mastermind voodoo plan of you trying to control my brothers?” I asked.

Nolan chuckled. “No, and I know I should’ve explained earlier but—”

I interrupted, “You were afraid I’d run. I get that. But no more secrets, okay?”

“Deal. I’m sure you have more questions. I’m happy to answer them all,” Nolan said, opening his fist to intertwine our fingers.

“How long have you been a werewolf?” I asked.

“I was born this way, but I didn’t shift until I hit puberty. That’s how it normally is, your brothers are a special case because they did not grow up around others of their kind.” he said,

“But they had the werewolf gene their whole lives?” I asked, “Meaning somebody in their bloodline was a werewolf?”

Nolan grimaced. “Your mother, Victoria, is a dormant wolf. She carries the gene but is unable to shift.”

My eyes widened, “I’ve been living in a house full of werewolves this whole time and never knew? This is crazy. Like really crazy. Like- like-” I stuttered, that familiar sense of

panic starting to take hold again. I reached for my pill bottle in my purse but came up empty.

*Where are my pills?*

The air dissipated the longer I thought about the lie I had been living in. Warmth spread through my cheek as Nolan took my face in his hands and turned my attention back to him.

“Breathe, Luna,” he commanded, amber swirling in his emerald eyes. I took in a big gulp of air, and then another, and another. Calming waves flashed through me, and I realized Nolan was sending them to me. He was trying to calm me .

“Emelia, what happened with the water fountain?” he asked, removing his hands from my cheeks when he finally sensed I was okay again.

“No idea honestly.” I sighed, continuing to take deep breaths.

“But it was you?” he asked.

“I think so,” I said, peering down at my hands as if they carried the answers.

“But nothing like that’s ever happened before?” he asked.

I thought back to how I was feeling when the fountain exploded. How angry and protective I was of my brothers, and I remembered smelling salt water.

Nolan was staring at me intensely, listening to my thought process.

“The freaky mind reading, is that a werewolf thing?” I asked.

“No, that’s an us thing,” he said, a shy smile on his boyish face.

*Us? Like he and I?*

“Yes, like you and me . You and I have a special bond, to explain it simply,” he said, answering my unspoken question. “Well, this is really anything but simple, but we can project thoughts to each other that we want the other to hear. And when our emotions are high, we can pretty much hear the others thoughts whether we want them to or not.”

I blushed, thinking about our time in the closet and how my emotions scattered from embarrassing to mortifying. I dropped my face in my hands, this wasn’t happening.

Nolan grimaced. “I try not to listen, I don’t want you to think I’m invading your privacy.”

“Earlier when you showed up, I could sense how nervous you were, is that a part of this ...” I hesitated. “This bond?”

“It is. We can feel each other’s emotions, if we’re trying to.” He smiled shyly. “I can’t help but want to do it all the time. I like knowing what your emotions are. What you’re thinking.”

“Why?” I whispered.

“We haven’t had a lot of time to get to know one another yet and it feels like the only way to know if you’re okay.” He grabbed my hand in his and swirled my mood ring around my

finger. “I’ve noticed you spin this around a lot when you’re deep in thought or anxious.”

I smiled, looking down at our hands. If he could always feel my emotions, then he knew...

“You spin it a lot.” He sighed, squeezing my hand. “Because of your sister or?”

I nodded.

He continued, “and when you first felt my presence at the theater why did you reach into your purse?”

“I carry pepper spray.” I confessed.

He nodded, staring at the river across the park.

“I’m not a werewolf, right?” I asked, whipping my head towards Nolan with wide eyes.

Nolan chuckled, “No, you are human. Come with me, I want you to try something.” He grabbed my hand and pulled me from the bench, leading over to the river side. He let go of my hand to bend down and scooped some of the lake water into his cupped hands. He held his hands out to me as if he wanted me to take the water in my hands, I smirked but held my hands up.

“Okay, Nol. Now what?” I asked, giggling as some of the water seeped through the cracks of my fingers.

“Now, I want you to close your eyes,” he said, a wicked grin spread across his face. I shook my head at his playfulness but closed my eyes and continued to hold the water in my hands. I



heard the leaves shift under his feet as he moved behind me, and wrapped a gentle arm around my abdomen, causing butterflies to erupt and goosebumps to cover my skin. Nolan used his other arm to move my long curls behind my shoulder and leaned down to place a chaste kiss at the nape of my neck. *What is he doing?!* A smile spread across his lips before he nipped my skin with his teeth, causing me to yelp and had it not been for his arm around my stomach I would have fallen over.

“Open your eyes, Emelia,” he whispered into my ear. When I opened my eyes, I gasped at my hands where the water swirled in my hands like a whirlpool. I spread my hands apart, causing the water to fall and splash on the ground.

“Holy shit!” I shouted, staring at my hands with wide eyes. What is happening to me? I started spinning my ring around my finger and pacing back and forth in front of the shoreline. What does all of this mean? Calming waves seeped through my growing panic again, and I stopped mid-stride. “That’s you?” I asked.

He nodded, coming to stand beside me and pushed a stray curl behind my ear.

“I like it,” I sighed, leaning into his hand. Nolan rubbed his thumb over my lips, staring deeply into my eyes as he sent wave after wave of calm through my veins.

I could’ve stayed like that forever with him. Never having to feel panicked again, never having to worry about anything. Nolan’s eyes shifted to an amber glow as his face got closer to

mine, and suddenly all the air Nolan had provided me dissipated. It wasn't often a boy could give you air and also leave you breathless.

“Luna?” Nolan whispered seductively.

“Mmm,” I mumbled, disoriented.

He chuckled, rubbing his nose against mine.

‘She is beautiful.’ he thought.

I smiled, not sure if he even knew I had heard that. The sky grew dark from the overcast, signifying that a storm would soon start. Thunder and lightning rattled through the sky, signifying that I had run out of time with Nolan. Once again, I shook my head at myself for being disappointed at his departure. Sad to be leaving this guy I barely knew and had wanted to punch earlier ...

“You need to go home?” he asked.

“I do,” I sighed.

“When I see you tomorrow will it involve being shoved into lockers and exploding water fountains?” he joked.

I wrinkled my nose at him. “Let's hope not.”

It took all my willpower to untangle myself from Nolan's warm embrace, and my gut twisted the further I moved away from him.

“I'll walk you home.” He smiled sadly, holding out his hand for me.



Later that night while I was lying in bed my phone beeped. It was a text from Mer.

**Mer: U okay?**

*Oh my God. MER.*

I jumped out of my bed and ran down the stairs to find Jackson. He was sitting at the kitchen table eating Mom's entire apple pie with a fork. I only paused a moment to register this before I walked into the kitchen and placed both of my hands on the table, giving my brother death eyes. He peeked up at me with a mouth full of pie and garbled a *what?*

“Does Mer know you're a werewolf?” I demanded.

His eyes widened. *She doesn't know...*

“Are you going to tell her?” I asked through gritted teeth.

He stared down at the pie in front of him, grimacing. That was when it hit me.

“Is she-” I stuttered, “Is she like your—”

I didn't even know what to call it. This bond? Was it like that for them? Did this happen with every werewolf?

*Werewolves ... I can't believe this is happening to me.*

“My mate?” He smirked, raising a brow at me.

“If that's what we're calling it, sure.” I shrugged.

“She is.” he said, “She is my True Mate.”

“But she doesn’t know?” I asked.

“She doesn’t know anything. Like you didn’t. Like Mason and I didn’t until a couple months ago,” he explained.

“But you can tell she’s your ... mate?” I asked, cringing at the new term.

“I can. I’ve always been attracted to her, you know that. But after we shifted for the first time ... after that it was different. I could hear her breath catch whenever I was around. I could hear her humming under her breath even when it was so quiet nobody else could hear, but most importantly I could feel her. Feel her emotions, sometimes better than I can feel my own. I could sense her stressing about a test she was taking from across the school. I could feel her entire body react whenever I was near.” He smiled, dreamily.

“Tell her,” I demanded.

“But what if she doesn’t understand? You shoved Nolan into a locker today because you thought he was a con man from NOLA.” He cocked his head at me.

I grimaced. Well, that was true...

I sighed. “You should still tell her. And it will be different from me and Nolan.”

“How?” he asked, raising an eyebrow at me.

“Because she’s known you since you were a bratty nine-year-old.” I smirked. “She knows you would never hurt her or make up something like this.”

He rolled his eyes. “Nolan said I should tell her too.”

“See he’s kind of smart too,” I said, shooting a finger-gun at him.

Jackson grinned wickedly. “So, you two talked it out then?”

I glared at him before sitting down to share Mom’s pie. “Told me my whole family has been lying to me. Yeah, he did.”

Jackson frowned. “I’m sorry we didn’t tell you, Em. But we knew he should be the one to tell you.”

“Even though I hadn’t even met him yet or even known he existed, I somehow get that. Which makes absolutely no sense, and I’m convinced I’ve just accepted my position as the Mayor of LooneyTown.” I sighed, stabbing my fork into the pie.

Jackson grinned. “Because he’s your True Mate.”

“How did you know? Before I’d even met him?” I asked, “And what is a True Mate?”

“When Nolan and some of the pack came to visit us, he saw you. You were leaving to go see Mer and Kris at the new bookstore at the beginning of the summer. You rushed out so fast that you didn’t even notice them in the living room. But he noticed you, and the mate bond snapped into place. At least on his part. You took a little longer.” He laughed.

“What about at school? He never happened to see me there?” I asked.

“He didn’t start at CHS until this year,” Jackson explained, “He thought it would be the best place to meet and get to know you before dropping an entire supernatural world on you. He probably didn’t expect the secret to come out this early. Honestly, you’re handling the news better than Mason and I did.”

“And you guys are the ones who go furry once a month.” I giggled, imagining my brothers with tails.

Jackson snorted. “It’s not once a month. Think more Jacob Cullen from *Twilight*.”

“You mean Jacob Black?” I snorted.

“Whatever,” he rolled his eyes at me.

Honestly, I was proud of the references either way. I had known he wasn’t just ‘doing homework’ while he sat next to me as Victoria and me binged old cringy movies.

“So, you could change into a wolf right now?” I asked.

“It’s called phasing or shifting, but yes,” he said, cleaning up our late-night snack. “Would you like a demonstration, little sister?” He grinned wickedly at me.

“Nope. I think I’ve had enough of a bombshell dropped on me today, thank you. Maybe some other time,” I said, trying not to get overwhelmed at the thought of Jackson turning into a wolf in the middle of our kitchen.

“Mom knew about you and Mason being werewolves? And she is part werewolf?” I asked.

Jackson froze at the sink, gritting his teeth.

“She knew.” he finally answered.

“But...” I probed.

“But...she knew since we were young this could happen, and she didn’t tell us. Her dad was a werewolf, her whole family was from a Canis Lupus pack. Mom’s gene is recessive so she can’t shift, and our dad was human, so she didn’t think we’d be able to shift either. I mean if we weren’t going to have the gene, I see why she wouldn’t want us to know.” Jackson assessed, staring down into the sink as he washed our plates.

“Oh. That whole situation kind of sucks,” I admitted.

“Yeah, but she apologized. A lot.” he grimaced.

“How did you guys find out you could shift or whatever?” I asked.

“Remember when Mason and I took that camping trip at the beginning of the summer? Well, it was near where Nolan and his family live, along with the rest of their pack. Mason felt sick and was suddenly burning up with fever. I packed up to take us back home so Mom could take him to the doctor, but then I got sick too. We both passed out and when we woke up, we were at the Adolfo Pack camp. They explained everything to us. Being in such proximity to them started our first phase into werewolves. Our wolves could sense the pack’s Alpha and were clawing their way out to get to him. A wolf needs its Alpha, otherwise they can lose control and go savage. We started practicing shifting over the next couple weeks with

Nolan's help, but we didn't confront Mom about it for a while," Jackson explained.

"I remember you guys being sick on and off at the beginning of the Summer, but Mom said it was the stomach bug or something, so I didn't question it. I feel like I've been so oblivious to what's been going on." I frowned, dropping my chin in my hand.

"I'm sorry, Em. From now on no more secrets," Jay promised, smiling.

I yawned, "Good. Anyway, I think I'm going to head to bed before my head explodes from all this new information. Night, Jay."

"Night, Em." Jay smiled. "Love you."

I scuffed up his hair as I passed by and headed out of the kitchen to the living room, grabbing my phone off the coffee table before turning to head upstairs. However, when I got to the bottom of the stairs, I saw Kris standing there, mouth open and eyes wide. She'd heard everything. *I knew I shouldn't have given her a spare key ...*

"Uhhhhh ... JACKSONNN!!!!" I shouted.

Jackson sprinted into the room with inhuman speed that had me jumping out of his way, and Mason came barreling down the stairs. Both laid eyes on Kris, who was still frozen, mouth open, staring at Jackson in shock.

"Shit," said Jackson finally.



“What? What is it?” Mason snapped, looking between the three of us.

Kris closed her mouth, taking a deep breath. She looked me directly in the eyes with a deadpan expression. We all stood there in suspended silence, waiting for her response.

Finally, Kris asked, “So we talking hot werewolves or should I start running?”

Mason cursed, laughing. Jackson and I still stood speechless.

*Is she serious?*

“You are a wonder, Kristine Aguya,” Mason said, still bent over and snorting at this point.

My eyes widened as I looked at Jackson, unsure how to respond.

Jackson stared blankly at both of us, as if we were crazy and he was contemplating having us committed.

“We can turn into wolves, Kris. This isn’t a horror movie. Just imagine a big version of a gray wolf.” Mason told Kris.

Kris nodded, “Okay that’s good. Now where do I get a hot wolf-boy to be my mate or whatever?”

“There’s something fundamentally wrong with you, Aguya,” Jackson said, rubbing a hand down his face.

“Yeah, I know, Jay ... Now: WHERE. DO. I. GET. ONE?” she said, clapping between each word.

“It doesn’t work like that, Kris,” Mason said, “You have to be a wolf ... or whatever Em is.”

*Nice. Like I’m an enigma ...*

“Damn. Anyway, I came over cause my parents are home and fighting per usual and I didn’t feel like listening to it. So, I invited myself over, sorry for intruding on this family secret though,” Kris apologized, shrugging her shoulders as if her universe hadn’t just been tilted on its axis.

“You know you’re always welcome, Kris.” I smiled. “Why don’t you head to my room and I’ll meet you up there in a minute with some snacks.”

“Sure. Do you mind if I use your shower?” she asked.

“Go ahead,” I said, and she trotted up the stairs and into the bathroom. I whipped my head towards Jackson wide-eyed, “What are we going to do?”

“I have no idea. Not much we can do now that she knows,” Jackson said, staring at the spot Kris had just vacated, “You think Mer will take it as well as she just did?”

“Oh, Jay.” I shook my head laughing, “There’s a 99.9% chance Kris is hyperventilating in the shower as we speak.”

“Shit, maybe you should go check on her?” he suggested.

“No, she needs time to process without a werewolf or a werewolf’s sister in the room.” I grimaced.

“Makes sense,” Jay agreed.

Mason sighed, heading back up the stairs, as if we weren't excited to listen to anymore. I grabbed Kris's bag off the floor before following him upstairs and dropping it on my bed.

"So," drawled Kris from the doorway, causing me to jump, "Nolan's a werewolf too?"

"Yes. I guess," I said. "Honestly, I'm still processing. I keep waiting for somebody to jump out of a closet with a camera and yell 'gotcha.'"

"Have you seen him, you know—" She hesitated, "Go furry?"

I snorted. "No, I only found out today too. Jackson said it's called shifting or phasing."

Kris raised a brow at me.

"It's a long story." I conceded.

"Well, it's only nine. Tell. Me. Everything!" Kris grinned. "What did Mason mean when he said, 'whatever Em is?'"

"Do you remember the water fountain exploding today?" I asked, grimacing,

"Oh, you mean after you shoved Nolan into a locker and your eyes glowed?" Kris asked, opening a bag of chips nonchalantly, "I had a feeling it was you that caused that?"

"How could you have known it was me? Wait, my eyes glowed? Like they changed colors?" I asked, plopping on the edge of the bed.

“Sort of. They were your normal gray one moment and then they were a glowing cerulean blue.” she said.

“I can’t believe this is happening to me. How are you taking this so well?” I asked my neurotic friend.

“I drank some herbal tea before I came over,” she deadpanned.

“Screamed in the shower earlier, didn’t you?” I asked, smirking.

“Yup, but don’t worry about me, Em.” She grinned, “Now tell me everything.”

*Always the strong one ...*



I woke with a start. It was still dark outside, with only my phone screen lighting up the room. I peeked down at Kris snoring on the floor. The house was quiet, everyone still sound asleep. I grabbed my phone and saw a text from an unknown number.

**Unknown: Are you okay? I felt your panic earlier? Jackson said you were fine, but I needed to find out for myself. Jackson gave me your number.**

**Me: I’m okay. We have a bit of a Kris issue. I’ll explain tomorrow. :)**

**Nolan: Good. Sorry I must have woken you.**

**Me: No, it's fine. It's nice to talk to you.**

**Nolan: I agree.**

**Me: Nolan, what are True Mates?**

**Nolan: Do you really want me to explain this through texts?**

**Me: That serious, huh? No, I will wait. But you HAVE to tell me tomorrow.**

**Nolan: No more secrets.**

**Me: No more secrets.**

**Nolan: So, I was wondering if I could take you somewhere this weekend? Your brothers will be there. And if Jay manages to tell Mer, she can come too.**

**Me: Where is it? You want us to come for the whole weekend?**

**Nolan: I want to take you to where I live. Where our pack lives. And yes, for the whole weekend.**

**Me: Will it be safe?**

**Nolan: You will always be safe with me, Luna.**

**Me: I'll ask my mom. :-)**

## Damn Werewolf Voodoo Powers

### Emelia

If I had to sit through anymore of this stupid class, I was going to die. Every tick of the clock felt like an hour and all I wanted to do was see Nolan. To get more answers. Every tick of the clock was another moment of me having to stare at the back of Mer's head, knowing I was keeping a huge secret from my best friend. When Kris and I had walked into the school together that morning, it took everything I had not to tell her the truth immediately, but like Jackson said, it was something he needed to explain to her. Because he was her mate ... whatever that meant.

Finally, by the grace of God, the bell rang, and it was time for lunch. Nolan and I had agreed to have lunch together outside under the large oak tree at the far end of the school's campus. We had agreed no more secrets, and I had come up with so many questions after our late-night conversation. As I

came upon the tree, I saw a blanket laid out that looked like it had been handmade, different mismatched patches sewn together with no obvious pattern. Leaning against the tree's trunk and facing away from me was the boy I'd been obsessing over. His messy black hair looked shorter from this angle with the sides and back shaved. His dark jeans hugged his bottom nicely, and his tight green T-shirt showed off his muscular biceps and shoulders. I stopped in my tracks when he turned his attention to me, his green eyes shining with mirth. He'd been listening to my thoughts ... This was going to take some getting used to ...

“Hello, Emelia, how has your day been?” he asked, turning fully towards me with his hands tucked in his pockets.

“Do you even really need to ask me that when you can read my thoughts?” I asked, smirking.

“I wouldn't be a very good mate if I only relied on our mental bond to see how you're doing,” he said, taking a seat on the blanket and patting the spot beside him for me to sit.

I took the spot directly in front of him instead, sitting cross-legged with my elbows on my knees and my chin in my hands, “Are you going to explain this whole True Mate thing to me now, or am I to keep guessing?” I asked, raising my eyebrows at him expectantly.

Nolan ran his hand through his hair and popped his neck, “What do you want to know first?” he asked.

“What is a True Mate? And how did you know I was yours?” I asked.

“Every werewolf has one True Mate meant for them. The one who is the missing half to their soul, and without them we are left feeling incomplete. In darkness searching for that missing link that will shed bright burning light into our lonely existence. When I saw you that day at your house for the first time, you were running out the front door and didn’t even look in my direction. But I felt it then, you were like a bright beacon shining through a tunnel with no light. I was positive then that you were my True Mate, and when we met at the theater, and I could calm your growing anxiety it only confirmed it more. Even while you thought I was some sort of weirdo; I was still so happy to hear your thoughts in my mind.” Nolan explained, never tearing his eyes from mine.

I sat there speechless, my heart pounding in my chest and tears on the brink of falling. The way Nolan felt about me was so overwhelming and bittersweet and beautiful I wasn’t sure how to react. That I was supposed to be this light that shrouded out the darkness for him seemed unfathomable. Surely someone else would suit him better than me?

Nolan’s eyes softened and his smile fell, “There is no other, Emelia. There will never be another. Sure, I could choose another to spend my life with, call them my mate. But no other will ever compare or be able to sooth the beast that lives within me like you can. I know it is overwhelming to hear from somebody you’ve only known for a couple weeks. I know it is overwhelming to hear that I have such strong feelings for you already, but I don’t want you to feel rushed



into anything. I just want you to understand that for me there is only you. It will only ever be you.”

“Nolan ... ” I hesitated, trying to find the right words to say. “Nolan, this is a lot. It really is. But there is a part of me that gets what you’re saying, ever since I met you my emotions have been heightened and all I can think about is you. Ever since I lost my sister, I’ve felt like my world has been going in slow motion and has been filled with grief and darkness. My family and friends were the only ones that brought me a semblance of peace and happiness. But after I met you, it was like my world could spin again, and I could breathe and smile and laugh. No, we don’t know each other very well yet, but I’m willing to try this. Try to get to know each other. Try to be a good ... mate.” I smiled, looking down at my hands in my lap.

Nolan took my hands in his and squeezed them, “You already are, Luna. You are everything I could have ever wished for and more. I do not deserve you.” He smiled, cocking his head to the side in a wolfish fashion.

I giggled, “So, what color is your wolf?”

Nolan smirked. “My fur is black. Would you like to see?”

My eyes widened as I looked around the school’s yard at the other students enjoying their lunches. Closer to the school, I could see Kris, Mer, and Jackson sitting at one of the outdoor picnic tables trying to pretend they weren’t staring at us. It was going to be really hard not telling Mer much longer.

Nolan's chuckle brought my attention back to him, "I can show you whenever you are ready." he said, "No rush. Do you have any more questions for me?"

"Tell me something about you that doesn't have to do with being a werewolf," I said, turning to lie down on the blanket. "Something personal that nobody knows."

I smiled up at him from the ground. He smirked down at me with mischievous eyes before grabbing me from under my arms and dragging me up between his legs so that my back was leaning against his chest.

'Much better,' he thought, leaning back against the tree. Soft gasps reverberated around the school yard. I even heard a few 'are they dating's?' and 'no ways', Was it really that surprising that Nolan and I were together? We were together, right? That's what this whole mate thing basically meant, right?

Nolan chuckled, "Hmm. Something personal that nobody knows," he said, playing with one of the curls that had fallen from my ponytail, "I can play the guitar."

I turned just enough to look up at him with a unimpressed stare. "Nobody knows that?"

"I've never played in front of anyone before." Nolan smiled down at me, shrugging.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I have stage fright," he said.

"Will you play for me sometime?" I asked, grinning up at him.

Nolan smiled down at me and cocked his head slightly sideways. “I will. I wrote a song for you, actually.”

My grin widened. “For me?”

“Mmhmm,” he chuckled, “I’ll play it for you. Your turn. Tell me something.”

I tapped my finger to my mouth playfully, as if it were hard to think of something, “I like you, Nolan,” I said, my heart fluttering.

Nolan’s eyes softened. “I like you too, Luna,” he said, kissing my forehead. “Any more questions?”

“What’s your favorite color?” I asked, smirking.

Nolan chuckled against my forehead causing goosebumps to spread over my neck, “It’s red.”



When Friday hit, I realized how nervous I was to meet Nolan’s pack and his parents. Nolan and I had spent the week getting to know each other and from how he spoke about his parents and sister I knew they were important to him. As important to him as my family was to me. I hoped they would like me, and that I wouldn’t be a disappointment to his parents. I’d grown so attached to having Nolan by my side this week, I was always sad when we’d have to separate, and Nolan looked downright uncomfortable when we’d have to say goodbye for the day. But mate or not, I knew my mother would never be

okay with my boyfriend staying the night with us. The week had flown by way too fast, but while I was extremely nervous, I was also excited to see where Nolan had grown up and to see what other werewolves were like. And to learn more about my newfound powers. I hadn't tried to use them much, besides attempting to play with the water in the shower and sinks of my bathroom. I didn't know how Kris had convinced Nolan to let her come but I was glad for it. Jackson still hadn't told Mer what was going on and it was driving me crazy that I couldn't talk to her about everything. It felt as if I was lying to her about a significant part of my life. A significant part of my life that had only taken place over the last fifteen days...

*Jeez.*

Nolan kissed my forehead, pulling me out of my reverie before leaving for his next class. He was only a few feet away from me before I already missed him, and when he chuckled at my thoughts, it only made it worse.

*Stupid mind reading,* I thought.

He laughed louder before turning the corner and escaping my line of sight. I sighed, heading towards my locker to get my textbook for AP Calculus. Even though he could hear all the thoughts in my head if he wanted to, he always let me process my thoughts and feelings before commenting on them or interrupting. The only time he would interrupt was to distract me when I was stressing out or spiraling. My nightly anxiety attacks had been slowly becoming nonexistent since his arrival.

“Hey Em.” I heard a nervous whisper and closed my locker door to see Mer standing there with tired, bloodshot eyes. I glanced around for Jackson but didn’t see him.

“What’s wrong? What is it? I’ll kill him, I swear to God!” I seethed, glancing frantically around for Jackson, prepared to wrestle him to the ground with my bare hands.

“He didn’t do anything. Jackson and I are fine.” She smiled shyly.

I exhaled. “Then why do you look like he burned your *Care Bear* collection?”

“Do you remember last week when that water fountain exploded?” she asked, squinting her eyes at me.

My eyes widened. Did she know I’d caused that?

“Yes, I remember.” I frowned.

Mer nodded, tucking her short bangs behind her ears before asking, “Be honest with me. Did you do that?”

*How in the hell could she know that?*

I took a deep breath. “Yes, but not on purpose.”

She nodded her head absentmindedly, looking around to see if anyone had heard us. The hallway was empty except for the two of us.

Mer stared back at me with tear-filled eyes, “Last night, I was on the phone with Kris, and she made this comment, and I know she was just messing with me, but she said I’d better hold on to Jackson tight, or she’d have to steal him.”

“Okay? That’s kind of normal for her to say,” I said, confused about where this conversation was heading. “Last week she commented on his ass.”

Mer nodded. “It is. But I had this irrational reaction. I snapped at Kris and hung up the phone.”

“Oh Mer, I’m sure Kris isn’t mad. She’s probably fine,” I assured her.

Mer shook her head frantically, “It’s not that. After I got off the phone, I looked out my window and you know that tree that’s in our front yard?”

“Yeah? What is it Mer? You can tell me,” I said, squeezing her hand.

“A bunch of the branches had snapped in half. And I don’t know why, but somehow, I know I did it,” she blurted, her mossy green eyes glassy as she stared wide-eyed at me.

My eyes widened.

*Holy shit.*

“I don’t understand. What’s happening, Em?” she pleaded, tears streaming down her cheeks.

I grabbed her in my arms and hugged her tightly, “It’s going to be okay, Mer. I promise. But I think we should probably go find Jackson so he can explain some things.”

She looked at me, confusion shining in her light green eyes, but didn’t object as we walked to the south wing to find my brother. I had no idea what classroom he was in, but I knew he

shared it with Nolan. I didn't know how I knew to do this, but I reached for Nolan in my mind and felt what direction he was in.

I checked the first English classroom on my right and there Nolan was, sitting at his desk with a bored expression. The desk next to him sat empty.

*Where the hell is Jackson?*

Nolan's head whipped towards the door where I was standing, his eyebrows furrowing.

'What's wrong, Luna?' he asked, using our bond.

'Where's Jackson? Mer needs him ASAP.' I responded.

"Em, what's going o-," Jackson began, appearing beside us, but stopped short when he saw Mer, "Meredith, what is it?"

The classroom door we were standing in front of creaked open, and Nolan emerged with a hall pass in hand.

"What's going on?" he asked, looking at Jackson first and then at me.

"Mer snapped some tree branches with her mind," I blurted.

Mer glared at me, mouthing, '*What the hell?*'

Jackson stared at Mer intently, his eyebrows furrowing, but then his shoulders relaxed. Had he read her mind to see what was wrong?

"How did she—" Nolan started, gazing at me thoughtfully. "Like the fountain?"

"Yes." I nodded.

“Can someone please tell me what’s going on?” Mer whined, blinking back tears.

I looked to Jackson with pleading eyes, “Tell her Jay.”

“Tell me what?” she asked, glancing frantically between Jackson and me.

Mer eye’s widened as she stared at Jackson before they rolled into the back of her head and she almost fell to the ground before Jackson caught her. He lifted her up, saying nothing, and carried her down the hall and out of sight.

*Shit, what just happened?*

“She just passed out. What could have happened to make her pass out like that?” I asked Nolan, freaking out and moving to follow Jackson down the hall.

Nolan touched my shoulder, stopping me, “That is how I would assume a normal human would react to hearing someone’s voice in their mind, Luna.” Nolan looked at me with a lopsided grin.

“Will she be okay?” I asked.

“It will take some time for her to adjust, but she’ll be okay,” Nolan said, grabbing my hand.

“Okay good,” I sighed but then whipped my head to Nolan, “Did you just imply that I am not normal?”

“You are anything but normal, Emelia. You are extraordinary.” Nolan chuckled at my bewildered expression.



“Now what?” I asked Nolan, shaking my head at his corny attempt to make me feel better.

There was no way I was going back to class after that...

“Let’s go wait in the library for their return. Then we should probably head to the camp,” Nolan said.

“Already?” I squeaked, “What about the rest of school?”

“Yes. I’m concerned about you girls. I have a theory, but I’d like to consult with my Alpha,” Nolan nodded.

Alpha? What in the H E double hockey sticks had I gotten myself into? Nolan smirked, wrapping his arm around me as he guided me to the library. I headed straight to the section I knew would be empty. It was in a dark corner where the librarians couldn’t see or hear us speak, so maybe he could tell me what he thought was going on.

“I’ll explain after I speak with my Alpha, I promise.” he said, looking around at my choice of secret location.

Well, if he wasn’t going to tell me I could waste time by reading a good book. I began searching the shelves, but realized we were surrounded by ACT/SAT prep books. No wonder it was always so vacant back here. I giggled.

Abruptly I felt that warm tingle crawl up my spine; Nolan had stopped directly behind me and wrapped a hand around my stomach playfully. I giggled again, turning around to face him. My breath hitched, our faces were within centimeters of each other. Nolan gazed into my eyes, asking for permission before moving any further.

Nolan placed his right hand gently on my neck and rubbed his thumb across my chin. He leaned his head in slowly, moving his hand to my cheek and guiding me to him. He stopped right as his lips touched mine and it was almost painful to keep that still. Finally, his lips touched mine and ... bliss. His lips were soft and smooth, and they molded perfectly against mine. My heart thundered so loudly I couldn't hear myself think. I opened my mouth slightly, allowing Nolan better access into my mouth. He growled, causing my knees to buckle. Nolan's arms wrapped around me as he pushed me back into the bookshelf, knocking a few books from their shelves. Kissing Nolan felt like the first rain after a long drought, quenching a long-standing thirst that had become unbearable these last couple weeks. Every touch of his lips to mine sent a bolt of electricity down my skin, lighting me up, setting my skin on fire, and leaving me breathless but wanting more.

The sound of someone clearing their throat knocked me back into reality and pulled me away from Nolan. Nolan growled, placing his forehead on my shoulder, and taking deep breaths. He had moved his arms to the shelves above my head and had squeezed the wood to the point it had started to crack.

Standing there at the beginning of the small aisle was Kristine Freaking Aguya with a huge '*gotcha*' smile the size of Texas. I swore to God the next time I caught her making out with some loser in the hallway I was going to give them both wet willies and remind them to leave enough room for Jesus.

Nolan started laughing, obviously having heard my inner rant.

*Lovely.*

“Kristine, I’m really sorry about this but we are definitely not friends anymore,” I deadpanned.

Kris rolled her eyes, throwing her blonde hair over her shoulder dramatically, “Pu-lease. I just saved both your asses from detention. Mrs. Michel was just about to come show Leslie Adams where to find the ACT flash cards.”

“Ohhh, did I say we weren’t friends anymore? What I meant to say was thank you most gracious and beautiful best friend for saving me from this terrible sin I have committed in the corner,” I said, bowing to my friend as if she were some savior.

Nolan stood up straight adjusting his shirt and messed up his already messy dark hair.

he chuckled, “You two are the weirdest girls I’ve ever met.”

“Yeah-yeah lover boy we’ve heard it all before.” Kris smirked, “Now, have either of you seen Mer? I think I may have stuck my own head up my ass this time and offended her.”

I ducked out from under Nolan’s arm and walked closer to Kris. “She’s with Jackson. She’s not mad at you, she’s had some ... ‘furry’ issues come up,” I said, looking around the library to make sure there wasn’t anyone within ear shot.

Kris’s eyes widened. “He’s telling her now?”

“I hope so since she’s snapping tree branches in half.” I grimaced.

Kris shook her head, “Wait, a tree? Like the fountain?”

“Furry issues?” Nolan blurted, interrupting us.

“Kinda,” I said, ignoring him.

“This situation gets freakier every day.” Kris glanced at Nolan, as if it was his doing.

“We’re going to head up to the camp now if you’re ready.” Nolan sighed, accepting that he wasn’t going to get an answer.

“Ooh. So, we’re playing ditching last block, then?” Kris smiled wickedly.

I rolled my eyes at her. “Anything to get out of class, huh?”

“Anything to get out of seeing Carter in Calculus. Yes.” Kris nodded.

*So, we’ve moved off Carter again ...*

“I didn’t like him anyway,” said Nolan.

“Why?” I looked at him curiously, he’d never even talked to Carter besides that day at the theater.

“Because he stares at your ass a lot, Em.” Kris smirked.

My eyes widened, and I looked at Nolan whose eyes had started to swirl with amber.

*Aw, he’s jealous.*

He shot a glare at me then, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

‘You’re cute when you’re jealous,’ I thought.

That earned me a smile. Anytime I used our bond he smiled, happy with how comfortable I'd gotten with it. It had been nice that he could feel when my anxiety started getting the better of me. I could be in class and still feel him sending me calming waves across the school, which was way more subtle than taking a Xanax.

"Alright, love birds, time to go. If we don't leave the school now, they'll just shove us back into class," Kris said, pretending to gag at our affection.

'Jackson just texted me love, they're ready to go,' Nolan thought.

'Already?' I thought, it hasn't been that long.

Nolan shrugged his shoulders before grabbing my hand to lead me to our lockers so that we could grab our overnight bags.

"Did Mer pack a bag?" Kris asked.

"She did. She thought she was staying at my house all weekend." I nodded, before heading for the school's exit. We found Jackson leaning against his Jeep staring at his feet.

'Uh oh. Where's Mer?' I thought.

'She's in the car, Luna,' Nolan told me

'How do you know that?' I asked.

He smiled, as if the answer should be obvious.

*Damn werewolf voodoo powers.*

‘Yes Emelia, it’s my voodoo powers. I can see through things like x-ray vision.’ He smiled wickedly, his eyes raking down me from head to toe.

I scowled back at him, earning myself a chuckle.

‘I can smell her, love,’ Nolan told me.

*Werewolf voodoo powers ...*

Nolan laughed, wrapping his arm around me to pull me close.

“Jay, you alright?” I asked my brother, who hadn’t moved from his spot and was downright pissy.

He glanced up from his feet at me with furrowed brows and a clenched jaw, and his eyes had turned completely amber. He said nothing. He didn’t even appear to be breathing. He was looking at me, but it was like he wasn’t seeing me.

“Jackson,” Nolan said, and I felt a rush of authority wash over me, but it wasn’t directed at me. Nolan was pushing some sort of power at Jackson, and it was working.

*No voodoo powers, my left butt cheek.*

Jackson lowered his eyes slightly, causing Nolan to let release a low growl that made my arm hair stand up. Jackson grimaced as if Nolan was causing him pain and tilted his head sideways to bare his neck to Nolan. Jackson’s eyes lightened, slowly changing from a mix of amber to his normal sapphire blue. Jackson stood with a neutral expression and walked around the Jeep to get in the front seat.

I looked towards Kris who was, quite literally, drooling. I couldn't blame her.

*That was—That was freaking hot.*

Nolan's head whipped towards me, eyebrow raised. I shrugged and got into the back of the Jeep to sit next to a silent Meredith. Kris got in behind me, slamming the door shut and causing Mer to jump. As soon as Jay put the car into drive and pulled out into the street, Mer grabbed my hand and squeezed it. I began to rub small comforting circles into the back of her hand, trying to convey that everything would be alright.

“Mer, did you text your parents and tell them you'd be staying with me this weekend?” I asked her quietly.

Mer nodded in response, staring solemnly at our enclosed hands. We sat in silence for most of the hour-long ride, and I found myself humming halfway through the drive just to break the silence.

‘What are you humming, Luna?’ Nolan asked.

‘Oh, this song from a guitarist I listen to. One of my favorites,’ I thought.

‘Ah. Who's the guitarist?’ he asked.

‘Red Wave is what his channel says. He's not very popular. I can't think of the name of the song right now, but it's an original,’ I told him.

‘I'll have to listen to it sometime,’ he mused.

‘What happened back there between you and Jay? Were you hurting him somehow?’ I asked.

‘I was forcing him to submit. He was upset because of his conversation with Merideth and was losing control of his wolf. I am more dominant than Jackson so I can push that dominant power at him in a way that can be uncomfortable and sometimes very painful depending on how much a wolf resists,’ Nolan explained.

‘So, you can force them to do things they don’t want to do?’ I asked, staring at the back of Nolan’s head.

‘I could, but not in the way you’re thinking. I would not misuse my power to take advantage of another wolf’s free will. It’s more to help my fellow packmates not to lose control when their emotions are running high,’ Nolan said.

‘Do werewolves get emotional a lot?’ I raised my brow, smirking.

‘We do when it comes to our mates.’ Nolan grinned, looking back at me over his shoulder with glowing eyes and causing me to blush.

We arrived at what appeared to be a campsite. There were multiple smaller cabins surrounding one large, beautiful lodge. It almost looked like a hotel you would have found in the smoky mountains. There was a large fire pit right in the center of all the cabins. The warm ambiance and the way pack members seemed so at ease gave the whole place a cozy feeling. I had the sudden urge to roast a marshmallow and go hiking. I didn’t even like hiking ...



On the right side there were multiple people practicing archery and some sort of martial arts. To the left was the lake where many pack members were swimming or playing volleyball on the sand. Nobody seemed bothered or surprised by our presence there, like they had known we were coming. Mer stood beside me as we exited the Jeep and still hadn't let go of my hand. For me to be the one with anxiety it was odd to see her that way.

That was when it hit me, why didn't Jackson calm her like Nolan did for me? Or was that just a Nolan thing? I peeked at Nolan who was leading the group to the bigger lodge. Jackson walked beside him and hadn't looked back at Mer once.

'I don't think he knows he can do that, Emelia. This is as new to him as it is for you. Our kind aren't ones to share all the ins and outs of their bonds. Normally our parents are the ones to explain everything to us. And well, you all weren't that lucky,' Nolan explained.

'Can't we tell him?' I asked.

'You can try but be careful. Your brother isn't completely in control of himself right now,' Nolan warned.

I made eye contact with Kris and nodded my head towards Mer's hand. Kris grabbed Mer's other hand in hers and pulled her close. I let go of Mer's hand, sending her a 'trust me' smile. I picked up my pace and caught up to Jackson before elbowing him, causing him to glare at me.

"Jay," I grabbed his hand and intertwined our fingers like we used to do when we were kids.

His glare turned sorrowful. It hurt my heart.

“Jay, she needs you right now. She needs you to help soothe her fear and anxiety,” I said, squeezing his hand.

“I don’t know how. She won’t even let me near her.” He sighed.

I tried to think of how to explain it to him and realized I’d never actually done it. Nolan had only ever done it for me, and now that I thought about it, I realized I’d never paid attention to Nolan’s emotions. Was that selfish? Was I not being a good girlfriend—a good mate? Nolan had left us standing outside the house while he went inside to get the Alpha and his mate, so for the moment I was on my own.

“Jay, imagine something that makes you feel better when you’re stressed. Like the beach or reading a book or—” I paused, “or Mer’s green eyes staring into yours.”

Jackson looked at me like I was crazy for a moment, but then closed his eyes to concentrate.

“Now push that feeling towards Mer’s mind. Think about how you want her to feel calm, peaceful,” I said.

A few steps behind us Mer took a deep breath and then sighed. Jackson turned slowly, he and Mer making eye contact for the first time in over an hour. They just stared at each other, not saying anything aloud.

Kris walked up and whispered in my ear, “Where do I get one? I want that.”

“What? A hot werewolf?” I laughed.

“No, that. Whatever they’re doing to each other right now. He somehow made her feel like she could breathe.” Kris cocked her head.

I looked at my spunky blonde best friend, and there was vulnerability in her blue eyes. She really meant that. She wanted something meaningful. Something that meant more than the dumb boys she wasted her time with at CHS.

“You’ll have that someday, Kris,” I promised, grabbing her hand and squeezing it.

“Nah, I’ll probably give up and find a nice girl to settle down with. They’re more interesting, anyway.”

My eyes widened. Was my best friend coming out to me right now? I mean it would have been fine if she was, just unexpected at this point.

Kris busted out laughing at my facial expression.

“I’m just kidding, Emelia. There’s no way I wouldn’t choose that”—she pointed at my handsome mate as he came back out the front door—“over what I can find just standing in front of the mirror butt ass naked.”

*Well, we had one serious moment.*

I rolled my eyes at my friend, and someone cleared their throat. Kris and I turned towards the lodge to find not only our friends staring at us wide-eyed but also an older couple who were staring at me. The woman had a large smile on her face, and the man looked as if he was fighting to hold back his grin. Somehow, I could feel that these two were the Alphas,

dominance rolled off them in waves. I had apparently acquired the voodoo powers...

Realization dawned on me at the familiarity I saw in the Alphas emerald green eyes. I was looking into my mate's eyes, or eyes that were a direct match to his.

"Luna," Nolan hesitated, "I'd like you to meet my mother, Arryssa, and my father, Nick. They are our Alpha pair."

*Shit.*

## Jealousy is a Powerful Thing

### Emelia

Nolan's mother walked up and wrapped me in her arms with motherly affection. I was so thrown off from the news of meeting not only the Alphas, but also Nolan's parents, that I forgot to reciprocate the hug.

*Oh, my gosh, she's going to think I hate her .*

Arryssa pulled away smiling, touching my cheek softly. A strange emotion washed through me, like warmth and joy, but it wasn't coming from Nolan. It was coming from Arryssa, but I thought only Nolan and I could do that for each other .

'She's the Alpha female, my love. They have the power to help control their pack mate's emotions. She felt that you were nervous, so she pushed some of her emotions to you,' Nolan explained.

'She seems kind,' I thought.

‘She is,’ Nolan smiled, and I could feel the love my mate had for this woman. Feel how excited he was for her to meet me. My shoulders relaxed as I smiled up at Nolan’s mom. He had her smile and her black hair, but unlike Nolan and his father, her eyes were a soft hazel color.

“Come everyone, and wash up. It’s almost time for dinner. Nolan will show you to your rooms.” Arryssa wrapped her arm around my shoulder and guided me into the lodge.

She oozed so much happiness it was hard not to feel giddy, and every time I glanced at Nolan, he was beaming with pride .

“Yes, everyone, make yourselves comfortable and we will enjoy a nice meal together,” announced the Alpha, Nick. His emerald eyes sparkled as he kept throwing secretive glances towards Arryssa and I. I tried not to feel self-conscious about how they were probably conversing about me through their bond .

Arryssa squeezed my shoulder before leaving me to walk away with her mate. Her absence left me feeling bereft without her warmth. What an odd feeling, to feel so close to this woman I’d literally only met five minutes ago .

Nolan walked up beside me and intertwined his fingers with mine. He stared down at me with adoring eyes, and I couldn’t help but feel happy that I was the cause of such joy. I wished I could keep that smile on his face forever. He led us up the stairs and into the left corridor of the building .

“We get our own rooms? That’s kind of cool,” I heard Kris say somewhere behind us.

“It is very pretty in here,” Mer whispered.

It was the first thing I’d heard her say since we had left the school. I peeked back over my shoulder to see she was holding hands with Jackson. I breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank goodness*.

Nolan came to a halt at the first room on the right and opened the door. Inside was a large suite with lilac-colored walls and three beds against the wall. There was a small kitchenette and a large bathroom that was completely covered in beautiful black stone tiles.

“This is for you three girls.” Nolan smiled awkwardly. It was adorable. “My room is right across the hall if you need anything at any point. Jackson and Mason have rooms in one of the cabins by the lake if you need them.”

My brothers had a cabin here? How often did they come here?

“You all are welcome here anytime. This will be the room you can stay in while you are here ,” Nolan said.

The girls stepped into the spacious room and wandered around curiously. They both picked beds out immediately, leaving the bed closest to the window open for me. The window was huge. I walked up to it and glanced out and saw the entire front yard. I could see pack members going about their day. Some members started the fire that laid in the middle

of the camp. Below the window was a comfortable-looking day bed with multicolored pillows thrown upon it. There was a bookmarked novel already sitting on one of the throw pillows. It was the book I'd just finished reading during lunch yesterday. The one Nolan had asked to borrow. He'd almost finished it. Didn't he sleep?

"We'll leave you three to get comfortable and ready for dinner," Nolan said, exiting the room with Jackson.

"I feel like I've entered into a parallel universe," Mer said, looking around the room.

"How are you handling, Mer?" I asked.

"Like I must've fallen asleep reading *Prince of Wolves*," She smirked.

"He's not a prince," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Em, he's the son of the man who is basically the king here," Kris laughed. "He's a prince."

"Exactly," Mer said, giggling.

"Well, I'm glad you're feeling better, Meri," I teased, throwing a pillow at my brunette-haired friend.

She scowled back at me, and I stuck my tongue out at her. The three of us changed out of our school clothes and into something more comfortable before traveling downstairs and onto the front porch. I was eager to look around.

"How about that one?" Mer asked me, pointing at a young red-headed boy.



I shook my head. “Nah, not her type.”

“Isn’t that the point?” Mer looked at me pointedly.

“What are you two jabbering about?” Kris asked, looking at us as if we were crazy.

“We’re searching for your next boyfriend,” I replied, completely serious.

“You two are crazy. I don’t need any sort of man. Don’t you remember I told you I was switching teams? I especially don’t need any of these wolves to be—” Kris stopped mid-sentence, jaw dropped open as a gorgeous boy with white, almost silver, colored hair walked by with some other guys. He didn’t seem to notice us at all as he was in deep conversation and carrying wood to the center bonfire .

“What’s wrong with Kris?” Nolan asked, wrapping his arms around me and rubbing his nose along the side of my neck.

*Why does he always do that? Is he smelling me?*

“Nothing is wrong with me. What are you talking about, Adolfo? I’m fine,” Kris rambled, coming out from her daydream.

Mer and I started cracking up so hard some of the other people glanced our way to see what was happening. Kris peeked towards the fire and blushed before turning to rush back into the lodge.

“Oh no. We’ve embarrassed her, Mer.” I giggled.

“That’s karma.” Mer smirked .

“Well, you seem to be feeling better,” Jackson grinned, walking up the front steps, “but what bad language in front of your mate.”

Meredith was only thrown by the word ‘mate’ for a second before she smiled sweetly at Jay. “My language? Excuse me, ‘mate,’ but I’ve heard you quote the entire book at a football game!”

I was bent over laughing so hard at that point I’d started snorting from lack of air.

“She has a lovely laugh, Son,” Arryssa said, coming out the front door and scaring the shit out of me.

But at that point I couldn’t stop laughing, and I’d started gasping for air.

“I know,” Nolan said, grinning at me.

“Dinnertime, my loves,” Arryssa announced, still smiling as she walked back into the house.

We followed her back into the house and into what I assumed was the dining room, but it was huge. It was almost as big as the cafeteria at school and looked like the dining hall from *Harry Potter*. We walked over to one of the tables near the front of the room where Nolan’s father was already seated and conversed with another young girl with green eyes and black hair. She had Arryssa’s facial structure, but Nick’s long nose and huge smile. She was beautiful in an innocent-looking way, but she had that mischievous twinkle in her eyes that Nolan carried.

*This must be Nolan's younger sister, Ashlynn Adolfo.*

As we approached them and sat down, Ashlynn's eyes flashed to mine and she grinned widely. "Emelia! I'm so excited to meet you!" she said, wrapping me in a fierce embrace.

*She's so nice, like her mother. His whole family is so nice and welcoming.*

"You must be Ashlynn. It's nice to meet you. Nolan's told me a lot about you," I said, smiling.

I could feel that Arryssa was still pushing warmth at me, wanting me to be comfortable here. I glanced around the room, taking in my surroundings and noticed all the different decorations they had hanging on the walls. The dining hall seemed so empty with only us in here. Surely more people usually eat here?

"We didn't want to overwhelm all of you with the entire pack at once. Normally, we all eat in here on the weekends," Nolan explained.

I frowned. "Oh. I feel bad we forced them to eat elsewhere."

"Trust me. They don't mind. A pack is just a big family, Emelia. The pack is excited to have all of you here. You are family now," Nolan said, tucking a stray curl behind my ear.

It was hard to imagine having such a huge family like that, especially when I was used to it just being Victoria, my brothers, and I.

I looked around at my friends, who were eating their dinner and conversing with Nolan's family . Meredith, an only child, lived with her mom who was a traveling nurse and barely home. Kris had an older stepbrother, but he had moved out, and her parents were rarely home and when they were home, all they did was fight. It was no wonder she had so much trouble forming connections with people that weren't Mer or myself. Mer and Kris could use a family like Nolan's. One so loving and unconditionally accepting of you. I smiled lovingly up at Nolan, who was talking to Jackson about playing volleyball later. I loved how well they got along, and I loved how much he seemed to care about all of us, even if he didn't know everything about us yet. It must be a trait of the Adolfo family to just accept people without really knowing anything about them.

“We have arranged a welcome party for the three of you,” Nick said, appearing guilty.

“The pack wanted to make sure you felt welcomed. So, we've planned a big bonfire so that you can meet everyone,” Arryssa said.

I smirked at Nolan, 'Didn't want to overwhelm us, huh?'

'Well, not in the first hour at least,' He chuckled.



There were so many people at this bonfire. I could barely keep track of everyone that Nolan introduced me to, and it had started to get overwhelming. Luckily it had gotten late and most of the pack had turned in for the night. I was so relieved for a break from meeting so many new people. Nolan had left to spend some time with his parents, leaving me to my own devices. I'd spent my, frankly unwanted, freedom sitting by the fire and roasting marshmallows with Kris. I planned to fully blame Nolan when I had s'more induced nightmares later. Mer was on the opposite side of the fire, with Jackson picking up shells or something along the coast.

“Do you think she’s doing okay?” Kris asked from the chair beside me.

“I think so. I was really worried during the ride over her, but she seems to be doing better now. I think Jackson is helping with that. I mean, he may be a supernatural creature now, but he’s still just Jackson, right?” I asked, smiling at my brother.

“I thought I was going to have to beat Jackson’s ass, and I’m not sure I’d win against a werewolf.” Kris joked.

I laughed as she eyed Jackson across the fire.

“So, you must be Emily.” A blonde girl sneered, walking up to me from the shadows. Kris sat up slowly, already ready to go on the defensive for me.

“It’s Emelia, actually. Nice to meet you,” I replied with a polite smile. “What’s your name?”

The blonde girl's nose wrinkled, like she had smelled something disgusting. "My name is Vanessa. I'm sure Nolan had mentioned me."

Heat spread through my skin. "No actually, he hasn't. But it's nice to meet you," I said, clenching my jaw.

"Yea, Emelia, sadly I can't reciprocate those feelings. Frankly, you're not welcome here," she said.

*Wow. That didn't take long.*

"And you're really two seconds from becoming a shish-kabob sister." Kris snapped, standing up to face the girl with her marshmallow stick clenched in her fist. I stood between them, holding my arms up to keep Kris from getting reprimanded for some jealous, mean girl.

"Listen, I don't know what your problem is here, but I think you should just turn around and go back to your friends, Vanessa," I said.

"And I think you should go back to the trailer park you crawled out of, freak," she snapped.

"That's enough!" Kris yelled, her normally blue eyes flashing scarlet.

"Oh shit," I blurted, causing Vanessa's vision to snap from Kris to me, her eyes glowing amber.

*She's a wolf. Great.*

Kris stepped in front of me, her eyes still glowing scarlet, "I think you better listen to Em and leave. Cause I'm about two

seconds from pushing you into this fire and making dog jerky.”

Vanessa sneered, “I’m a werewolf, sweetie. You don’t stand a chance-”

Kris’s hands set aflame, both first now covered in red hot fire. Vanessa’s eyes widened, but her jaw clenched and she turned her attention back to me. “Whatever, you little wench. You stay away from Nolan. I don’t give a damn if he thinks you’re his True Mate. You’re NOT. He’s MINE!” she growled through clenched teeth, her eyes glowing darker as her anger intensified.

“Yours?!” I snapped, getting in Vanessa’s face.

My vision blurred and suddenly all I could see was red. I’d never felt so angry in my entire life, that heat from earlier now turning to a deep humming under my skin. The lake’s current seemed to be coming in more violently, and as I stared into Vanessa’s blue eyes with clenched fists, I felt a gentle hand touch my shoulder . Air that I hadn’t known was missing reached my lungs and my vision cleared, the sounds of my heavy breathing finally reaching my ears. It was silent, except for my breathing. Those who were still awake stared at me and Kris with incredulous eyes. Kris stared open-mouthed at me from the same spot next to the fire, and Jackson and Mer were nowhere to be seen. I made no movements. Nobody else did either. Vanessa was staring at me with wide eyes, like I was a freak at the circus. Tears began to well up in my eyes.

*What is happening to me?*

‘Luna?’ Nolan asked, standing beside me and taking my hand in his.

I looked up at him with tearful eyes.

‘Help me,’ I thought.

Nolan’s eyes softened, and he picked me up in his arms, cradling me to his chest before turning towards the rest of the pack and letting out a deep growl. The crowd dispersed. Nolan stayed silent as he walked past everyone, including my friend, to the main lodge. Arryssa and Nick stood on the front porch with large eyes. Nolan halted next to them, not saying a word, just bowed his head slightly to his parents before moving into the house. He carried me all the way up the stairs and into the suite I shared with my friends. It was empty. The blanket was soft beneath me as he sat me gently on my bed and bent down in front of me.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he whispered.

I shook my head no. Nolan grabbed my hands in his and began rubbing small circles into my palms.

‘I’ve never been so angry before. I felt like I was losing control,’ I thought.

‘What did she do?’ he asked.

‘She said that you were hers,’ I sighed, ashamed.

Nolan grinned as he lifted his eyebrows at me. He found my irrational jealousy humorous ...



‘This isn’t funny Nolan, the whole pack is going to think I’m a jealous freak,’ I frowned.

‘No, they won’t. You had a normal reaction one would have when their mate is involved.’ He grinned.

‘Nolan, in the human world, people don’t get irrationally jealous like that about such an offhand comment. Now if I had walked up on her kissing you? Then I’d have a real reason to push her into the fire or cause a tidal wave,’ I said.

Nolan smirked. ‘A tidal wave, huh? Might need to learn to control your powers before we start that big.’

‘Did you see what happened with Kris?’ I asked.

‘What happened to Kris?’ He raised a brow.

‘Her eyes turned red and her hands were on fire,’ I thought.

‘Water, Fire, and Earth,’ Nolan thought.

‘Just missing Air,’ I mused.

‘And Spirit,’ *Nolan* said.

‘All the elements?’ I asked.

Nolan nodded.

‘What does this mean?’ I asked.

‘It means—that the Adolfo Pack has been chosen as the next Keepers of The Sacred.’



“*The Keepers of The Sacred*? This situation keeps getting weirder and weirder. What’s next, flying monkeys?” Kris asked.

It was the next morning and my friends and I were sitting around the breakfast table with Nolan’s family. Nick smiled down at Kris like she hadn’t completely interrupted him. The patience this man had was astounding ...

“*The Sacred* are bestowed upon a pack that is deemed worthy every few decades by the Moon Goddess. It is a great honor, but it is also a great responsibility.” Nick explained, looking towards Nolan and Jackson, “In the past, *The Sacred* have been sought out by those that would like to misuse their power. It is now not only this pack, but most importantly your boys’ job to protect this gift. I believe you’ve both been gifted your mates early for this reason. The Sacred have always shown up during times of great strife in our world.”

“Early? Why is it early?” I asked, “What is a Moon Goddess? What strife? There’s going to be a strife?” I babbled, my anxiety starting to fester.

“Newfound ‘sacred’ power, check. New pack of werewolves to watch over me, check. New hot werewolf mate to love and protect me, not check. Got it,” Kris said, drawing imaginary check marks in the air.

Arryssa smiled lovingly at Kris. “Not yet, young one, but I don’t believe he is too far off. Our theory is that *The Sacred* and their mates are already in this pack. They just haven’t been given their gift yet,” She paused, turning to me. “And yes,

early. It is unusual to find one's mate so early in life, especially as a teenager. Nick and I, for example, did not find one another until twenty years ago, when we were in our fifties. And even that is considered early for many. And the Moon Goddess is the deity of all werewolves."

"Another theory is Emelia is the link." Nick continued his earlier explanation, undeterred by our teenage babbling.

"The link for what?" I asked.

"You were the first to get your gift after meeting Nolan. Once you were connected into the pack, your gift emerged. Followed by Meredith and Kristine."

"Oh, wow. I guess that's true. But why me?" I asked.

"Every generation of *The Sacred* has a leader. It makes sense that you've been chosen, as Nolan is our Beta, but next in line for Alpha," Arryssa explained.

"Beta?" I looked at Nolan.

"I am my father's second," he explained.

"Oh. Okay," I muttered, shaking my head at all the new information.

*Me? A leader? I'm not sure whoever decides these things is paying attention...*

"So, is there an Omega?" Mer asked.

Nick grinned at my friend, proud of how quickly she'd caught on.

*Mer should be the leader ...*

“We do not have one currently. The honor of picking our Omega goes to Nolan. That person will be his Beta when he and Emelia ascend to Alphas,” Nick announced.

“Wait. Em is a Beta right now?” Kris asked.

“Technically yes, however, we normally initiate someone into this position with a small ceremony in front of the pack,” Arryssa replied.

I grimaced.

*Great, like a Girl Scout bridging ceremony ...*

Nolan chuckled beside me. ‘You were a Girl Scout, Emelia?’

Nick cleared his throat, a small smile on his face.

‘We’ve been caught,’ Nolan thought, still chuckling.

“So, when does boy wonder here ascend to Alpha? Oh no, you don’t have to die, do you?” Kris asked, grimacing.

Nick shook his head. “No, I will hand my reign over to Nolan when I believe he is ready.”

“What happens to you when that happens?” I asked.

“Arryssa and I will enjoy our retirement and play with the grand pups,” Nick grinned.

I choked on the orange juice I was drinking, sputtering it onto the table in front of me.

“Nicholas!” Arryssa scolded him.

“What? I find it only fair we tell her the truth about producing an heir within the first year of their union now,” Nick deadpanned.

Nolan dropped his head into his hands, shaking his head at his father.

Nobody said a word, staring at Nick with open mouths. The corner of Nick’s mouth lifted slightly.

*This mother trucker ...*

“Oh, you’ve got jokes? And here I thought Arryssa was going to be my favorite.” I smirked at him, dabbing my OJ up with a napkin.

‘I wonder if they’ll have your eyes, Luna?’ Nolan mused.

My vision snapped to him before I smacked him on the back of the head.

“Ooh! New sister-in-law is feisty! I like it!” Ashlynn said, coming out from the kitchen in an apron covered in powdered sugar.

She walked around me, setting a plate of homemade beignets on the table. They smelled delicious.

“You bake?” I asked her.

“Bake, cook, sew. I’m the definition of a Home EC class. You bake?” she asked.

“She burns,” came a familiar voice from the entrance to the dining hall.

I turned to see my little brother, Mason, strutting down the aisles between the tables.

*When did he get here?*

“I burn your birthday cupcakes one time! One time and you won’t let it go !” I groaned.

“One time? What about that time you set the kitchen on fire cooking stir fry?” Jackson asked from across the table.

“She’s said baking, not cooking.” I replied, pointedly.

The whole room erupted into laughter. I wasn’t sure what they thought was so funny. I begrudgingly grabbed a beignet off the plate and aggressively bit into it.

*Heaven. It must taste like this.*

It was the best thing I’d ever eaten...

“That’s it. I’m never leaving. I shall stay here and eat Ashlynn’s beignets forever and pay her with nice comments ,” I announced.

“You ‘shall?’” Mer snorted.

Kris reached for a beignet but I snatched the plate out of her reach before she could get to it. “Yes, shall. If Nolan here is the prince, then I’m the princess. Gotta use the correct lingo.”

“I’m not a-” Nolan started, before I placed a gentle finger on his lips to hush him.

“Your dad just said when he hands his *reign* over to you,” I reiterated, causing Nolan to raise an eyebrow at me.

“Reign equals king, lover boy,” Kris interjected.

“That makes you a prince.” Mer agreed.

Ashlynn started laughing so hard she had tears rolling down her cheeks, and Arryssa’s face was turning red from the lack of air.

“Well, you’ll never be bored, Son.” Nick chuckled, patting Nolan on the shoulder, “I’m going to go to my study and get some paperwork done for the pack records. I hope all of you have a great day.”

“How ‘bout that volleyball game, Nol?” Jackson asked, standing.

“Sure let’s go,” Nolan answered.

‘Leaving me again?’ I pouted.

Nolan smirked, ‘I would take you with me, but Ashlynn has demanded I let her spend time with you alone today. Sister bonding, she called it.’

*Sister bonding ... My heart ached momentarily.*

‘Don’t be gone too long,’ I thought, ‘I hate when you’re gone. And I know how clingy that sounds.’

Nolan’s eyes softened. ‘It’s the bond, Luna. The more time we spend together, the harder it is for us to be apart. The bond pulls us closer together, demanding that we complete it.’

‘Complete it?’ I asked, eyes wide.

Nolan grimaced. ‘I will explain later. Now isn’t the time, it’s a more ... private conversation.’

‘Oh God,’ I thought, blushing.

Nolan chuckled, his green eyes swirling with amber. ‘It’s not what you’re thinking. I will explain later. How about we go on a date later today?’

I grinned widely, ‘A date? Like a date, date?’

‘Yes, Emelia. A date, date.’ he laughed, kissing my forehead before he and Jackson wished us goodbye and left for the volleyball court.

“So, Ashlynn. What’s fun to do around these parts?” Kris asked.

“Well, a lot of the pack members our age are usually chilling by the water at this time of the day.” Ashlynn responded.

“Sunbathing sounds good,” Mer said, looking down at her pale arms.

We left to change into our bathing suits before heading to the beach with Ashlynn. I scanned the beach in search of Vanessa. I didn’t see her anywhere. Mer and Kris laid their towels on the ground and decided to go for a swim, leaving Ashlynn and me to sunbathe on our towels.

“She probably won’t come near you again for a while,” Ashlynn said, taking me by surprise.

“Who?” I asked.

She looked at me pointedly, like the answer was obvious.

“How did you know I was looking for her?” I sighed.

“Because you seem like the type of girl who regrets being anything but nice to a person. But it was good that it



happened. You exerted your dominance and made your claim on Nolan.” She nodded, pulling her sunglasses from her head and putting them on.

“My claim?” I snorted.

Ashlynn nodded. “He’s your mate. That means nobody else has the right to even look at him without your permission.”

“That seems harsh,” I said.

“Maybe. But it’s the only thing that helps keep your wolf in check when some prima donna is making eyes at your man,” she explained.

“I don’t have a wolf.” I raised a brow.

“No, but you have the Water Spirit in you. Same relationship, different form .” She shrugged.

“Ahh. Have you met your mate yet?” I asked.

She smiled. “Yes. He just doesn’t know it yet.”

“How can he not know?” I asked, snickering.

“Well, he knows. He’s just not making an effort to claim me yet,” she shrugged.

“Why?” I asked.

“He’s nineteen, and I’m sixteen. Which isn’t really a big deal in our culture, especially for True Mates. But I think he’s waiting out of respect for my father. Probably wants his permission before he publicly claims me,” she mused.

“How did you find out he was your mate?” I wondered.

“Well, we’ve known each other since we were little, and we’ve always loved each other. He’s my best friend. But one day it just clicked. I walked into the kitchen and he was on the floor covered in flour from a bag he’d dropped on the floor. And something in me was pulled to him. My wolf, she was telling me. He was so thrown off by it that he just stared up at me for a while. He thought he was dreaming. How lucky could we be that our childhood best friend was our mate?” She smiled dreamily.

“Where is he now ?” I asked, smiling.

“He’s on a trip for the Alpha. Checking on our younger cousin, Alisa in New York. She’s in a special musical program there. But Alexander should be back soon.” She smiled as she said his name.

I liked Ashlynn. She was sweet and I could tell she was going to be a good friend to have, but I also felt some sort of strange tug in my stomach when I looked at her. It was a new feeling, but not entirely unfamiliar. I looked towards my friends swimming in the water and realized I felt that same tug with them. It felt like some sort of connection I had to them. Why was I feeling it with Ashlynn?

“Ashlynn?” I asked.

“Yes?” she responded with her eyes closed, soaking in the warmth from the sun.

“You’re going to think I’m crazy. But I need you to try something for me,” I said.

She opens her eyes and looks at me with confusion.  
“Okay?”

We both stood and I lead her back to the front of the fire pit, where the embers from the night before still looked warm. I made her stand by it, directly in front of the main lodge. On top of the lodge was a small purple flag with a symbol I didn't recognize. It wasn't moving, as there was no breeze today.

*No wonder it's hot as hell.* I shook my head, *focus.*

“Okay, Ash.” I paused. “Can I call you Ash?”

She laughed, but nodded.

I stood behind her, placing my hands on her shoulders.

“Okay, Ash. I need you to focus on that flag up there,” I said.

“Got it.” She zeroed in on the flag, squinting her eyes and smiling, amused at my antics.

Nolan and Jackson left their game to come stand beside us, along with Mer and Kris from the beach.

“What are you guys doing?” Jackson asked.

“We're trying something.” Ashlynn hushed him, still focusing on the flag. “What are we trying to do? I have no idea. But I trust Emelia so.” She shrugged.

I smiled, liking that Ashlynn trusted me already.

“Call me Em,” I said in response, and Ashlynn's smile grew wider.

“Emelia?” Nolan asked.

I shushed him, focusing on the flag alongside Ashlynn.

“Ash, I want you to close your eyes and picture that flag on top of the building. I want you to imagine that it’s not humid as hell outside and instead it’s a nice cool autumn day. Perhaps there’s a small breeze.” I guided her, biting my lower lip in excitement.

The flag started moving, like there was indeed a small breeze only the flag could feel. Nolan’s eyes widened as he watched, and he glanced back at his younger sister with amazement. Arryssa and Nick came down the front steps of the lodge to come stand with the group, curious to know what we were doing. Ashlynn’s eyes were still closed, so she didn’t notice.

“Okay Ash, now I want you to imagine that small relaxing breeze growing into a larger gust of wind. Maybe the wind from the last thunderstorm we had,” I proposed.

The flag began blowing around frantically, and there were a few gasps from around the group. However, Ashlynn kept her concentration.

“I leave for a week and Ashlynn turns into an air bender. What the hell is going on?” Came an unfamiliar voice.

The flag ripped from the pole and blew across the camp before getting stuck on a tree.

“Dammit Alexander! You ruined my concentration!” Ashlynn glared at him, but he just smiled unapologetically back at her.

“Alex! My boy, how was New York?” Nick asked, coming to stand beside Alex.

Alex smiled up at Nick, “It was good sir. Alisa is enjoying her time there and has already stolen the position of first chair soprano.”

Arryssa and Nick beamed with pride for their young niece.

“Of course, she has! Come, come now. We shall go to my office and discuss your trip,” Nick said, leading Alex away to the main lodge.

“Shall?” Alex asked, peering at Nick incredulously.

Nick chuckled, looking back at me and my two best friends as he walked away.

‘You’ve turned my father into a monster,’ Nolan grumbled.

‘I just showed him that he’s a king.’ I shrugged, giggling.

Nolan’s chuckle reverberated through my mind.

Ashlynn was still standing in the same spot where she had moved the flag, but she was staring at the front door instead of the flagpole. She was waiting for Alexander to return...

“Sooooo. I guess you found our missing link, Em,” Kris announced.

“Missing link?” Ashlynn asked, pulling her attention away from the front door.

“You’re the spirit of Air, my beautiful daughter.” Arryssa walked over, embracing her and beaming with pride.

“Welcome to *The Sacred*,” said Mer.

“We need a cooler name. Something more modern. Like *The Avengers*,” Kris said, placing an imaginary *‘thinking cap’* on her head and tapping her foot.

“You’ve only known about being a part of this thing for like two hours and you’re already disrespecting the name,” Mer said, rolling her eyes.

Arryssa laughed at my friends as they debated whether to change the name of our group.

“Yes, well, enjoy the rest of your day, my loves.” She grinned, walking off towards some of the other cabins.

‘Where is she going?’ I asked Nolan.

‘She is the Alpha female, so she is going to meet with the rest of the females in the pack to see if they need anything or have any concerns that should be brought to the Alphas’ attention,’ he explained.

‘That makes sense. It’s nice here Nolan. So peaceful and friendly. Well besides the lurking mean girls trying to steal my man ...’ I thought, shaking my head.

Nolan chuckled, walking up behind me to wrap his arms around me.

“So, how about a group game of volleyball?” asked Jackson.

“Girls against boys?” responded Ashlynn.

“If I set the volleyball on fire does that mean we win?” Kris asked with a wicked grin.

“That would be cheating Kristie,” said a voice from behind the group.

We turned to see the white-haired boy from the night before making his way up to us.

“Can I join the game?” he asked.

“You’ll make it an even six, so totally. Let’s do this, ladies!” Ashlynn said, throwing her fist into the center of the circle for a group fist bump.

“I think Em and I are going to sit this one out guys.” Nolan announced, causing me to turn in his arms and look up at him in surprise.

Ashlynn squinted her eyes at Nolan, “That’s not fair. I barely got to spend any time with her.”

“You can spend more time with her later, little sister. It’s not like she’s going anywhere.” Nolan chuckled, smiling down at me.

Warmth spread through my cheeks and butterflies erupted at the intense gaze Nolan was sending me. He was right though, I wasn’t going anywhere. Being at this camp with Nolan and his family felt right, it felt like I was meant to be here. Like I belonged. Deep down in my heart I knew that, and I knew that I was meant to be with Nolan. It felt like destiny that his green eyes would forever stare into my gray ones.

“Fine, don’t be gone too long though. I’m whipping something special up for dinner,” Ashlynn grinned. “Alright, ladies, lets beat these guys’ tails at volleyball!”

*Yup. She's going to fit right in with us ...*

As they headed towards the volleyball court, Kris's jaw was clenched, and she was glaring at the white-haired dude.

“What's wrong, Kristopher?” white hair asked, “Scared we'll win?”

“You better watch it, White Wolf before I turn your ass into doggy bacon for my lunch,” Kris snarled.

‘Looks like Kris found someone to distract her for a while. She was getting a little depressed with all this True Mate stuff,’ I sent to Nolan via our bond.

‘You don't think he's her mate, Emelia?’ Nolan mused.

‘Wouldn't they already know? Jackson said you knew the moment you saw me,’ I raised a brow.

‘It's not always instantaneous, like with Ashlynn and Alexander for example. They knew each other for years before the bond clicked into place,’ he explained.

My eyes widened, ‘You know about them? She made it seem like a secret.’

‘She's my little sister, Luna,’ he grinned at me.

‘True. So what causes the bond to be delayed? I didn't know what it was, but I felt like we connected the second you invaded my personal space at the theater,’ I smirked.

‘Could be a multitude of things. Maybe Kris isn't ready for him, even though she says she wants one. You do tend to think she goes through guys without caring about any of them...



Also, you liked that I invaded your personal space,' he grinned crookedly at me.

'But would that keep him from knowing?' I asked, rolling my eyes.

'No, it wouldn't. But he would be able to sense that she isn't ready, and his instincts would help him know how to help her overcome that block. In this instant, if he is her mate, he appears to be using the, *lets annoy the shit out of her* technique.' He chuckled.

'Yes, you seem quite versed in that subject.' I giggled.

Nolan raised an eyebrow at me and smirked, "Do I, Emelia? Well, my tactic seems to be working, so let's continue." Faster than lightning Nolan picked me up and threw me over his shoulder and started walking in the direction of the lake.

My eyes widened, "Nolan where are we going?! Put me down! You better not throw me in the water!" I shouted.

"But however else will I woo you, Luna? As you said, I am an expert when it comes to annoying you. A good dunk in the lake will do you good. Maybe it will help that smart mouth of yours," Nolan said.

I laughed, "Nolan if you drop me in that water, I will take you with me!"

"That doesn't scare me. You'll have to think of a more creative threat," Nolan said, his footsteps growing heavier as he reached the dock.

I looked around panicked, he wouldn't throw me in the lake, right? Just as we reached the end of the long dock Nolan stopped, and I knew it was over. He was going to throw me into the water. Nolan slid me down his shoulder and grabbed me around the waist before lifting me again and setting me down onto a wobbly wood floor. I looked around to see that he had set me in a two-person canoe. It was old and rickety. The dark green paint peeling off the sides, it looked like one of the boats I used to ride in when I was a girl scout.

Nolan smirked as he stepped down into the canoe and took the seat behind me.

“So, you were a girl scout?” he asked, mirth swimming in his eyes.

“Oh shush. Where are we going?” I asked.

“It's time for our date, Luna. I thought you might enjoy some time on the water.” he said, reaching behind him and pulling two life jackets out from under the seat. He held the smaller of the two out to me, but I just stared at him with crossed arms. He shrugged before putting the life jacket around me and snapping the buckles closed for me, like I was a child.

“Always my protector,” I said, shaking my head.

“Always.” He nodded, grabbing an oar in each hand and pushing us off from the dock.

I faced forwards in the canoe so that I could see the trees as they passed by. Nolan pushed us all the way across the lake and into a small alcove. As we entered the alcove, I was

surrounded by the scent of Spanish moss, evergreen, and cypress. The end of the water covered in an assortment of different flowers and swamp blooms. At the end of the alcove was a small waterfall streaming through rocks that protruded from a short cliffed hill. It was about twenty feet high and at the bottom the water swirled into a mixture of blues and greens. It was breathtaking. I had lived in Louisiana my entire life but had never seen such a beautiful sight. It was all so small and personal, like a secret only the small frogs that hopped around the rocks and lily pads knew about. When I turned around to comment, I froze. Nolan wasn't looking at the trees, the waterfall, or the tiny frogs. He was staring only at me, a small smile played on his features.

“What is it?” I asked, turning around in the boat to face him.

“It's nothing, really. I've been coming to this place since I was little,” he paused, looking around at the area for the first time before returning his attention to me, “but I've never heard someone describe it as you have. Sure, I thought this place was peaceful and a place where I could collect my thoughts. But through your eyes, you see such beauty in the little things. You see beauty in the rocks, the trees, and even the little frogs.” he laughed, scrunching his nose at a frog that hopped by us.

I shrugged, reaching my hand out for the frog to hop onto my hand, “I've always been able to connect more with nature than I have real people. It's amazing to me to see all the different ecosystems. We're probably surrounded by hundreds of little animal communities right now, not just these frogs.”

Nolan looked down at the frog curiously, “That’s true. Lots of little animals, and lots of predators waiting in the shadows.” Nolan smirked at me, his eyes flashing to amber and back to green.

“Can you make your eyes do that?” I asked, laughing, “Or is it something you can’t control?”

“Both. I can make them change on command, but sometimes I can’t control it. If my emotions are running high, they’ll shift. I can try to fight it, but it doesn’t always work,” he explained. “I can partially shift my teeth and claws as well.”

Nolan held his hand up and where his normal short-trimmed nails used to be, sharp claws now protruded from his fingertips. He retracted them and then smiled widely to show me his canines which had lengthened to a sharp point. I leaned forwards to get a better look, reaching my hand up to touch the sharp point. Nolan’s grin widened before he stuck his tongue out and seductively licked the side of my finger. I quickly retracted my hand and felt my face warm.

Nolan laughed and his newly sharpened teeth retracted, “So do you want to be a marine biologist so you can save all the little frogs?” he asked.

I laughed, “The little frogs are one reason. But no, I want to explore the ocean. I want to look and discover what’s down there, there are so many ecosystems and creatures we haven’t even found yet. I want to be the person that finds them, finds the little fish that’s been waiting to be seen and waiting for its moment to shine.”

Nolan smiled, “That’s amazing. I love how passionate you are about this.”

“What do you want to be after high school?” I asked.

“I will take over for my father, when I’m ready,” he said, “When we’re ready.” He looked at me, running his hand through his hair.

I frowned, “Is that what you want to do, or what you have to do?”

Nolan grinned, “I want to do it. I want to be the person that loves and cares for my pack, for my family, for you.”

“I think you’ll be pretty great at that,” I said, smiling.

Nolan smiled back and grabbed the oars to push us further into the alcove and closer to the waterfall. The water rushed down beside us, drowning out any chance of further conversation. I watched Nolan slowly push us closer to the rushing water, the mist showering us and getting his hair damp. He was wearing a white shirt today over some black swimming trunks that were tied with a white drawstring. The longer we stayed under the mist the more wet his shirt became and the more I could see the tanned muscles that hid beneath his shirt. Nolan smirked as he stared at the falls, pretending he couldn’t hear my thoughts as I checked him out.

“Don’t be embarrassed, Luna,” he laughed, “I check you out all the time. I can’t help it. The Goddess blessed me with a breathtaking mate.”

I blushed, not sure how to respond to his praise. Nolan's eyes swirled with amber as he stared into mine, and he reached over to the falling water and flicked his hand through it causing the water to splash me in the face.

“Oh, it's on!” I shouted, splashing him back.

We continued our water fight and were standing in the boat at this point. I struggled to stay standing as the boat rocked back and forth. I put my hand back in the falls and so did Nolan, we stared at each other and waited for the other to make their move. Without thinking I felt for the water that surrounded me and pushed on that small inkling of power I felt in my lower belly. A stream of water protruded from the falls behind Nolan and whacked him in the side of the head, pushing him off balance and falling into the cool water below. I burst out laughing when he emerged from the water looking like a drowned cat.

“That's not very nice Luna,” he laughed, sputtering out water, “Are you going to help me back into the boat?”

“Sure,” I laughed, reaching my hand down for him, but he quickly grabbed it and pulled me into the water. Goosebumps erupted over my skin as the cold water surrounded me, Nolan pulled me up from under my shoulders and held me against him, laughing hysterically. I couldn't help but laugh back at how carefree he seemed at that moment. His green eyes sparkled as he stared into mine, our chests pressed together as we tried to stay above water. Nolan leaned down and pressed his lips to mine, slow at first but then with more fervor. I

would never get tired of the feel of his lips against mine, never get tired of the spark of electricity I felt when he touched me. I grinned, sinking further into the water and forcing him to follow. Once under the water I turned and swam away as fast as I could manage, Nolan stayed close behind. I looked underneath the waterfall and was surprised to find a small cave. It didn't go too deep in but was still big.

“You're a very good swimmer,” Nolan said, coming to plop down on the dirt beside me.

I shrugged, “Jackson taught me how to swim when I was eight years old, and I've been swimming like a fish ever since.”

Nolan grabbed my hand and interlocked our fingers, staring out into the water that rushed down in front of us. Somehow it was quieter back here than it had been out there.

“Is this where you come to think? This cave?” I asked.

Nolan nodded, smiling at the cave's surroundings.

“Does it hurt to turn into a wolf?” I asked suddenly.

“At first it does, when you first start shifting. But the more you do it the easier it gets, for me it's only mildly uncomfortable now. It's still hard for your brothers though, but they try to join us whenever we go for a pack run, and Jackson has started helping me with the patrols on the camp borders.”

“Patrols for what?” I asked.

“For enemy packs, or any threat that might try to come into the camp and hurt us.” he said.

“Oh.” I frowned, who would want to hurt the Adolfo Pack?

“Would you like to see my wolf, Emelia?” Nolan asked hesitantly, “I understand if you’re not ready. It’s a crazy thing to see, especially for a human.”

I took a deep breath, “I want to see. I need to see.” I nodded, resolute.

Nolan looked down at our interlocked hands and frowned before taking a deep breath and removing his shirt. My eyes widened, realizing what he was doing, and I turned around to face the wall. Nolan chuckled, but I heard as he continued to remove the rest of his clothing, my face was on fire, and most likely the shade of a cherry tomato. Cracking and popping sounds almost had me turning around to make sure Nolan was okay. Soft footsteps padded behind me, and coarse fur rubbed against the side of my arm. A large black wolf walked around me and laid down at my feet, placing his muzzle in my hand and rubbing his nose against the inside of my wrist. Emerald green eyes looked up at me, waiting for a reaction.

“Well ... ” I paused, taking a deep breath. “I’ll never need a puppy.”

The wolf made a snort-like sound, as if he were laughing. I tentatively reached my hand up and scratched the place between the wolf’s ears, causing him to close his eyes and his tail to wag.



*Yup, just a big puppy ...*

‘I am not a puppy, Emelia,’ Nolan sent, peeking one eye open to look at me, ‘but I am glad you are taking this so well. You take everything better than I expect you to. Thank you for not being afraid of me.’

I smiled down at the wolf, looking over his huge body that was larger than any wolf I’d ever seen on TV or at the zoo. His fur was coarse at first, but the more I raked my fingers through it the softer it felt. Nolan’s wolf was magnificent, jet black like his hair was in human form, and looked like he could kill any prey or predator that might’ve happened by. I should be scared, but I knew Nolan would not hurt me. He would always protect me, and one day I hoped I would be able to protect him. There had to be a reason we were brought together here and now, a reason that these powers had found me and my friends all at once. It seemed to me that this Wolf Goddess had plans for all of us that would remain hidden until we were ready to know. That thought should give me anxiety and cause me to panic, but as I stared down into the eyes of my mate, I knew that I would be okay. As long as Nolan and I were together everything would be alright.

“I’m glad I met you, Nolan,” I said, smiling down at the wolf.

‘And I you, Luna,’ Nolan thought, ‘I’m going to go change back now and find the canoe. Will you be alright here for a minute?’

I nodded, turning to face the waterfall again. The wolf stood and trotted over to the abandoned pile of clothes, before grabbing them in his muzzle and leaving the small cave. I peeked around the cave one last time before standing to walk to the end of falling water, its spray coating my face once more. I'd always felt connected to water, even before I discovered this newfound power. Being in the water, whether it was swimming or just in the shower, always left me feeling more relaxed and at peace than before I entered it. Somehow, I'd always known that if there was magic on this earth, it would be contained in water. I stepped into the cool water letting it shower down on me before diving into the rest of the lake. As I emerged from the water near where I had seen the bottom of the canoe floating, I came face to face with the cutest creature I had ever seen. Nolan was holding a baby turtle in his large hands.

“He’s so cute!” I said, grabbing onto the side of the boat to get a closer look, “Where did you find him?”

“He was sitting on the oar when I got back to the canoe,” Nolan said, smiling down at the little creature, “I thought you’d like to see it before I put it back in the water.”

“Thanks,” I said, smiling lovingly up into his green eyes.

“Ready to head back?” he asked, placing the small turtle back into the water near the shore.

“Yeah, let’s go,” I said, hoisting myself back into the canoe.



“So, what does the pack usually do on Saturday nights?” I asked after we rejoined the group by the volleyball nets.

“Bonfire,” Nolan and Ashlynn replied in unison.

Ashlynn was leading the group back to the main lodge for a late lunch slash early dinner with the pack. Alexander was walking beside her and I realized how well they complimented each other. She was taller than my friends and me, at around 5’6” and he was around the same size as Jackson. He had black spiky hair that had a somewhat blueish hue, and he had what reminded me of somewhat large *Harry Potter* glasses. He gazed down at her and brushed what looked like some leftover flour off her cheek, and she smiled up at him with adoring eyes.

*How anybody wouldn't know they were mates is beyond me...*

The group went their separate ways to get ready for dinner, and the girls were already in the suite as Nolan dropped me off at the door.

“I like having you here,” he whispered, caressing my cheek and giving me a long soft kiss on the forehead. Before fully pulling away he looked me in the eyes to ask permission before he moved his mouth down to mine. This time the kiss wasn’t hot and heavy, but sweet and felt almost like a whisper because of how short it was. Nolan chuckled feeling my

disappointment, “We don’t want Kris walking in on us again, do we?”

I blushed, shaking my head no.

“I will see you soon, Luna,” Nolan said as I stepped back into my room and closed the door.

I laid my forehead against the door, taking a moment before returning to reality. I could feel myself falling further and further the more I spent time with Nolan. I knew it wouldn’t be long until Nolan owned me, heart and soul. I could sense that string between us pull on my heart the further he got away from our suite, and I wondered if I hadn’t already fallen ...

## Paging, Dr. Phil

### Emelia

“Do you guys normally throw big parties on both Friday and Saturday night?” I asked during dinner.

“How did you know we were throwing another party tonight?” Nick looked at me curiously.

“I saw out the window that everyone was setting up for a big bonfire again.” I shrugged.

Nick smiled, “Ah I see. No, we don’t normally throw parties like this every weekend, but it is a special occasion. Arryssa and I couldn’t be happier with the developments in the pack.”

I guess it was exciting to have *The Sacred* appear so quickly into your pack. I felt like I needed a textbook just to learn about all these legends and myths that the wolves had...

‘We do have some books in the pack library with history from over the last few centuries,’ Nolan thought.

My eyes widened, ‘Centuries? How long do you people live?’

‘An average lifespan for someone with speed healing and aversion to regular human illnesses,’ Nolan smirked.

‘So, you can’t get the flu?’ I asked.

‘Nope,’ Nolan thought.

‘That’s bullshit,’ I grumbled, “Now stop avoiding the question. How long?”

“Maybe two hundred years if we’re lucky.” Nolan laughed.

I choked on my drink, spewing droplets onto the table, “I hate to tell you this Nol, but I’ve only got maybe eighty years if I’m lucky.”

Nolan smiled at me like he had a secret, “I’m not too worried.”

“It’s still bullshit,” I shook my head, two hundred years ... This just gets crazier and crazier.

Nolan chuckled, looking towards my brother. “Why am I just finding out that your sister uses such foul language?”

“She likes to hide that secret until she knows that the male is trapped within her power,” Jackson deadpanned.

“You know it was cool in the beginning that you two got along so well, but I’ve changed my mind. You’re not allowed to be friends anymore,” I said.

“What makes you think he’ll choose you over me?” Jackson smirked.

“Because I’ve trapped him in my spell, remember. He can’t escape now,” I replied nonchalantly, stuffing a piece of Ashlynn’s delicious asparagus in my mouth.

I looked at Ashlynn and mumbled over a mouthful, “You cooked this?”

“Not this batch, but it is my recipe. You like it?” she asked, smiling.

“It’s amazing. You know what? I’ve changed my mind again. Jackson you can have Nolan. I’ll take Ashlynn instead,” I said, putting another helping onto my plate.

The room burst out in laughter.

“And with that being sorted out, I think it’s time to head out to the bonfire for tonight’s festivities,” Nick announced.

We all stood, exiting the dining hall to head to the fire. It seemed like the entire pack was standing there waiting for us when we reached the front porch. Like they couldn’t start the party without us.

*Well, I feel bad for eating so much now.*

“Before we start, I’d like to make some official announcements,” Nick said loudly, with an authority that shushed the crowd, “Our pack has been gifted many wonderful things this weekend and I believe that should be celebrated. First of all, I’d like to publicly introduce Emelia Suneer who has been publicly claimed by your Beta, Nolan Adolfo. There will be no challenges permitted at this time,” Nick said,

standing between Nolan and I with a hand on each of our shoulders.

‘A warning would’ve been nice, Nol! ’ I fought the urge to shoot daggers in his direction.

“Nolan has claimed Emelia as his True Mate, and as you know, he is Beta and the future Alpha of this pack. Which means no challenges may be submitted from within the pack from wolves that are less dominant than him. Should you still have a concern with this union, please come directly to me,” Nick said, eyes roaming over the males of the pack, “Being that Nolan and Emelia have only just met, and Emelia is not familiar with our culture, we will leave the date of bonding ceremony up to them. We will keep you all updated.”

‘Bonding Ceremony? Is that like a wedding?’ I asked Nolan.

‘It is similar, but no. It would be a ceremony led by my father in front of our pack and families. It is not a legal binding ceremony such as marriage, but after the ceremony and something else, we will be bonded under the eyes of the Moon Goddess and our souls will be connected forever,’ Nol thought as he kissed my temple. ‘I will explain what the other part is later when we are alone.’

“Next, I would like to announce that the Adolfo Pack has been blessed as the next *Keepers of the Sacred*. For those of you that are not familiar with our history with The Sacred, they are a powerful group of five, be they human or werewolves, that possess the spirits of each of earth’s



elements. The Sacred are blessed upon a pack every few decades, and they always show up at a time the Goddess thinks they are needed. We do not know what that is at this time, but as always, we must stay vigilant . Four out of five elements have been discovered already. I shall introduce them:

Water and The Sacred Leader—Emelia Suneer;

Earth—Meredith Terran;

Fire—Kristine Aguya;

and Air—Ashlynn Adolfo,” Nick said each element and name as he walked from person to person, pausing to show who was who. “Please help to make these new members of our pack feel welcomed.”

He stopped next to Ashlynn, grabbing her hand and held out his other hand towards Alexander, “and my final announcement for the evening. Packmate Alexander Vann has laid claim to my daughter, Ashlynn Adolfo, claiming that she is his True Mate. This has been proven to me, but I will allow them a grace period as well before challenges are made. Only challenges from wolves that are more dominant than Ashlynn and Alex may be made from within the pack.”

Ashlynn stared up at her father in shock. Alex must’ve talked to Nick when they were in the office earlier that day, and never told her. A wide smile spread across her face, and loud cheers and whistles broke out. I even heard a few, “Finally’s” spread throughout the pack.

*It must be custom to put females on the spot when doing these kinds of things, I see...*

Nick smiled down at Ashlynn, beaming with pride. Both of his children had found their mate, and within the same month of each other.

“Everyone enjoy their night, there is so much to celebrate. Bless the Adolfo Pack!” Nick announced.

“BLESS THE ADOLFO PACK!” Was shouted throughout the pack before the crowd dispersed and everyone left to celebrate.

I stayed standing where I was, Nolan waiting patiently beside me.

‘Luna?’ he eventually asked.

‘What are challenges? Why would someone challenge their bond?’ I asked.

‘Challenges can come from other wolves within or outside of the pack. From wolves that believe Alexander is lying and wish to claim Ashlynn or Alexander as their True Mate,’ Nolan explained.

‘Why would someone try to claim someone that isn’t their mate?’ I asked.

‘Jealousy. Some people go crazy waiting for their mate.’ Nolan thought.

‘How do the challenges work?’ I asked.

‘The challenger and the challenged will have a fight in their wolf forms that is monitored by the Alpha,’ Nol explained.

I frowned, ‘Like until one gives up?’

‘Depends on the challenge and wolves. Some choose not to show mercy where their mate is involved even if the other wolf submits to them,’ Nolan thought, staring into my eyes.

‘They’ll kill them?’ I asked.

‘Sometimes yes,’ Nolan thought.

‘How did Alex prove to your dad that he and Ashlynn are True Mates?’ I asked.

‘He had to show the Alpha that they possess the gifts that are given to mates: reading each other’s thoughts, controlling emotions, special markings that are given to some pairs,’ Nolan explained.

I raised a brow, ‘Special markings?’

‘My mother and father are the only ones I know that have them. They are very personal for most, so they aren’t discussed normally,’ Nolan shrugged, ‘Also, as Alpha my father and mother can feel a bond between them and all the other wolves in the pack, like a strong linked chain. When that chain reaches a mated pair, it’s like their links are doubled together side by side, and that link feels even stronger after a pair goes through the bonding ceremony.’

‘Do you think Ash and Alex will be challenged?’ I asked.

‘I’m not sure,’ Nolan said.

‘If someone hurts her, I don’t know what I’ll do,’ I said, clenching my teeth and fists.

Nolan chuckled.

‘Why didn’t your dad announce Jackson and Mer?’ I asked.

‘Because Jackson has not come to him and asked to claim her publicly yet.’ Nolan explained.

‘Why not?’ I frowned.

‘He wanted to give her time to accept this new world before he threw challenges and bonding ceremonies on her,’ Nolan grimaced.

‘Oh gosh. What if someone challenges Mer? She can’t fight to the death! She can’t fight at all. I saw her cry after crushing a ladybug once!’ I spiraled.

‘I don’t think that will be an issue when Jackson claims her,’ Nolan thought, laying his hands on my shoulders trying to calm me.

‘Why not?’ I asked.

‘I haven’t told anyone, but I’ve decided to ascend Jackson to Omega. Which will put him as third in line for Alpha,’ Nolan said, ‘He will be granted the power of an Omega, making him more dominant than every wolf in our pack aside from my father and I.’

‘But he’s only been in the pack a few months, and isn’t an Adolfo? Don’t you have an uncle or cousins or something that would be upset?’ I asked.

‘I am not next in line just because I am the Alphas’ son, Luna. My father chose me to be his Beta when I was fifteen, and because of that, I am next in line for Alpha. The Omega I choose will be my future Beta and must be someone I trust completely. They must be someone I believe will honor and care for the Adolfo Pack even if I’m gone,’ Nolan explained.

‘Wow. But you haven’t told Jackson yet?’ I asked.

‘I will soon,’ Nolan thought, smiling out at something over my shoulder.

“Emelia Suneer, if you don’t come dance with your best friends right now, I’m going to come drag your beautiful butt down here.” Kris yelled from the impromptu dance floor.

I looked to see that my two best friends were actively trying to teach Ashlynn how to break dance.

“Where did they learn to dance like that?” Nolan asked, laughing.

“Victoria used to host impromptu dance parties in the living room for us.” I laughed, leaving his side to go dance with my friends.

*Mom.*

I suddenly wished she was there to see Jackson so happy and with so many friends. I wished she was here to see all of us so happy and enjoying ourselves. I wished she could be here too, so she could have time to relax. She worked too much, worked too hard to provide for us. She deserved some relaxation time with her family. I should call her, convince her to call in to

work and come here. We'd barely had time to discuss everything going on with Nolan and I, but I knew she'd been wanting to take a day to explain things to me properly. The music broke off from upbeat dance music, someone turning it down so that it was barely heard. Most of the adults had gone to bed for the night and the young pack members had gathered around the fire to talk and tell stories. It really was strange to see so many people that weren't related act like a family. A close-knit family too. My brother Mason was hanging out with a few young wolves around his age. He glanced around longingly at some of the females in the pack. It must be hard to know that you were destined to have this one person out there in the world that was supposed to complete you. Be your other half. And have no idea where they were or when they would show up. I peeked up at the sky, noticing the ironically full moon we had tonight. It was beautiful. I thought back to a week ago when Nolan had told me what Luna meant. *Moon*. I remembered thinking it was odd, because in most romances one would compare their love to the sun. I thought being compared to the moon was far more special. But I might've been biased at this point. To think I'd only known Nolan for two weeks, and he had changed my life so much already. But even so, I couldn't remember what it was like not to have him. My anxiety had reduced so much since that first time he had calmed me at the theater. Since then, he had become my daily dose of Xanax. My own personal therapist. My best friend. If I was his moon, then he was the planet I orbited. My Earth. Keeping me grounded. Keeping me present.

“Hey Em, do you think you could go grab my phone from inside the house?” Jackson asked me, pulling me from my thoughts.

“Sure,” I said, heading into the house to search for where Jackson’s phone was left in the dining hall.

“Are you having a nice time, my love?” Arryssa said from the kitchen doorway, with a hot steaming cup in her hands that smelled like lavender and honey.

“I am. Thank you so much again for inviting my friends and I to stay here for the weekend,” I said, smiling.

“Oh Emelia,” she smiled sweetly at me, “I don’t mean to be abrupt or overstep. But you are Nolan’s mate. I already see you as a daughter to me. You and your friends are family now. You are welcome here anytime without permission. This is your home now too. Whether you choose to stay here or in your Covington home is up to you. I know that with the bond it will get harder for you and Nolan to be apart for long periods of time, but we don’t want to rush you.”

“Thank you, Arryssa,” I said. “It is something I will have to think about, but it has already become difficult for us to be apart.”

“Yes, well as I said. It is up to you.” Arryssa kissed me on the cheek before saying goodnight and heading to her bedroom.

As I stood there alone in the dining hall deep in thought, and stared at the place where Arryssa had just stood, I got an eerie

feeling like I was being watched.

*CrEeAk! Snap!*

I spun towards the noise and found myself facing two windowed double doors. But there was nothing there, and the door was locked.

*Weird? I'm imagining things.*

A branch from a tree was leaning against the window.

*Must've been the tree.*

*Ping!* I looked down at my cellphone.

***Kris: dude when r u coming back??? Hurry up!***

I rolled my eyes at my friends' urgency.

*Ping!*

***Mer: OMG you're going to miss it! Hurry!***

What the hell? I headed outside, Jackson's phone in hand. Everyone was still surrounding the bonfire, some couples were dancing. Mer and Kris were staring at something with wide eyes. Mer was sitting on Jackson's lap. Again. I walked up to the fire and heard the soft strumming of a guitar. The melody was beautiful and familiar. It was my favorite *Red Wave* song. But it wasn't just instrumental like normal. Someone was singing lyrics. I walked past the girls and saw Nolan sitting by the fire with an acoustic guitar. Nolan had written words to my favorite instrumental song? No. That didn't feel right, something deep in my gut was trying to tell me something. Was Nolan the guitarist I listened to? Was he *Red Wave*? Bells



rang in my heart and mind, trying to tell me that it was the truth.

*Nolan is Red Wave.*

Nolan's smile grew as he sang, "Watch as she holds the world in her hands. Watch as she tries to show she understands. She's everything. Everything I've ever needed. Watch as she helps those who need her. Watch as she fights to keep them off the ground. She's everything. Everything. Everything I ever wanted. Needed. And she's mine. She's mine. And I am hers. Forever hers."

It was beautiful. Tears streamed down my face, as everyone stared between Nolan and me. But I couldn't pull my eyes away from him. Even before we ever met, Nolan had written this song for me. Somehow knowing that I needed it. How hadn't I known *Red Wave* was him? He's the only instrumental artist I had ever cared to listen to, and even without knowing the lyrics up until this point, I had always felt like its soothing chords and notes were calling out to me. The crowd applauded him at the end of the song, and it must have been decided that the party was over after that. Pack mates dispersed, leaving for their homes. Nolan put the guitar across his back and walked over to me while staring at the ground. He ran his hand through his hair and scratched the back of his neck nervously.

"You wrote that?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer.

Nolan nodded.

“You published that song two years ago. Before you had even met me. How did you know?” I asked.

“A couple years ago while I was sitting under the falls, I suddenly got this deep sense of loneliness and panic. I was fine one second, and then the next it was like I couldn’t catch my breath. I’d never felt anything like it, but I knew it wasn’t me having those feelings. I thought it had to be my True Mate, the Goddess was showing me that she needed me. So, I wrote that song, but I never imagined you would actually hear it ,” he said, caressing my cheek.

“That’s my favorite song,” I said, sniffing.

“I know.” He grinned down at his feet and readjusted the blue guitar strap across his chest.

“Why didn’t you tell me you wrote it when I was telling you about it?” I asked.

“I was so thrown that you had heard it. And I wanted to surprise you.” He smiled sheepishly.

“It was beautiful, and I loved it,” I said, placing a chaste kiss on his cheek, “I thought you had stage fright?”

“I do, that was terrible,” he laughed, “but it was worth it to see the shock on your face.” he said with a lopsided grin.

I laughed, slapping Nolan’s chest playfully. Nolan’s eyes darkened before he placed two fingers into the loops of my jeans and pulled me against him, kissing me and not asking for permission this time. My heart pounded and my knees buckled. I had never been kissed like that before. When he

eventually pulled away, I was winded and taking in big gulps of air. Nolan stared down at me with a cocky grin.

“I don’t know what it is about my presence that makes you two want to suck face in front of me. But I’d like to take this moment to kindly ask you to not,” Kris said, appearing next to us with a hand shielding her eyes.

“Sorry Kris,” I giggled.

“It’s cool. I’ll have my revenge whenever I find my own mate. I can’t wait to just bombard you with make out sessions around every corner,” she said, turning to head back into the lodge for bed. The white-haired guy from earlier leaned against the railing at the bottom of the front steps with crossed arms staring at Kris as she came closer. Kris held her arm out straight as she walked past, her middle finger almost touching the guy’s nose before she climbed the stairs and disappeared inside the lodge. The white-haired guy chuckled before he walked away, his frosty blue eyes sparkling before shifting to amber.

“Twenty bucks says they’re together by weeks end,” Mer said, walking up with Jackson beside her.

“Hmm. Make it fifty and I’ll bet they’re together by midnight and it’ll be a secret.” I countered.

“Deal.” Mer replied, and we shook hands.

“If it’s a secret, how will you know they’re together?” Nolan asked.

“You’ll see.” I smirked.

“You think they’re mates?” Jackson asked Nolan.

“Not sure. It’s possible.” Nol shrugged.

“Wouldn’t they already know?” Mer asked.

“I’ll explain later Mer.” I told her.

Mer wiggled her eyebrows at me, as if to say I would definitely be giving her all the details later.



The next morning, everyone seemed to be dragging their feet from the night before. The breakfast table was silent except for the sound of everyone eating the wonderful shrimp and grits Ashlynn had made for us.

“Mom will be here for dinner tonight, Em.” Mason announced, taking the seat to my right.

He’d been pretty vacant this weekend.

“Oh? I thought she had to work today?” I asked, over a mouthful.

Mason shook his head, “She requested the night off so that she could come see everyone. She hasn’t seen the camp yet either.”

“Oh okay,” I said, wondering what she was going to think of all this.

“That’s wonderful news.” Arryssa smiled widely.

“Really sucks that we have to go home tonight though,” Kris said, pushing the food around her plate.

“Why do you have to go home tonight, Kristine?” Nick asked.

“Because we have school tomorrow,” Kris said, reaching over to feel Nick’s forehead, as if he might have had a fever.

Nick smirked, “I know that. But it doesn’t mean you have to leave. You do have a room here and I’m sure you could drive or carpool with someone to school. It’s only forty minutes away, right, Nolan?”

“That’s right.” Nolan grinned.

“I guess I could stay. It’s not like my parents are home waiting for me. Are you staying Em?” Kris asked me and I shrugged back in reply.

Kris finally took a bite of her food, and a loud sigh was heard from the direction white hair was sitting. Kris glared back in his direction, and he reciprocated by blowing her a kiss. Kris blushed, looking down at her plate again and clenching her fork.

“Dammit!” Mer shouted, sliding fifty dollars across the table.

“What the hell?” Kris asked, turning her glare onto us.

“How does that prove it?” Nolan asked me.

“Because Kristine Aguya does not blush when a regular Covington High boy flirts with her,” I said, “So something

must've happened.”

“And she doesn't hide her face. She would walk around proudly and announce to the world that she got some,” sighed Mer.

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Kris shouted.

“You and White Wolf over there,” Ashlynn said, nodding her head towards his table.

“What is his name anyway Kris?” I asked, placing my chin on my fists and sending her my best shit-eating grin .

“You're both crazy. I don't know what you think is going on, but it's not,” Kris said, standing up quickly, her face candy apple red, to storm out of the dining hall.

A few moments later, White Wolf followed, and I had to bite my tongue to keep from laughing.

“Wow. I guess you two were right,” Ashlynn snorted, “but why was I not included in this bet?”

“We thought you'd be busy celebrating with Alexander last night.” I raised a brow.

Ashlynn blushed, peeking over at her father, who didn't seem perturbed by the comment at all. He smiled brightly, his green eyes twinkling .

“His name is Doran,” Arryssa said, answering the earlier question, “he joined the pack about a year ago. He's normally very quiet. He was a lone wolf before coming to the Adolfo Pack.”

“Lone wolf?” Mer asked.

“He left his previous pack, choosing to be on his own. He never talks about them, so nobody knows why he left. But we happily took him in when he requested it.” Nick answered.

“He’s a nice boy.” Arryssa assured us, her eyes filling with sadness momentarily.

“I’ve never seen him show this much attention to a female though.” Nick smirked before a small frown formed between his brows.

He glanced over at Arryssa, who nodded back at him reassuringly.

As we finished up our breakfast and got ready to go our separate ways for the morning, Arryssa tapped me on the shoulder, “Can I speak with you in private Emelia?”

“Sure.” I mumbled.

Oh man. Was I in trouble? I followed her into a different room. The walls were lined with books and artifacts from around the world, and there were lots and lots of family photographs. I spotted a small photograph on a side desk, two small children with bright green eyes and toothy grins staring back at me.

At the farthest end of the room was a small desk with multiple journals sitting neatly on top of one another. Arryssa closed the door behind me and pointed to two comfortable-looking chairs for us to sit in.

Arryssa sat down and grasped one of my hands in hers, “Emelia, this may seem like it’s none of my business. But you girls are a part of our pack now. And that makes you family, which means, as Alpha female I worry about the well-being of you girls. Which makes the questions I’m going to ask you appropriate for an Alpha female to ask their pack member.”

I smiled at Arryssa because she was trying so hard to make sure I felt comfortable and not overwhelmed. The girls and I had only been here for a couple days, and I already felt like this was where I belonged. These people had already pushed their way into my small anxiety ridden heart .

“Arryssa, you can ask me anything. I trust you.” I reassured her.

She smiled widely at me, “You are going to make a great Alpha female one day. I have some concerns about Kristine. What is her home life like?”

I grimaced, “That’s a complicated question, honestly. Kris lives with her mom and stepfather. Her brother has already grown up and left for college and they didn’t really get along anyway. But Kris’s parents fight. A lot. So, they are only home maybe once a month. Just to check in and give her money to stock the fridge. It isn’t really a home to her. She spends most days at either mine or Mer’s house.”

“Ah. I see. And Kris’s relationships in the past?” she asked.

“With boys? Well, I don’t mean to sound like a bad friend. Because she is one of my best friends. But Kris likes to jump from boy to boy. Never really getting close to any of them. I



think she feels like ‘why care if it’s just going to end in heartbreak.’ So, her concept with guys is just to use them for a short break from reality,” I said, feeling guilty for talking about Kris behind her back.

“And she’s only really close with you and Meredith?” Arryssa gauged.

“Just us. We’re her family.” I nodded. “We’re the only constants she’s ever had in her life. She knows no matter what, she’ll always have us.”

Arryssa smiled sweetly. “She is very lucky to have you both. But I worry that she is going to have a rough road ahead. Especially if Doran is her mate, and she is pushing him away or using him like the others.”

“I worry too. But I’ve never seen her react like that to a guy. Normally she would flaunt herself right in front of him and wouldn’t be shy about it. But I’ll talk to her ,” I said.

“I think that is a good idea. Now, about dinner tonight with your mother,” she said, changing the subject.

“Oh. Don’t worry too much about that. She doesn’t like when people make a big deal about her. But she is allergic to some shellfish, so should probably avoid that.” I told her.

Arryssa laughed, “Noted. But what I was going to ask was how you think your mother would feel if we offered for your family to live here. Permanently.”

“Oh wow. I’m not sure. Where would we stay?” I asked.

“Well, the cabin your brothers stay in is big enough for them and your mom to stay in comfortably,” she explained.

“And I would stay in the main lodge? Shouldn’t I stay with them?” I asked.

“I can understand why this would all seem strange to someone not born into this world. But you are Nolan’s mate and, naturally, because of that, he is going to be highly protective of you. Especially because he is an Alpha and because of your gifts, he is going to want you as close as possible. I imagine it won’t be long before you are both sharing a suite.” Arryssa explained nonchalantly, as if she hadn’t just told a seventeen-year-old girl she was going to share a room with her son...

“I think this is probably going to be a lot for her to swallow. I mean we’ve all lived in that same house since I was adopted. It’s where Mia lived.” I said, swallowing the lump that had suddenly formed in my throat.

“Yes. I understand it will be hard. But I think it will be good for all of you to be here with us,” she said, smiling kindly, “but of course we don’t want to do anything to make you or your family uncomfortable.”

“It will have to be something we discuss as a family, I’m sure,” I said, deep in thought.

“Well, I think that’s enough deep talk for today. I’ve got some things to take care of in here, but you go enjoy the rest of your Sunday, my love.” she said.

She stood, opening the door to let me out. I walked back into an empty dining hall.

*I wonder where everyone has run off to.*

‘The girls are up in your suite waiting for you. Jackson and I are going to take care of some things in town and will be back soon,’ Nolan told me.

I grinned, ‘Thank you Nol. You’re very handy to have.’

His laugh reverberated through my mind. ‘Glad to know I’m *handy* Luna. I will see you later.’

I headed upstairs to my suite and knocked on the door.

*Why am I knocking on my own door?*

I walked in without waiting for an answer and Mer stood in the middle of the room with only a bra on, struggling to get her sweatshirt over her head.

*Oh. That’s why I knocked .*

“Dude. You’re supposed to wait for someone to answer when you knock like that. What if a guy had walked by,” Mer scolded me.

“I imagine Jackson would rip their head off so not really an issue,” Kris said, smiling not-so-sweetly.

“Anyway. Subject change alert. Kris?” I said, looking at my friend pointedly. Waiting for the goods.

“Kris what?” Kris asked, befuddled.

“It’s no use, Em. I can’t get anything out of her.” Mer groaned, finally getting the shirt over her head. Her short

brown curls were now sticking up all over the place.

“Come on Kris! Just tell us about Doran!” I whined.

“There’s nothing to tell. He’s just a nuisance.” Kris answered, shrugging her shoulders and rolling her eyes.

“A hot nuisance,” Mer remarked.

“That you made out with.” I smirked.

“How did you know that we—” Kris started to say.

“I didn’t.” I laughed, showing her my best ‘gotcha’ smile.

“I hate you!” Kris yelled, throwing a pillow at me.

“Oh my God, it’s out now. Details, go!” Mer shouted, belly flopping onto her bed with her chin in her palms. She started kicking her feet back and forth like she was about to watch a juicy episode of reality television or something.

“When did it happen? You came to bed with us?” I asked .

“Well, if you must know—” Kris said, flipping her long blonde hair over her shoulder.

“We must.” Mer and I said in unison.

“I went to get a drink from the kitchen around 2 a.m. White wolf was waiting there on the counter. Like he knew I was coming. I politely asked him to take a hike. He did not take said hike. When he refused to leave, I went to get some juice from the fridge and he got right up behind me, put his hands on either side of my head on the fridge. I didn’t move for a good minute, I thought maybe if I don’t move, he’ll get the hint and go away. No cigar. So, I finally turned around and our

faces were only centimeters from each other.” Kris paused to add dramatic effect.

“And then what happened? Don’t leave us hanging!” Mer squealed.

“And then he didn’t move. Not at all. We literally stood there for five minutes before I couldn’t take it anymore. I laid one on him!” Kris announced, clapping her hands together.

“You kissed him?” I asked, surprised.

“I did. I grabbed him by the collar and pulled him to me—” Kris continued.

“Oh, mama,” Mer said, fanning herself.

“And then we turned into rabid animals and couldn’t keep our hands off each other,” Kris said nonchalantly, shrugging her shoulders like it wasn’t a big deal.

“What happened after the kiss?” I asked, crossing my arms.

“And then I ran away like the scared little girl I am.” She groaned, frowning at the pillow she’d tossed earlier .

“Oh Kris,” I said, going to hug her, Mer joined me.

“It’s not a big deal. No need for these dramatics.” Kris sputtered, slapping away our hug.

“Do you think he’s your mate Kris?” Mer asked.

“How am I supposed to know?” she asked, frowning.

“Can he speak to your mind?” Mer asked.

“I don’t think so.” Kris frowned.

“Can he control your feelings?” Mer asked.

“How am I supposed to know that?” Kris huffed, turning away from us and going to fiddle with something in her bag.

“When he had you pushed against the fridge last night, when you were both staring at each other, how did you feel?” I asked.

“Like I was having an anxiety attack.” She sighed, playing with the zipper on her bag .

“And when you decided to kiss him, what made you want to do it?” Mer asked, squinting at her .

“I don’t know. I was starting to hyperventilate because he was so close to my face, and then suddenly I caught my breath. And I thought to myself, um hello earth to Aguya, why aren’t you kissing this guy right now?” Kris said, still staring down at her bag.

*Hmm.*

Mer looked at me with furrowed brows and shrugged .

“Is it like that?” Kris asked, looking from Mer to me with hopeful eyes.

“I’m not sure. I think you would know if it was him doing it. Whenever I would start to freak out Nolan would push what felt like a wave of calm over me. I’m not sure if it’s the same for everyone,” I explained, looking to Mer for confirmation.

“When we got here and Jackson came to help me, he grabbed my hands and it felt like he was holding me to the

ground. I could feel the dirt underneath me and I felt like we were both connected to it.” Mer answered my unspoken question .

“Was it anything like that, Kris?” I asked .

“I don’t know,” she said, grimacing.

“Do you want him to be your mate?” Mer asked, moving closer to Kris .

“Wouldn’t I just know? Didn’t you guys just feel it? Maybe you didn’t understand it Em, but you remember hearing Nolan from day one ,” Kris spiraled.

“That’s true. Jackson and I have always felt this bond. I think if he had known about the things mates can do, he would’ve tried earlier,” said Mer.

“Arryssa said sometimes it can be blocked,” I told them.

“Why?” Mer asked.

“She thinks—and I’m really sorry we talked about you Kris—but she thinks you’re subconsciously blocking him. Pushing him away out of fear of heartbreak or from lack of emotional attachment with your family ,” I explained.

“Damn. It sounds like I need therapy, huh? But that’s okay. I like Arryssa. She’s kinda like everyone’s mom.” She smiled sadly, not denying that she may be pushing the bond away.

*Paging, Dr. Phil...*

“Do you think you’re pushing him away Kris?” I asked, grasping my friend’s shoulder.

She looked uncomfortable, like she wanted to make an inappropriate joke but also wanted to show her vulnerability to her friends. The latter won.

“Maybe. I don’t want to, but what if it’s not him guys? What if I’m not good enough for him? I’ve been watching you guys with Jackson and Nolan for the past two weeks and I just don’t think I can let someone in like that. There’s a lot of crazy going on in my brain that you guys don’t even know about,” she said, closing her eyes and fighting back tears.

I wanted to hug my friend again, but there was a knock at the door that stopped me in my tracks.

“That’s him,” Kris said, looking anxious.

“How do you know?” Mer asked.

“I can see his aura through the door. Oh, by the way, that’s a thing I can do now. I can see all your auras surrounding you like flames.” She smiled sadly, as tears slowly fell down her cheeks.

“Do you want us to answer the door for you?” I asked, gritting my teeth.

This guy hadn’t even done anything yet, but I still wanted to beat his white-haired ass.

“No, I’ll go.” She sighed.

When Kris opened the door, Doran stood behind it looking panicked with wide eyes that searched the room. He must have seen Kris’s puffy eyes because his facial expression turned soft. Had he known something was wrong with her? Kris



didn't seem to notice this development before she left with him, closing the door behind her. Mer and I looked at each other, wondering if we'd both come to the same conclusion .

“There's no way he could know she was upset without feeling it right?” Mer asked.

“I don't think so.” I smiled softly.

*I hope she'll be okay.*

“Did she say she saw his aura?” Mer asked, staring at the closed door.

“Yup,” I replied.

“I wonder what color ours are?” she muttered under her breath .

“Probably Black. Like our souls,” I said, grinning back at my friend .

Mer busted out laughing, bending over to hold her knees, “Maybe we all need therapy.”

“I've been thinking that since Nolan first showed up,” I giggled.

## Sweet Dreams are Made of This

### Emelia

**A**fter Kris left, Mer excused herself to go hang out with Ashlynn, claiming she was going to teach her how to cook. They seemed to be getting along well, I was glad. I couldn't be happier everyone was getting along so well. I decided to spend some of my alone time reading one of the history books I had snatched from Arryssa's office. Well as much as you can snatch something in front of a werewolf with super hearing. The day bed was so comfortable, I only made it a couple chapters in before I started to doze off...



*I was at school, standing by my locker. I was supposed to go meet the girls in the courtyard for lunch, but I was waiting for someone. Who was I waiting for? I was excited to see them.*

*“Have you been waiting long, darling?” asked a British accent I didn’t recognize. I turned to see a tall guy about my age with shoulder-length blond hair and bright blue eyes. He caressed my face, and I leaned into it.*

*Wait? Who the heck is this guy? I don’t know him. Get away from him!*

*But I didn’t listen. My body wouldn’t listen.*

*“Not that long. I missed you today, Locke,” I heard myself respond.*

*“I missed you too, darling,” he said, placing a small kiss on my mouth.*

*Holy hell who was this dude?*

*“Come on let’s go see your friends,” he said, taking me by the hand and leading me to the courtyard. The girls were sitting in our normal spot. Mer was sitting with Jackson and Kris was canoodling with Carter.*

*What about Doran?*

*“Dang Em. What took you guys so long?” Jackson asked, coming over to give Locke a fist bump.*

*“I had to wait for Locke to get out of class,” I replied, frowning at their friendly gesture.*

*“You two are so cute together,” Mer said, smiling warmly at us.*

*What? I don’t even know this dude. What is happening?*

*Where is—?*

*Where is—?*

*I can't remember his name. Why can't I remember his name?*

*I began hyperventilating.*

*Where is he? Who is he? Why can't I think straight?*

*"What's the matter love?" Locke asked, looking down at me with furrowed eyebrows.*

*"Dude. I'm not your love!" I shouted, finally able to control my mouth.*

*Where the hell was Nolan?*

*I gasped, looking up at Locke with panicked eyes, "Who are you? Where's Nolan?"*

I was shaken awake. I was in my room on the day bed still. I'd fallen asleep? Was I dreaming?

*Jesus I'm hyperventilating.*



I was having an anxiety attack. My eyes connected with Nolan's, who was sitting in front of me with wide amber eyes

.

"Luna, what's wrong? What's happened?" he asked, his hands placed gingerly on each of my shoulders.

"I don't—" I stuttered, looking around the room in a panic, "I was dreaming. I can't remember what I was dreaming

about,” I looked down at my hands confused, “I thought you weren’t going to be back until later?”

“Emelia, it’s 5 o’clock in the afternoon. Your mother will be here soon. I knew you had fallen asleep but then—.” He stopped, shaking his head, “Then I couldn’t hear your thoughts anymore. Your thoughts were scattered, you were thinking about school and then nothing. It went blank, and I couldn’t hear anything. And then I felt your panic, so I rushed up here. You don’t remember what you were dreaming about?” he asked, rubbing a hand through his hair.

“No, I don’t. I remember feeling panicked. And like I couldn’t find you. And I felt this strange presence. But that’s it,” I explained, still breathing frantically.

Nolan pushed a wave of calm over me, and it only took me a little off the edge. Nolan cursed under his breath.

“I don’t understand what would block you from me like that. You shouldn’t be able to block me when you’re unconscious like that. I didn’t like it.” Nolan whispered, frowning, “Are you alright, Luna?”

“I think so. Just a bad dream is all.” I touched his cheek, trying to comfort him. He leaned into it, but his jaw was still clenched.

“Do we need to get ready for dinner? Does Ashlynn need help cooking or something?” I asked, trying to change the subject.

“I thought you said you couldn’t cook?” Nolan asked, his shoulders relaxing.

“Oh, I was going to volunteer Mer to cook while I politely supervised,” I retorted.

He laughed, relaxing further. I’d really worried him...

“Ah, I see. Well let’s go see if she needs a hand.” he said, plopping a kiss on my forehead before helping me to stand and walk down to the kitchen.



“Mr. and Mrs. Adolfo, it was so kind of you to invite me here for dinner. I have been wanting to come see where the boys have been spending most of their time,” My adoptive mother, Victoria, said.

“The pleasure is all ours Victoria. And please call us Nick and Arryssa. After all, we are family now,” Nick replied, grinning from ear to ear.

He looked like the Cheshire Cat. They must not get a lot of visitors here...

‘None that aren’t within the pack,’ Nolan said, speaking to my mind.

‘Thank you, inner conscious for always answering my questions. I love having a werewolf encyclopedia in my head,’ I thought.

Nolan laughed out loud, covering his mouth to hide it with a cough. Victoria looked between us, smirking.

“Let us sit and eat our dinner before it gets cold.” Arryssa smiled, leading Victoria to her seat.

Ashlynn had out done herself tonight. She’d made some delicious homemade imitation crab gumbo, and the rest of the table must’ve agreed with my sentiments because they’d all gone back for seconds and thirds. Victoria peeked at me and winked, knowing I must’ve mentioned her allergy.

“Victoria, your children tell me you are a surgical nurse at the local hospital?” Nick asked.

“I am. I have to work a lot of hours, but I love it, and I appreciate my children’s support in my career. I know it’s hard on them with me being gone so much.” She grimaced, looking down at her plate.

“Aw, Mom. Don’t worry, we’re all grown, so it’s not a big deal,” Mason said, giving her a small side hug.

She smiled back lovingly at him, but the guilt did not leave her blue eyes.

“So, Victoria, we would actually like to discuss a few things with you regarding the joining of your three children into our pack.” Arryssa smiled apologetically.

“Well, it’s more like five. I claim those two girls over there too. They’re at my house enough.” She pointed with her spoon to Mer and Kris, who smiled widely at her.

“Yes of course. What we wanted to discuss with you—and we mean no offense by any of this—it’s just our culture but—” Nick stumbled over what he was trying to say.

“You’d like my children to move here with you all. For their protection and because this is now their pack.” Victoria replied bluntly.

*Holy crap.*

“Well yes. That’s exactly it,” Nick said, eyes wide.

“But we would also like you to join them,” Arryssa added.

Victoria’s eyes widen and she choked on her food slightly, “Why?”

“You are pack as much as they are. You don’t have to have a mate or a wolf to be a part of this family. That is if you’d like to join us.” Nick smiled sheepishly.

*I didn’t even know he knew how to be shy...I think I prefer the Cheshire Cat.*

“Where would we stay?” My mother asked, twirling the spoon in her hand.

Arryssa and Nick both smiled. She wasn’t automatically turning them down. That was a good sign, right?

“There is a cabin that you and the boys may stay in. The boys already have rooms in one that they stay at occasionally, like this weekend. But there is a room for you also along with a kitchen, two bathrooms, and a good-sized living room.” Nick explained.



Victoria's brows furrowed, she glanced between Nolan and me, "Where is Emelia staying. And Meredith and Kristine?"

Arryssa let out a small laugh, "She has her own suite in this lodge upstairs. She shares it with Meredith and Kris."

My mother's shoulders relaxed.

"However, Nolan's room is directly across from it. We'd like to be honest up front about that as it may be uncomfortable for you. But because they are mates, it is safer this way. As you may have been told, the girls have been revealed as part of *The Sacred*. So, they require higher protection, and I think there is no safer place than near their mates and Alpha's. That is also why Jackson will have a room made for him next to Nolan's," Nick announced.

Victoria's eyes widened as she looked over at me and the girls. "The Sacred? I remember hearing about them as a child, but I thought it was just myth."

"We were surprised as well, but Arryssa is looking into the history we have on them. Trying to learn more about what it means to be in The Sacred, and what must be done to prepare them to become the elemental spirits," Nick explained. "But because of their rarity and power, I feel that we should be vigilant with their safety."

Victoria looked down at her food, moving it around with her fork. She peeked at the small tattoo on her wrist where Mia's name was written, she'd had it done a year after her disappearance.

“You think they will be safer here?” she asked, looking at Nick for reassurance.

“I do. They will be safe here,” Nick promised.

“So say the king, so it SHALL be.” Kris shouted from across the table, breaking the serious moment as everyone at the table burst into laughter.

“Did I miss something?” Mom asked, looking from Mason to me.

“It’s an inside joke.” Kris smirked, knowing my mom hated it when we had those because we always held them over her head.

“Mr. Nick—” Mer started to say, looking to Victoria.

“Just Nick, Meredith,” Nick said, smiling.

“Nick is kind of like the king here since he’s Alpha. So, Kris said we should use the proper vocabulary. Like ‘shall,’” Mer explained, rolling her eyes.

“Oh?” Mom replied, still looking confused.

“And then Nick took it to heart and thinks he’s King Henry or something now,” I explained.

“I do not.” Nick laughed, sporting his Cheshire grin.

“Oh, I’m very sorry. Not King Henry. King of Hearts.” I beamed, causing Nolan to chuckle beside me.

Nick looked at me confused by my reference.

“Oh, I get it. Cause he smiles like the cat?” Victoria asked, laughing.

The table burst out laughing again, Arryssa started snorting. Nick looked so bewildered by everyone's reaction but couldn't help but laugh after hearing Arryssa snort. Arryssa suddenly stopped laughing and looked at her mate with wide eyes.

“You've never seen *Alice in Wonderland*?” she asked.

“O-M-G no way! This must be rectified!” Kris pulled out her phone and started searching for the movie to rent.

My mom was smiling at her, her shoulders easing slightly.

*Has she been that worried about us?*

Ashlynn, who must've gotten up and left the table, entered the dining hall from the kitchen carrying a tray full of little white bowls. She ceremoniously placed them in front of everyone, giving my mom hers last. It was Bananas Foster. My mom's favorite. How did she know that? I looked at Jackson and Mason who both shrugged their shoulders at me. A small smile played on Nolan's face. Had he told her?

‘I never told you this was her favorite?’ I sent to Nolan.

‘Some things you don't have to tell me. Some things I can just pick from your mind. For the most part we can pick anything out of each other's thoughts. As long as we are not blocking each other out,’ he explained.

‘Oh really. What's Mason's favorite dessert then?’ I queried.

‘Bananas foster.’ He smirked.

‘Lucky guess,’ I muttered.

Nolan chuckled under his breath, taking another bite of his dessert.

“Victoria, if you don’t mind me asking and feel free not to answer, but why weren’t you already with a pack?” Arryssa questioned.

“That is a long story, actually. I’d be happy to explain some other time.” She smiled shyly.

*She doesn’t want to talk about it in front of us. Hmm.*

“Of course. Maybe after dessert we could speak privately in the study?” Nick inquired.

“Sure,” my mom answered, nodding.

“And with that happy note. Did any of you do your homework this weekend?” Mer asked, taking a sip of her drink.

“Shit,” Kris and I replied in unison.

“Didn’t think so.” Mer smirked.

*Of course, with all this excitement going on, Mer still found time to do her homework ...*



“Have I mentioned that I hate Calculus?” I groaned, my face laying in my textbook.

We’d been doing homework for the last two hours. I was exhausted. For some reason I thought that since I got to be a

super cool werewolf water wielder chick now, I didn't have to go to school anymore.

*The fantasy was fun while it lasted ...*

'Sorry love that is not part of the package,' Nol laughed.

'Well, grrr,' I thought.

Nolan chuckled in my mind, and an invisible hand caressed my cheek.

*Holy crap we can do that? We can make each other feel things without being near each other?*

"You've mentioned it a couple times. But a future marine biologist has to have this course so stop talking to Nolan." Mer smirked.

"How did you know I was talking to Nolan?" I asked.

"You go a little cross-eyed when you do." Kris giggled.

"I do not!" I screeched.

"You kind of do. Should probably work on that." Mer giggled.

"Well, I've just finished my last question, so I'm done with homework for the night," I declared.

"Me too," Kris replied.

"Me three. So, Em, you keep asking us how we're doing here, but I have to ask. How are you doing?" Mer asked, looking at me quizzically.

"I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be?" I asked, "I'm always fine."

“Jackson overheard something about an anxiety attack today?” Mer frowned.

“Oh. I just had a bad dream. I’m fine,” I answered, waving off her concern.

Mer and Kris look at me with a ‘don’t give me that shit’ expression. They remember I used to have a lot of nightmares after Mia disappeared.

“It wasn’t like those nightmares. I can’t really remember what this one was about. I just felt really confused when I woke up and panicked,” I explained.

“You know if you ever need to talk, we’re here,” Kris said, “Maybe all the stress is causing the weird dreams.”

“I know, but I’m fine guys. Really.” I smiled warmly at my friends.

*If I say ‘I’m fine’ one more time they’re going to hold an intervention ...*

A light knock sounded at the door and my mom peeked her head in. “Hi, girls. Do you think I could have a minute alone with Emelia? It won’t take long.”

“Sure! Let’s go, Mer,” Kris answered, grabbing Mer by the hand and dragging her out of the room.

“What’s up, Mom?” I asked.

“I just wanted to come talk to you,” Victoria replied, shutting the door behind her.

*Uh oh.*

I sat down on the edge of my bed and she came to sit beside me.

“Did something happen?” I asked, taking her hand in mine.

“No, nothing’s happened,” she said.

“You’ve changed your mind and want to go home?” I grimaced.

“No. We’re all going to move here, and live with the Adolfos,” she said, staring down at her hands, “Is that okay with you?”

“It’s okay with me,” I said, “What about the house?”

“I’m going to sell it and use the money to pay for the cabin the Adolfo’s have provided for us.” she said, “They told me I didn’t have to pay for it, but that doesn’t sit right with me.”

I frowned, “We’ve lived in that house for as long as I can remember.”

Victoria smiled sadly, wrapping an arm around my shoulders, “It’s just a house, Emelia. Just because we won’t be living there anymore doesn’t erase the memories, we’ve made in it. I think it will be good for us to try to move on a little, make new memories, and I know you’ll be happier here, closer to Nolan.” She raised a brow at me.

I blushed, “You’re really okay with me staying in here, basically living across from my boyfriend?”

Victoria laughed, “Normally I would say no, but I also know there is no safer place to be than with your mate.”

“Did you used to live with a pack like this?” I asked, “when you were little?”

Victoria nodded, “When I was around your age, maybe eighteen, I was in a pack a little smaller than this one. I couldn’t shift but I was pack, nonetheless.”

“You can’t shift, but you’re still a werewolf?” I asked.

“I have a wolf buried inside me, she just can’t come out like Jackson or Mason’s wolves. I’m known as a dormant wolf.” she said.

“Why aren’t you with that pack anymore?” I asked.

“There was this boy in my pack who went feral one night,” she blurted, “and he killed my sister.”

“Oh no, I’m so sorry, Mom,” I said, squeezing my mother’s hand.

“It was very hard on our entire family. Especially my father. He couldn’t control his anger and he wanted to challenge the feral boy’s entire family. The Alpha refused his request because it wasn’t the family’s fault the boy turned feral. But my father couldn’t accept that, so he shifted and attacked that innocent family against the Alphas’ wishes, killing all of them but their youngest daughter. She was only two,” she explained, “The Alpha banished my parents from the pack after that.”

“Including you?” I asked.

She shook her head. “No, he told me I could stay. It wasn’t my fault. But I chose to leave, and I chose to take that little girl and adopt her. Her name was—”



“Mia?” I asked, eyes wide.

“Yes, and soon after that I met Jackson and Mason’s father and we married. We adopted this amazing little eight-year-old with curly hair and big curious gray eyes.” She grinned, wrapping her arms around me.

“I didn’t know Mia was adopted too,” I said.

“Neither did the boys. Nobody knew. Only my husband and I.” She nodded.

I stared down at my hands, deep in thought.

“Are you okay? I know it’s hard to talk about her.” Victoria asked.

“I think so. It helps to have Nolan nearby to keep my emotions in check. You know...since he’s hovering outside the door like a stalker,” I said loudly.

My mother started laughing. Nolan opened the door and walked into the room with his arms crossed and sour face, upset that he’d been caught.

“How did you know he was there?” Victoria chuckled.

“He thinks he’s sneaky, but he’s not.” I smirked up at him, “I could hear him thinking about whether he should be listening to us. Obviously, the former won.”

“I’m sorry to eavesdrop, Mrs. Lyall.” Nolan grimaced.

“That’s fine Nolan. I’m sure it’s hard for you two to keep secrets as it is being mates and all. Also, call me Victoria. Or Mom. I’ll take either,” she babbled, smiling dreamily at him.

I looked over at her with my jaw dropped.

*Just instant approval? No fight or anything?*

She laughed at my facial expression, “Even if I wanted to not like him it’s a little too late for that, Hun.”

“Was he your mate, Mom?” I asked suddenly, my ADD coming in full force.

“Who? My husband? No. I’ve never met my mate. And after leaving the pack I gave up on the hope of ever finding him. It was nice to have someone help with the kids though. And he used to be a very good friend.” she said, staring down at her hands.

“Very good friend that you made very good-looking children with,” Kris said from the doorway.

“So much for privacy,” Mer said, rolling her eyes as she came into view, “Sorry guys I tried to keep her away, but you know Kris.”

“That’s okay girls. I think I’ll head off to bed anyway. As should all of you.” she ordered, looking at us pointedly. “You still have school in the morning, and it’s past curfew.”

She kissed me on the forehead before wishing everyone a goodnight and exiting the room.

“So... you sleeping in here wonder boy or?” Kris asked.

“I’m leaving. I just came to tell Emelia goodnight,” he said, walking up to me with a grin so devious it almost matched his father’s signature Cheshire smile.

He bent down, placing his hands on each side of me on the bed and kissed me fervently. He wrapped an arm around me and laid me down onto my back, nibbling my bottom lip and causing me to let out a soft moan.

Instantly he was off me and out of the room, shutting the door behind him. I still laid flat on my back on the bed and breathless, staring at the ceiling in bewilderment. *What. Just. Happened?*

I sat up and saw both my best friends standing there with their jaws on the floor, both of their faces flushed. I imagined it was the same color as my own.

“Holy hell!” Mer finally muttered, fanning herself.

Kris said nothing. She was silent. Just stared at me before making an about-face and leaving the room and pounding down the stairs.

“Where is she going?” I asked.

“No idea. But your mom is right, we should go to sleep. I’m sure she’ll be back from wherever soon.” Mer murmured, staring at the empty spot where Kris had just stood.

After I turned the lights off in the room, I heard Mer somewhere in the darkness start giggling, “bet you twenty bucks she’s with Doran.”

“Deal,” I said, giggling along with her. “You know what I just thought about, Mer?”

“What?” Mer asked.

“Why did Kris have to go down to the kitchen for juice last night when we have a built-in kitchenette in our suite?” I smirked.

Mer didn't answer at first, leaving the room in quiet darkness.

“You think she lied about the make out session in the kitchen?” she eventually asked.

“I have no idea. We might have to do some sleuthing,” I grinned.

“Agreed. You might owe me that fifty bucks back,” She laughed.



The alarm went off way too early the next morning. I rolled over in bed to see it flashing 5:00 a.m. Why the hell were we getting up this fricken early?

Kris groaned from her bed, rolling over. Mer's bed was already empty and made up for the day.

*She's a weirdo.*

“How the hell is Mer already up with her bed made?” Kris whined, her head hiding under a pillow.

“Cause she's a demon spawn.” I sighed.

I could hear the shower running in our bathroom. When had she woken up?

“She just wakes up in the morning and the first thing she thinks is ‘Time to make my bed’? Weirdo,” Kris groaned. “Why do we even have to be awake at 5 a.m.? School is at 8!”

I grunted a response, sitting up in bed to stretch.

“Because the Alphas want everyone to have breakfast together before we leave. So, you two better get up cause it’s time to head down there and eat,” announced Mer, standing in the bathroom doorway dressed and putting mousse into her short brown waves.

“Fine but I’m going in my pajamas.” Kris whined.

“Ditto,” I agreed.

Mer said nothing, grabbing her phone before walking out of the room with a smirk on her face.

*Who is that happy this early?*

Kris and I hopped out of bed, grabbing our phones and putting on some slippers and robes before heading to the dining hall.

“Good morning, ladies!” Ashlynn smiled, walking in from the kitchen with a pan of the biggest cinnamon rolls I’d ever seen.

I’m talking bigger than Gaston’s giant cinnamon rolls at Disney World. My mouth watered just looking at the icing on them.

“Oh. You guys aren’t morning people, huh?” she snickered, looking down at our slippers.

“How’d you know?” I asked over a yawn.

“Because your hair looks like a beautiful troll doll, Luna.” Nolan laughed, walking in from the other room.

*Oh my God.*

I hadn’t even looked at myself before heading down here. I tried to smooth my hair down with my hands, but it was no use. My curls could not be tamed and required the power of conditioner.

Nolan just laughed at me, coming over to wrap his arms around me and placed a chaste kiss on my lips, “You look gorgeous, Emelia.”

I blushed, knowing I must look like a frightened cat.

“Oh my God, I look like the girl from *The Exorcist*,” Kris shrieked after looking at the mirror on the wall.

She turned to run back out the door and back towards the stairs, but just as she reached the bottom step she ran straight into Doran’s chest and fell onto her butt.

“Nice hair.” Doran smirked down at her, reaching a hand down to help her stand.

Kris looked up at him, her expression going from bewildered to pure rage. Doran’s smile grew even bigger. Kris stood, attempting to shove Doran out of her way. He didn’t move an inch.

“Get out of my way before I roast your ass, you white-haired freak!” She shouted, shoving past him again, this time Doran moved out of her way.

She stomped up the stairs muttering profanities under her breath. Doran watched her as she left before trotting into the dining hall with a cocky grin.

“You know she only makes fun of your hair because she likes it,” Mer said to him.

“Also, the fact that she threatened you is her way of flirting with you. So, ya know. Good job,” I said, throwing him a thumbs up for support.

He looked down at my thumb like he’d never seen such a small appendage before. He said nothing and continued to his normal table for breakfast.

“Wowww... Not a morning person either I guess,” Mer whispered.

“He gets a little better after he has some coffee,” Ashlynn said, patting me on the shoulder as I stared at my tiny thumb.

I look over at Nolan who was fully dressed with his black hair all spiked up nice and neat, “You know I was just thinking I was going to hate that you’re a morning person. But I changed my mind. Be as happy and awake as you want.” I smiled up at him with my cheesiest grin, causing Nolan to laugh.

“Emelia Rae Suneer you couldn’t even brush your hair before coming down for breakfast?” my mother scolded me,

coming into the hall with my brothers behind her.

“She’s trying to show Nolan what she’s like early, Mom. Don’t want him to find out later and run off,” Mason replied, smirking at me.

I started looking around the room for something to throw at him.

“I got you, girl,” Ashlynn said from across the table as she walked over to Mason, placed the smallest cinnamon roll on his plate and then smacked him on the back of the head.

“What the hell, Ash!” he shouted.

“Nolan let’s switch. I’ll take Ashlynn and you take Mason?” I said, looking at him with my best puppy dog eyes.

“I don’t know, Luna. Can he cook?” he asked, sizing Mason up.

“Uh no. I am not letting this creep into MY kitchen,” Ashlynn answered for me. “But no worries, Em, I already see you as my sister.” she walked over to me and handed me a plate with the biggest roll she could find.

“I love you,” I said, almost tearing up at the beauty of my cinnamon roll.

Nolan reached over my shoulder, plucking a piece of my roll off before I could stop him. He plopped it into his mouth, running out of my reach to his seat at the table. *Someone’s playful this morning.*



Kris walked back in past me still in her pajamas, but her hair was brushed into a decent-looking ponytail. I heard Doran laugh from where he was sitting and decided to go over to him.

“Doran, do you want to sit with us?” I asked, trying to sound polite.

His eyes widened slightly, and he peeked over at Kris, who was looking anywhere but at us.

“I’m not sure what strategy you’re going for. But I promise she does NOT want space,” I whispered to him, “She’d want you all up in her grill. Not scared. Not careful. Just full-blown there.” I said, looking him dead in the eye.

‘Are you meddling Luna?’ Nolan chuckled.

‘Of course not. How dare you accuse me of meddling!’ I retorted.

“So ya coming?” I asked Doran.

“Sure,” he responded hesitantly, standing to follow me back to our table.

“You all know Doran, right?” I asked, taking my seat beside Nolan who smiled at me. I felt a sense of pride that wasn’t my own wash over me. I smiled back at him, avoiding the daggers I felt Kris throwing in my direction.

‘She is pretty scary looking right now,’ Nol sent to me.

‘Yes. But deep down she wanted him over here but would never admit it,’ I replied.

‘So, you’ll take her rage if she gets to be happy?’ he asked.

‘Of course. What are BFFs for?’ I smiled.

‘Slumber parties?’ Nolan grinned.

I rolled my eyes at him, ‘Says the guy who hasn’t told Jackson he wants him as Omega yet.’

‘I’ll tell him. Eventually,’ Nolan frowned.

‘Have you told your father?’ I asked.

‘I have,’ he sent.

‘What did he say?’ I asked, peeking over at my brother through hooded lashes.

‘He agreed with my choice. Not that it would change anything if he hadn’t,’ he said.

“Good morning, Adolfo Pack!” Arryssa announced as she came into the room with Nick following closely behind.

Everyone muttered a good morning. Arryssa and Nick looked to the extra seat taken by Doran at our table and tried to hide their smirks from Kris who was aggressively chewing on her roll.

“Ashlynn, amazing food as always!” I muttered over a mouthful of icing covered goodness.

My mother’s face turned red from embarrassment, and she rubbed a hand down the side of her face.

“Oh, Victoria this is a wolf pack,” Arryssa laughed at her expression, “there is much worse than talking with your mouth full.”

My mother's face turned even more red.

We quietly finished our breakfasts, most of us still looked half asleep. Near the end of breakfast, I noticed Doran staring at Kris, but she hadn't seemed to notice yet. When she finally looked over at him, he smirked and slowly licked some icing off his lips. Kris stared back at his lips, a blush creeping up her neck.

*Damn.*

"Cough it up, sister!" Mer shouted, scaring everyone who was silently eating.

"Damn," I muttered, handing a twenty over to her.

"You guys made another bet? And still did not include me?" Ashlynn whined.

"Sorry, you're not around when it happens," I winced.

"Ohh she should join our room!" Mer squealed.

"Oh my gosh. Can I?" Ashlynn asked.

"Will you bring snacks?" I asked, smiling.

"Duh," Ash retorted.

"Then duh," I said.

Everyone at the table chuckled in response.

"Can you fit another bed in that room?" Victoria asked, shaking her head in amusement.

"Actually, that day bed converts into a full-size bed." Arryssa answered her.

“Ooh dibs!” I shouted before anyone else.

“Are we just going to ignore that these two bimbos keep making bets on my love life?” Kris scoffed.

“So, you admit there’s a love life going on here?” Mer smirked, head on her chin.

“Oh, come on guys!” Kris growled.

“Okay. okay. Leave her alone,” I laughed, “You guys are embarrassing poor Doran,” I said, throwing a wicked grin in Kris’s direction.

“Alright, enough fun. You guys should all finish getting ready for school and head off,” Nick announced, standing from the table.

‘Yay, back to school,’ I thought.

‘Hey what’s the worst that could happen? You already blew up a fountain,’ Nolan chuckled.

‘Calculus could happen, Nolan. Calculus.’ I cringed, making the barfing motion with my hand.

Nolan chuckled.

## The Nightmare on Suneer Street

### Emelia

I took my seat in AP Bio and pulled out my notes and homework from Friday so that Mr. Tate could come around and collect it. We were supposed to be dissecting frogs, but my usual lab partner had gone MIA. *Great.* I would have paired up with Mer, but we had to work with our assigned seat partners. I was really hoping Mr. Tate paired me up with another group and didn't make me cut this frog's little guts out alone. Mr. Tate walked into the room, setting down a large box that I could smell all the way from my seat in the back of the room. It smelled like cleaning fluid and mold.

“Good morning class! I hope y'all are ready to cut into these frogs!” Mr. Tate smiled at the class, far more awake than any of us were.

A few of us grunted responses but nobody seemed enthused to be cutting into amphibians this morning.

Mr. Tate nodded, “Yes thrilling I know. Now before we get started, I’m going to take roll call, and on that note, I want to introduce your new classmate, Mr. Locke Blakely.”

A boy with shoulder-length blond hair and baby blue eyes walked into the classroom, causing a few girls to perk up. I couldn’t blame them, he was good-looking and definitely had the whole bad boy thing going on. He wore dark jeans and a black leather jacket over a white T-shirt. His hair looked slightly flattened, like he had hat hair. I was guessing from a helmet.

*He must drive a motorcycle. Ooh maybe he and Nolan would get along?*

Locke turned his head, locking eyes with me.

*Why is he looking at me?*

“Miss Suneer?” Mr. Tate repeated, because apparently, I was in La-La land today, “Do you mind letting Mr. Blakely sit with you today? It seems you are missing a lab partner anyway,” he requested.

“Oh sure,” I mumbled, shaking my head to regain focus.

Locke took his seat next to me and I was overwhelmed with the scent of pine needles and eucalyptus.

*Wow. He smells nice.*

Mr. Tate started handing out the tools and frogs for today’s assignment.

I grimaced, *well he smells nicer than these frogs.*

“Are you alright, love?” Locke looked over at me concerned.  
“You’re looking a little pale.”

*OMG is this guy British? Drool.*

But he was right. I did feel queasy, but I didn’t think it was from the frogs.

“Oh, I’m fine. Just forgot to eat breakfast,” I lied, gesturing towards the dead frog on our table.

He squinted his eyes at me, “Well should we get started with this frog then?”

“Sure,” I said picking up the scalpel.

We didn’t say anything else to each other for the remainder of the class, just completed our project in awkward silence. I glanced over at Mer who was looking at me with concerned eyes. I tried to convey that I was fine without Locke noticing. Eventually, the bell finally rang for the end of class. I grabbed my things and hurried out of the room before Locke could say anything. The second I was out of the doorway I ran straight into what felt like a brick wall. I had run smack into Nolan’s chest.

*Man, he’s strong. Any normal guy would’ve at least stumbled.*

“What’s wrong, Luna?” Nolan asked, looking down at me with furrowed brows, grasping my shoulders to steady me.

“Nothing- I don’t know- I’m fine,” I lied.

*Wow you’re on a roll with the lies today chick.*

Of course, Nolan knew I was lying, he had known something was wrong before I had even left the classroom. He looked back over my shoulder and locked eyes with Locke as he came out of the classroom, bumping into Nolan's shoulders as he went. Nolan's eyes flashed amber for a moment and he shut eyes, trying to take calming breaths.

"Who is that guy?" he whispered.

I moved my mouth to reply but didn't know what to say.

*Why do I feel so on edge? I don't even know the guy.*

My heart was pounding in my chest, and I recognized my telltale signs of an oncoming panic attack.

"That's the new guy. Locke Blakely." Mer replied to Nolan's question, coming to stand by us in the hall. "You okay, Em? I don't like the way that guy was looking at you. You were obviously uncomfortable," Mer frowned.

I said nothing, I just stared straight at Nolan's chest, taking deep breaths. I tried to breathe in his smoky scent and wash away the scent of pine that was making my skin itch. It helped a little, Nolan smelled like cologne and firewood and home. We just stood there, Nolan's arms wrapped around me as he pushed calming waves through my mind. We must've been standing here for a while because when I looked away from Nolan's chest the hallway had cleared. Mer had left, probably gone to her next class. Nolan just held me, waiting until I'd calmed enough to speak.



“Emelia. What did he do?” Nolan whispered through gritted teeth.

I looked up into his blazing amber eyes, his jaw was clenched, and his nostrils were flaring. He looked like he was about to lose it, and when I dove deeper into his thoughts, I could sense him trying to bury his anger. I could feel that he didn’t want to scare me and knew that it would have only made my anxiety worse if he’d gone to maim Locke.

“He didn’t do anything. I don’t know what happened. I just got this feeling in my gut that something was wrong with him,” I explained.

“I couldn’t hear you again.” Nolan whispered, “Like when you had that nightmare. It was like you were shut off from me. I could hear you thinking about your dissection project and then suddenly nothing. I couldn’t reach your mind again until you ran into me,” He grimaced.

“That’s freaky,” I said.

“Yes. It is. I don’t want you going near that guy Luna,” Nolan pleaded, “I’m sorry I don’t mean to order you around but-”

“No, I get it and I trust you. I don’t really want to be around him anyway,” I agreed, looking in the direction Locke had gone.

“Good,” he said, wrapping his arm around me and guiding me to my locker.

*So much for coming back to a normal high school day...*

“Is he a wolf?” I asked.

“He didn’t smell like one. But he didn’t smell entirely human either,” Nolan’s brows furrowed.

“Do I smell human?” I asked, raising my eyebrows at him.

Nolan chuckled, “Yes and no. I can smell your magic at certain points, but you mostly smell like sea salt and sunscreen to me.”

“Sunscreen? I don’t wear sunscreen,” I scoffed.

“I didn’t think you did,” He laughed again, “Now let’s get you to your next class, if you’re up for it.”

“Okay,” I sighed.



It finally hit lunchtime. I was starving, and I swear Mer stared at the back of my head for the entire second class, causing Kris to take notice too. She wouldn’t stop asking me what was wrong, and I still didn’t want to talk about it. Even after leaving class, I was scanning the hallway like a paranoid weirdo. Maybe I could sense the magic on him, like Nolan had on me. Maybe that was why he’d made me feel so panicked. I mean I had felt weird after meeting Nolan, and he was a werewolf. But so were Jackson and Mason and I’d been living with them since they had turned. The girls and I got in line for lunch, Kris and Mer had blissfully given up on asking me questions when they’d realized it was pizza day. I didn’t even

rejoice over this. I needed to find him. I needed to interrogate this guy, or I was going to lose my mind.

*Nolan asked me to stay away from him though. Shit.*

“Girls I’m going to run to the bathroom really quick, okay?” I announced before dropping my empty tray back down on the pile of clean ones.

*Well, that’s not sanitary. Oh well.*

I headed out of the café and towards my locker. I tried to feel out for where Nolan was, but my mind hit a wall.

*I can’t feel him. Shit.*

I turned the corner to my locker and found Locke leaning against it, staring at his phone. Was he waiting for me? How had he known I was coming?

“Hey,” I said, cautiously approaching him.

“Hey, I wanted to check on you. You seemed spooked earlier,” he said, frowning down at me.

“I’m sorry. I don’t normally act like that. You just—” I stopped short, what was I trying to say?

“I give you a weird vibe?” he asked, a small smile on his face.

“Yes. How did you know?” I replied, eyes wide.

“I give a lot of people that vibe. I’m not sure why. Makes it hard to make any friends when I move to a new town,” he shrugged.

“You move a lot?” I asked.

That must suck, people just assuming your bad news without getting to know you.

*Wow I feel like a terrible person.*

“Yeah, I’m a military brat. Move every year or so,” He murmured nonchalantly.

“That must suck. Why don’t you come eat lunch with my friends and I?” I asked.

*Crap. Nolan’s going to kill me.*

A small smirk crossed Locke’s face before it disappeared.

*Did I say something funny?*

“Your friends Meredith and Kristine?” Locke asked, scratching the back of his head, “They’ve been giving me death glares from down the hall so I’m not sure that’s a great idea.”

I glanced over my shoulder, and sure enough Mer and Kris were peeking around the corner. Did they think they were being sneaky?

*Well, you’ve been caught, dummies.*

I waved them over to us, turning back to Locke.

“They’re just being protective. Also, I’m going to advise you not to call her Kristine. She’ll definitely hate you.” I grimaced.

“Noted,” He laughed, running a hand through his long blond hair.

The girls came up behind me, sandwiching me between them, trying to give off a ‘fear me’ vibe. I rolled my eyes at them.

“Hello, Luck.” Kris smirked.

“It’s Locke, Kris,” Mer said, scrunching her eyebrows at Kris.

“I know that, Mer. I was trying to sound prissy,” Kris tried to whisper.

“Oh. My bad. Hello, Luck,” Mer repeated.

I put my face in my hands, shaking it. My two best friends. What wonders they were.

“Hello, Meredith.” Locke nodded politely to Mer. “Hello, Clarice.” He smirked down at Kris.

Kris’s mouth just missed the floor when it dropped, “Wow you’re funny. Why don’t we like him?” Kris asked, looking at me.

“I gave her bad vibes,” Locke answered for me.

*Oh my God, kill me now ...*

“Oh. And we’re over that now?” she asked, looking back and forth between us.

“I guess so. I was trying to invite him for lunch. Hannibal Lector here tells me he doesn’t have any friends,” I pretended to whisper.

Locke chuckled under his breath, liking my continued use of his reference.

“Well, we’re minus a couple boyfriends today, so why not.”  
Mer shrugged.

I looked at her questioningly, and she mouthed the word ‘Camp’ to me. Why had they gone back to camp this early? Why hadn’t Nolan told me?

“Actually, I heard they’re letting school out early today,”  
Kris announced triumphantly.

“What why?” Mer and I asked.

“Mysterious serial killer looking kid flooded the gymnasium,” she shrugged, looking at Locke.

Mer and I snapped our heads to Locke. *No way.*

Kris busted out laughing. She was joking?

*And I feel like an assuming asshole again...*

“Its parent teacher conference day you gullible weirdos.”  
Kris laughed hard, bending over to hold her knees.

“Sorry about that. No pizza I guess,” I said to Locke.

“What about the diner?” Mer interjected.

“Ooh I could kill a milkshake,” I moaned.

“Then let’s go,” Locke smiled down at me.

He was handsome. I bet the girls around here would snatch him up pretty quickly. We grabbed our things and headed to the parking lot just as the early dismissal bell rang. When we got to the diner it was still empty. The after-school rush hadn’t yet come.

“Maybe most of them ate pizza and won’t come.” Mer muttered, thinking the same thing as me.

We stopped at our favorite booth and plopped down. Locke stood awkwardly by the bench, unsure if he should sit next to me or not. I patted the seat.

“The usual, girls?” Leslie, a young waitress asked as she came to stand at the end of the table.

“Yes please, Les,” Kris replied.

“And our new friend here will take a vanilla shake,” I added.

“Got it.” Leslie smiled, scribbling down our order as she walked back to the counter.

“A vanilla shake?” Locke asked, looking down at me with a raised eyebrow.

“You look like a vanilla guy,” Mer answered for me.

“So, Locke, why’d you move to Covington, Louisiana? Parents work?” Kris inquired.

“Normally yes. My dads in the military so we move a lot. But this time he was deployed overseas and my mom went with him. I’m eighteen so I decided to start living alone and picked a random place to finish high school,” he explained.

“You’re a senior?” I asked.

“I am. I know it’s odd, but something drew me here. Maybe it’s the NOLA food I keep hearing about.” He grinned, placing his chin in his palm, turning to face me a little more.

*Is he flirting with me?*

“What are your after-school plans, Locke?” Mer asked, taking his attention off me for a moment.

He started having a full conversation with Mer about going to college for some sort of research job, but I couldn't seem to pay attention. My anxiety was creeping in, and this guy was sitting way too close for comfort. Closer than any guy whose wasn't Nolan or one of my brothers had ever sat. I locked eyes with Kris across the table, but just as I was about to ask for help Leslie came over, placing four milkshakes in front of us.

“Wow, this is pretty good for plain vanilla,” Locke murmured.

Mer and Kris grunted an agreement. I just stared at my cup, watching as some of the strawberry ice cream melted down over the edge.

*'Nolan I can't breathe,'* I thought.

*Nolan.*

*Nolan.*

*Nolan.*

I kept repeating his name in my head as I focused on the melted ice cream dripping down the cup. I was going to pass out. I could not breathe. There was no oxygen in here. I tried to reach for the small pill bottle at the bottom of my purse but couldn't find it.

*Nolan.*



*Nolan.*

*Nolan.*

I was suddenly knocked back into reality at the sound of a loud growl. I turned my head, my vision blurry, to find an empty seat beside me. Kris and Mer were staring wide-eyed at the three figures standing next to our table. Nolan and Locke stood face to face, neither moving nor talking. Jackson stood on the opposite side of the table, holding a protective arm in front of Mer. Nolan's eyes were completely amber, but Locke's eyes were not his own either. His normally blue eyes had shifted to a dark shade of purple. My head was swimming.

*What the hell ? Am I seeing things? Weren't his eyes blue?*

"I think you should go," Jackson said through gritted teeth, standing behind Nolan.

Jackson looked down at me with concerned eyes. Locke took notice of this, turning to look at me. His eyes were still a dark shade of purple but I saw no concern there. The longer he stared at me, the more it felt like an inky black snake was slithering around my neck and cutting off my air supply.

*I can't breathe. I still cannot breathe.*

*'Nolan, I can't breathe,'* I tried to send him.

I watched as everyone's mouths moved, realizing I could no longer hear them. All I could hear was Nolan's growling and the sound of my heart pounding. The room was spinning, and I was enveloped in darkness. I was falling.



*I was lying on a blanket in the middle of a beautiful meadow full of white Flowers, my dark hair and bright yellow dress popping in comparison to them.*

*“So, you like daisies huh?” Locke asked, sitting beside me with his head relaxing on his knees.*

*I sat up like a shot, how had I gotten here?*

*“What happened to the diner?” I asked.*

*“You passed out. I don’t know why I expected anything less. You never could stand to be near me for very long,” He sighed.*

*“What are you talking about we just met today?” I demanded.*

*Locke looked over at me then with a small knowing smile. This wasn’t the first time we’d met.*

*“My nightmare. You were in it, but I didn’t know you. Even though I was acting like I did. How did I forget?” I asked, shaking my head at myself.*

*“Because I made you forget. I always do.” He shrugged.*

*“You can control my dreams?” I asked.*

*“I can. And I can make you forget them after. It’s easier that way,” he frowned.*

*“Why?” I whispered.*

*“Because you can’t handle remembering. It makes you act like you did today. You panic,” He replied angrily.*

*“Why would being around you make me panic?” I asked.*

*“I can’t explain that.” he said.*

*“How can you do this? What are you? What is this?” I asked, gesturing to the dream around us.*

*“I can’t explain that either,” he sighed.*

*“Jeez. Why can’t I reach Nolan?” I asked myself, aggravated.*

*“Because I don’t want you to. I don’t want you anywhere near him. He weakens you. And I need you,” He explained.*

*“For what? Never mind you can’t explain that either right?” I grumbled.*

*He shook his head no at me. He paused, his brow furrowing and looked up at the sky. The ground started to shake a little. Like a small earthquake was coming. Locke rolled his eyes.*

*“What?” I demanded.*

*“He’s trying to reach you.” He sighed.*

*“Nolan ?” I asked.*

*“Yes. Can’t blame him, really. It must be infuriating not being able to hear your thoughts. Well, I suppose I’ll let you return for now,” he grumbled.*

*“But I won’t remember this?” I asked.*

*“You’ll only remember that you passed out in the diner after Nolan and I had a confrontation. And maybe the daisies. I’ll let you keep those. Goodbye Emelia.” Locke smirked, before placing a kiss to my forehead.*

*My vision started spinning again.*



“Emelia? Luna? Emelia?” Nolan pleaded, saying my name over and over, cradling me in his lap.

The Jeep shook aggressively as we must’ve hit a rocky road, and I could hear the girls reassuring Nolan that I would be okay. Every so often I heard someone’s hands gripping the steering wheel, it must have been Jackson driving.

‘Nolan?’ I thought.

Nolan’s hand froze where it had been playing with my hair.

‘Luna?’ Nolan whispered to my mind.

‘What happened?’ I grimaced, my head pounding.

‘You had a panic attack and passed out. I’m so sorry,’ he whispered, sounding mournful.

‘Why are you sorry?’ I asked.

‘I should’ve comforted you instead of having a pissing contest with that asshole,’ he confessed.

‘Asshole? You mean Locke?’ I asked.

‘Yes him,’ he replied.

‘What did he do? I just remember getting milkshakes and he was talking to Mer about college,’ I asked.

‘He got too close to you, and you started panicking. I couldn’t hear you up until then. I was on my way back from the camp and suddenly I couldn’t hear you, so Jackson and I came to find you. When we got near the diner, I could feel you starting to panic. He was sitting too close, and you didn’t like it. You couldn’t breathe. Finally, your voice broke through, and I could hear you. You kept saying my name, pleading for me, but you couldn’t hear me,’ he explained.

‘When I got into the restaurant you were white as a ghost. Mer and Kris were trying to talk to you, but it was like you were in a different world. I tried to get to you, but that prick blocked my path. He’s lucky I didn’t kill him right then and there. I let out a warning growl, and you finally moved. You tried to reach for me, but you didn’t have enough energy. And then you passed out. I caught you before you hit the diner floor,’ he confessed.

‘Holy crap,’ I frowned.

‘Yes. Holy crap. You’ve been out for almost an hour. I didn’t know what to do,’ he said, ‘and I couldn’t hear you again after that. Did you have another dream? You were breathing funny.’

‘I remember dreaming about white flowers,’ I confessed.

‘Hmm,’ He murmured.

I opened my eyes to look out the window when I heard the Jeep hit the gravel. We were back home at the camp. Everyone got out of the car silently. Nolan wouldn't let me down to walk, still cradling me in his arms like I was a child. He carried me all the way into the main lodge with my friends following behind.

“What happened?” Arryssa gasped, running up to us with a concerned expression.

“I passed out,” I whispered, my throat extremely dry.

Arryssa looked up into Nolan's eyes, searching for answers.

“Have you ever seen a wolf with eyes that glow purple?” Nolan asked his mother.

Her eyebrows creased, “no I haven't.”

“I thought he wasn't a wolf?” I attempted to say but only understood half of what came out.

“He doesn't smell like one.” Jackson commented, coming to stand beside Nolan.

He looked down at me, searching me from head to toe. I kicked his shoulder with my foot to reassure him I was fine, and he cracked a small smile.

“I'll go get you some water,” he said before leaving the room, Mer following closely behind him.

I was suddenly exhausted, barely able to keep my eyes open.

“I’m going to take her to lay down,” Nolan announced to the others before carrying me upstairs and into his bedroom.

*Wait. Why were we in here?*

He laid me down on his pillow and sat down beside me. His piercing green eyes were the last thing I saw before sleep took me and I was surrounded by the scent of smoke and burning wood. If I had any dreams, I didn’t remember them.

I woke up to silence. The sun had disappeared, and the moon had taken its place. Nolan was no longer by my side, and I could sense that he wasn’t in the room. I noticed the clock on the bedside table read 7:00 p.m. Had I missed dinner? My stomach growled in protest. Did I eat anything at the diner? I stood up and left Nolan’s room turning towards the stairs. The dining hall was empty, but a small bonfire was going on out front. My friends surrounded it, roasting marshmallows . Kris sat on Doran’s lap, laughing at something he had said. But I didn’t see Nolan.

“He’s with his father,” Arryssa said, announcing herself.

She was sitting cross-legged on the floor of her office with the door marginally cracked.

“What are you doing?” I asked, noticing the small stones that lay in a semi-circle around her.

“I’m meditating. Would you like to join me?” she smiled.

“Sure,” I shrugged, walking over to take a seat in front of her.

“What are the stones for?” I asked.

“They represent each of the earthly elements. I don’t normally use these but with you girls here I thought I should investigate it. See if it could help you girls learn to channel your gifts,” she explained.

“That’s sweet of you.” I smiled and looked down at each stone.

Each stone had a different color and texture. One yellow with swirls of gold throughout it—Air. One green, reminding me of moss on a tree—Earth. One purple and translucent—Spirit. One was red and jaggedly shaped, and when I touched it, there was a black dust left upon my fingertips—Fire. And the last one was light blue with what looked like a pattern of waves—Water.

I reached out to touch the stone, feeling a slight pull towards it. As my hand made contact, I could smell sea salt and felt a light spray upon my face. It was as if I was standing near the ocean as the tide washed in. I looked at Arryssa and her eyes had widened slightly. She was experiencing the same thing as me. I was sharing my feelings with her by channeling it through the stone.

“I think you girls should take these stones. Use them to learn about your gifts together. I think that it would be smart to start training to use them.” She requested.

“Use them for what though?” I asked.

“I believe that they’re used to connect us with the surrounding elements, but also as an aide to protect our pack. So though it may be new for all of you, I think it would be



smart to learn to use them in combat,” Arryssa explained, looking at me thoughtfully.

“Like hurt people with them?” I grimaced.

“Only in a defensive manner. To protect yourselves and your pack mates,” She explained.

“Oh. You think we’ll have to do that?” I asked.

“I hope not. But it’s better to be prepared. I also think it will help you personally to learn to connect with your element,” she said with a sad smile.

“Why me?” I asked.

“I think that it could help you calm yourself in certain situations,” She looked at me knowingly.

“My anxiety?” I asked feebly.

“Yes. Next time you feel the panic starting to rise and Nolan is not there to help I want you to hold on to this stone and think about that ocean spray on your face,” She smiled.

“I can try,” I sighed and looked down at the stone in my hand.

We had these gifts for a reason, right? The Moon Goddess had granted us with them because she thought we would need them. The Sacred always show up during a great time of strife. We needed to prepare ourselves for that, right?

“Now let’s go get you something to eat, shall we?” Arryssa stood, holding out her hand to me.

“Arryssa, I would love to read whatever books you have about The Sacred, and the Moon Goddess for that matter,” I said.

Arryssa smiled brightly. “Of course. I’ll find you some and put them in your room.”

I took her hand with a small smile on my face and followed her into the kitchen to eat some of Ashlynn’s leftover lasagna. It was SOOO good.

Familiar arms wrapped around me as I was finishing my last bite. Nolan nuzzled his face into the back of my hair and inhaled. I felt his shoulders relax and a strange rumble coming from his chest.

*Was he purring?*

“I’m not purring,” he laughed at me.

“Sounds like purring to me,” I sang.

Arryssa let out a loud laugh as she exited the room, giving us privacy.

“Are you feeling better Luna?” he murmured, touching his nose along the cuff of my ear.

“Well, your sister’s cooking is the cure to all so yes,” I grinned.

“Do you want to talk about what happened? Do you remember your dream at all?” he asked.

“I don’t remember anything about it, really. Just the flowers. I remember feeling confused and distraught though. Like I was

talking to someone, but I don't know who," I frowned, racking my brain for anything I could remember.

"Can you remember their face?" he asked.

"No, I don't remember anything about them," I frowned.

"That's weird. And I can't hear you when you're having the dreams either. I don't like this," he grimaced.

"Me either," I sighed, "I think they were daisies. Daisies were Mia's favorite flower."

"Do you think you were dreaming about her?" Nolan asked.

"I don't know," I said, frowning.

Nolan moved my hair over my shoulder, continuing to move his nose along the skin on my neck and sending goosebumps down my arms. Nolan chuckled, liking my reaction to his touch. He began placing feather-like kisses under my ear and down my neck, but when he got to the nape of my neck, he bit me gently. I let out an embarrassing moan, looking quickly towards the door that Arryssa had just vacated.

'She went outside,' Nolan murmured, tracing his fingers down the side of my arm.

'Super hearing. I'm jealous,' I said, sounding breathless.

He chuckled again, continuing his slow torture as he kissed back up my neck and turned me around to face him and lifted me up onto the counter. He kissed my lips, caressing my face in his hands and I wrapped my legs around him. I could hear my heart pounding in my ears, not for the first time today. But

this time it didn't scare me. I kissed Nolan fervently, forgetting that we were sitting in plain sight. The thought that his parents could walk in at any moment was the only thing giving me strength to pull away.

"I missed you today," Nolan whispered huskily, causing me to let out another small moan.

Nolan's eyes swirled with amber, and he stiffened his shoulders, visibly trying to hold himself back, "Your eyes are glowing, Luna."

"What?" I gasped.

"They're glowing almost a powdered blue. I've never seen someone's eyes glow that color. It must be because you're the Water Spirit. It's like when my wolf is more present my eyes change to amber. You look stunning, Emelia," he praised.

I blushed, nobody had ever looked at me the way Nolan had in that moment. Looked at me like I was something extraordinarily precious. I lifted my hand to caress his cheek and his eyes turned completely amber.

"Luna, do you remember how I told you there was something private that happened after the bonding ceremony?" Nolan asked.

My eyes widened, and a blush crept up my cheeks. "I do."

*It's not sex, right?*

Nolan chuckled, 'No Luna it's not sex.'

“Oh. Well, that’s good. Well not good, but-” I stuttered, my face felt like it was on fire.

Nolan ran a finger over my neck again, in the same spot he’d bit earlier, “After the ceremony we have to mark each other, the mark will show everyone that we belong to only each other.” he whispered huskily.

“Mark each other how?” I asked, my chest heaving.

Nolan smirked before leaning down to place his lips at the base of my neck again and lightly scraped his elongated teeth across the sensitive skin before kissing it.

“You have to bite me?” I asked breathily, tilting my head to give him better access, “Nolan, you do remember I’m human right? I can’t pierce your skin with my teeth like you could.”

Nolan nipped my earlobe before standing straight and facing me again, “I know. We will cross that bridge when we come to it. I just wanted to you be prepared for it.” he said.

“When you bite me, it will leave a mark? Like a scar?” I asked.

“It will leave a mark, yes. It will also cause our scents to combine, so other wolves will know that you are mine, and I am yours.” he said, kissing the tip of my nose before leaning in to kiss my mouth once more.

“Should we join the others outside?” I whispered, my heart still beating out of my chest.

“Probably,” he sighed, his face within an inch of mine.

I could feel his breath on my face, but he made no move to leave. I smirked at him, and my eyes must have returned to normal because he blinked rapidly, clearing his vision as if he was in a trance.

“Come on, I’ll make you a s’more.” he grinned.

“A nice golden one sounds nice,” I lied.

“Don’t pretend you don’t like it burned.” He snorted.

“Oh, good you’ve passed the test!” I declared.

“Kind of easy when I have the cheat sheet.” He chuckled.



The rest of the week went by without any further incidents. Locke had stayed silent during our one class together and I didn’t see him outside of that class. I was thankful for a few days without any drama, but I was still exhausted. I hadn’t been sleeping well. I’d been having nightmares every night this week and had been woken up with Nolan sitting at the edge of my bed with grim eyes. I could see how much it was starting to weigh on him that he couldn’t help me, like me he had bags under his eyes and his hair looked messier than usual, like he’d been running his hand through it nonstop. On Friday morning, the lack of sleep had finally caught up with me.

“Emelia?” Locke elbowed me awake, “Mr. Tate is looking at you. You should at least pretend to be awake.”

I sat up and looked at the clock hanging over the whiteboard. I'd slept through almost the entire class.

*Shit, hope there's no pop quiz on Monday.*

"Not sleeping well?" Locke asked, never taking his eyes off the whiteboard.

*Is this the first time he's talked to me since Monday?*

"Not really. Bad dreams," I whispered back, trying to gauge where we were in the lesson.

*Why am I talking to this guy?*

"About what?" he asked.

"I can't remember," I muttered, internally slapping myself for answering.

*Why am I talking to this dude right now?! Come on Em!*

"Hmm. Been eating too many sweets before bed? I heard that can affect your dreams," he grinned.

"Not any more than usual," I answered curtly.

*Oh my God, shut up, Emelia. Stop talking to this guy.*

Locke turned his chair towards me, his knee touching mine. My breath caught in my throat, and panic constricted my heart, and suddenly I was sitting in the rain. The sprinklers on the ceiling had busted, but there was no fire. I snatched my backpack off the floor, pushing past the other students trying to leave the room. The girls were screaming and covering their hair with their textbooks, and the guys were all laughing. Like this wasn't bizarre. Like this happened all the time. But I knew

it didn't. I knew I had done that. I had instinctively reached for my powers the moment Locke's knee had touched mine, I had felt for the nearest water source and pulled for it to come protect me, and it must've set off the sprinklers.

"Are you alright, love?" Locke came to stand beside me in the hallway.

I didn't answer and glanced around nervously for Mer to come save me.

"Nolan!" I pushed towards his mind.

"What are you?" I asked Locke, looking directly into his eyes.

They were his normal shade of blue. No hint of the purple I had seen on Monday anywhere. His eyes widened slightly, as if my question had shocked him.

I repeated myself more forcefully this time, "What. Are. You?"

"What kind of question is that, love?" He smirked down at me like I was crazy.

*Who does this guy think he is?*

I grabbed him by the front of his shirt, pushing him back into the empty classroom having its own personal rain shower. I slammed the door behind me, locking it before Mr. Tate could get to us.

"Don't you lie to me, Blakely," I ordered.



“I’m not lying. I don’t understand your question.” He frowned.

“Why did your eyes glow purple?” I demanded.

No answer.

“Why can’t I hear Nolan when you’re around?” I shouted.

No answer, his grin widening with each ludicrous question.

“Tell me what you are. Now,” I snapped, the rain shower growing more forceful.

Still nothing, his grin turning cocky. I was going to beat this dude’s ass. I lifted my fist, ready to punch somebody for the first time in my life, but somebody grabbed my fist before it made contact. Nolan. He was here. He wrapped his arm around me, pushing me behind him.

“Are we going to have a problem here man?” Nolan asked, growling.

“I’m not sure what issue you’re referring to. She’s the one asking crazy questions,” Locke said casually.

*This fricken arrogant ass liar.*

Nolan growled, his eyes turning fully amber, and he took a menacing step towards Locke. I could hear the class yelling ‘Fight! Fight! Fight!’ outside the door, so I pulled down the window blinds usually only used during lock downs. Locke’s eyes swirled with purple and small sparks were coming off his fingertips.

*Oh shit.*

I turned back to the door where Mer was peeking through the small crack the curtain had left. I mouthed ‘Go get Jackson. Now.’ and quickly closed the curtain so that the rest of the class could no longer see us.

“You’re giving her the dreams,” Nolan said through gritted teeth.

*How did he know that?*

“What dreams? It’s not my fault if she’s dreaming of me,” Locke said, holding up both hands in defense.

Nolan stepped forwards again, raising a clenched fist. I laid my hand against his back, causing him to freeze.

‘Luna?’ he asked.

‘He’s taunting you. He wants you to hit him,’ I said.

Nolan’s arm lowered to his side, but his shoulders were still tense. I pressed my palms against his spine, trying to send calming waves like the ones he’d sent me in the past.

‘You’re right. But why would he want me to hit him?’ he pondered.

‘I don’t know, but I think we should just leave,’ I insisted.

‘Yes. Let’s go,’ he relented.

I sighed, relieved that I wasn’t going to have to drag him out of the room with a leash. Locke frowned, clearly disappointed that Nolan had stopped his advances. Nolan wrapped his arm around my shoulders and guided me towards the door.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Locke growled, stepping towards us.

Without thinking about it, I pushed what I felt of the water in the room towards him and into a puddle in front of his feet. I imagined that water turning to ice for him to slip on. We were out of the classroom before I could turn to see if my plan had worked.

“Mr. Adolfo this is not your classroom?” Mr. Tate scolded, walking up to us with the school janitor at his side.

“Sorry Mr. Tate, I just wanted to check on Emelia. That new guy has been bothering her a lot. I’d appreciate it if you could change her seat. Maybe move her next to Meredith.” Nolan replied smoothly, as if he hadn’t been about to go all wolf on the asshole behind us.

“Oh, I wasn’t aware of that. Should I speak with him, Ms. Suneer?” Mr. Tate asked, looking down at me.

“No, I’m sure moving seats will help. Thank you for understanding sir,” I answered.

“Of course,” he smiled kindly before walking back into the room with the janitor.

“Maybe I should switch to home school,” I said sarcastically.

“You would be bored at home school,” Jackson snorted, walking up to us with Mer next to him, “What did I miss?”

“This new guy is a problem,” Nolan growled through gritted teeth.

“He’s bothering you again?” Jackson frowned, looking at me.

“You’re sure he’s not a wolf?” Mer asked Nolan.

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen a wolf with purple eyes,” Nolan sighed, running a hand through his hair.

“Purple? You don’t think he’s Spirit, do you?” Mer asked me.

“No, he doesn’t feel like he’s a part of *The Sacred* like you guys do,” I answered, “I feel connected to you guys. I feel an aversion to him.”

“Let’s continue this conversation later ladies. There are eyes on us, and we should probably get to our next class,” Jackson said, plastering a fake smile on his face for the nearby students.

“You’re right,” Nolan frowned, squeezing my hand.

“I’ll be fine. Mer and Kris will be with me until lunch,” I assured him, squeezing his hand back.

“I’ll see you at lunch then,” Nolan agreed, placing a chaste kiss to my temple.

Mer grabbed my hand and didn’t let go until we were at our next class. Kris was sitting at our desk, her eyes widening when she saw me. I must have looked like a drowned rat.

“What happened now?” Kris demanded.

“Sprinklers. Locke Blakely. I need a KitKat,” I sighed, sitting down next to her and placing my head in my arms on

the desk.

I just wanted some sleep.

“Mer?” Kris asked.

Apparently, my answer hadn’t been enough of an explanation.

“That Locke guy. There’s something wrong with him. And he’s messing with Em a lot. I’d really like to knock his ass out,” Mer growled, banging her fist onto the desk, the wood beneath her hand cracking. Her eyes widened.

“Easy there, cowgirl. No need to break a desk,” I snorted, “we really need to learn to use these powers guys. We can’t keep setting sprinklers off and breaking desks.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Em. Me and fire got it going on.” Kris smirked. “Wait. Sprinklers? What happened to the sprinklers?” Kris whisper shouted.

“Yeah sure. Hey, did you guys notice the burn marks on the banister this morning?” I smirked, ignoring the sprinkler question.

“Oh, you mean where Kris and Doran were making out?” Mer pondered.

“Oh, shut it!” Kris snapped, “We weren’t making out.”

“Ladies?” Mrs. Cobb scolded us.

*How was I supposed to focus on schoolwork with all that’s going on in my life these days?*





# Locke and Key

## Emelia

The sound of my blood-curdling screams woke me that night. Nolan was rubbing my back and humming one of my favorite Red Wave songs. Mer and Kris were sitting upright in their beds, staring at me with wide eyes. Arryssa and Nick both stood in the doorway like they were ready for battle. I'd had another nightmare. I fell back onto my pillow and sighed. I was so tired. Every time I'd managed to fall asleep, I'd woken up screaming. I'd been sent home early from school that day when I scared the shit out of everyone in my Calculus class by falling out of my desk while screaming. I peeked over at the clock to see that it was only 11 p.m.

*I'm so tired.*

Nolan's face softened, and he removed my blanket, picked me up and cradled me in his arms. He said nothing as he carried me out across the hall and into his bedroom. He laid me down in his bed while still holding me in his arms and covered me with the blanket. He began humming that same



tune and the warmth and comfort I felt from being in his arms lulled me to sleep. I wait for the oncoming nightmare...



*But the nightmare didn't come. Instead for the first time in a week I had slept through the night. I woke up feeling refreshed and better than I'd felt in days. I was still in Nolan's bed, but he wasn't. The bed beside me still felt warm, so I knew he hadn't been gone long. He'd stayed with me all night. He kept the dreams at bay. Where did he go?*

*I got up and peeked out the door into the hallway to see if anyone else had woken. I didn't see anyone, but I did hear a noise coming from my suite. I snuck across the hall and ran into my room, closing the door behind me. I turned around to find Kris sitting on the edge of her bed looking at me with wide, bloodshot eyes. She'd been crying.*

*"What's wrong?" I asked, going to sit beside her.*

*"It's nothing really," she sniffled, wiping the tears off her cheeks.*

*"Kris," I scolded, brushing a piece of her blond hair behind her ear.*

*"It's Doran"—she let out a sob—"I saw him with some other girl outside the cabin last night."*

*"Like kissing her?" I asked.*

*“I’m not sure. But they were definitely doing something. She was all over him,” she sobbed, “I actually thought he cared about me. How could I be so stupid?”*

*I said nothing, steaming over this news. I stood up, quickly changing into some clean leggings and a T-shirt. I was so angry it took me three times just to get one sneaker on.*

*“Em? What are you doing? Where are you going?” Kris demanded, looking at me with panicked-filled eyes.*

*I said nothing, slamming the suite door as Kris trailed behind me.*

*“Em?” She sniffled.*

*“I’m going to kill him,” I replied finally.*

*“No Em, don’t. I’m fine. Everything’s fine,” she babbled frantically.*

*I walked into the dining hall where everyone was sitting and didn’t see him. I heard his laugh resonate from the kitchen and turned in that direction.*

*“Em, what’s up?” Mer asked, coming to walk beside me, “Kris have you been crying?”*

*Before I could walk into the kitchen Doran strutted out through the door and laid eyes on Kris. His eyes widened, turning amber, but I was too mad to think about what that could mean. I was focused on getting to Doran and beating the shit out of him. I raised my fist to punch him, but something stopped me in my tracks. I couldn’t feel Nolan. Where was Nolan?*

*I glanced over at our usual breakfast table to see that it was empty. The whole room was suddenly empty except for me, Kris, and Doran- who were now frozen in place.*

*I was wrong. Dead wrong. I was dreaming.*

*Clap, clap, clap !*

*“Well done, Doll. I was looking forward to seeing you punch this one though.” Locke chuckled, appearing out of thin air. “However, I am quite shocked you were able to become aware you were dreaming.” He frowned.*

*“Jesus Christ, Locke. What could you possibly want? Why can’t you just leave me alone?” I shouted, running my fingers through my hair in exacerbation.*

*“What makes you think this is all about you, love? You see, this specific dream wasn’t made for YOU. I’ve planted this one into your little friend’s brain.” He smirked, walking up to Kris to brush a lock of her hair from her face.*

*She remained frozen.*

*“Why?” I asked.*

*“Well, your friend isn’t as strong as you are. Neither is that Doran fellow over there. When they wake, they’ll think this really happened. I wonder how that will affect their pending mate-hood. Should be fun to watch.” He grinned.*

*“Leave them alone!” I demanded, clenching my fists, this guy was really beginning to piss me off.*

*“And then maybe I’ll move on to Meredith and your brother,” he continued.*

*“What do you want?” I snarled through gritted teeth.*

*“I want you to leave him,” he said, dropping his coy smile.*

*“Hi-him?” I stuttered.*

*“Adolfo. I want you to tell him you were wrong. You don’t love him. He’s not your mate. I am,” he explained.*

*“But you’re not—” I spat.*

*“But I could be. We’d make a lovely couple don’t you think, Emelia? Very powerful together.” he said, a wicked smile growing on his face.*

*“And if I won’t do it?” I whispered.*

*“Darling, you really don’t want to see me when I’m angry.” He grinned, purple swirling through his blue eyes.*

*“Wow, feeling dramatic, are we?” I snorted.*

*Locke’s easy-going grin suddenly turned gruesome and cold. His face completely transformed from his usual flirtatious smile to something evil, something dark. He took a menacing step towards me.*

*“Emelia dear, it would be wise of you to heed my warning. I can take everything from you with or without your permission,” he warned.*

*“I’m not afraid of you,” I snapped.*

*“You will be,” he said, kissing my temple.*



“Emelia!” my brother, Mason, shouted as he shook me.

I opened my eyes, I was standing outside in the middle of the woods. It was barely daylight outside.

*How the hell did I get here?*

“Mason, what’s going on?” I demanded, looking into my brother’s blue eyes.

“I should be asking you that. I looked out our cabin window and saw you just mindlessly walking out here. You wouldn’t answer me, and then you just started screaming,” he explained.

“I was sleepwalking?” I asked, looking down at myself, I was barefoot and in my pajamas.

“Yes. I’ve never seen you sleepwalk before. What the hell is going on?” he asked.

“I have no idea,” I replied.

‘Emelia? Where are you?’ Nolan sent to me, his voice filled with panic.

‘Nolan? I’m in the woods with Mason. we’re heading back to the cabin now,’ I explained.

‘How did you get into the woods?’ he asked.

‘I was sleepwalking,’ I sighed.

We headed back towards the cabin, the sun had just started to come out. A large group of people were standing in a circle in front of the main lodge yelling at each other.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

Nolan pushed some of the crowd apart, coming to stand beside me, he looked me over for some sign of injury.

“I’m fine,” I murmured.

“Emelia? What’s going on?” My mother asked, walking up to me with tears rolling down her cheeks.

I hugged her, “I’m fine, Mom. Just sleepwalking.”

“I was so worried,” she sniffled.

“Do you remember your dream, Emelia?” Nick requested from the front of the circle. Nolan growled beside me.

“I didn’t even know I was dreaming for most of it. It was so real,” I frowned.

“I thought she was in your room, Nolan?” Arryssa asked.

“She was. I went to run the perimeter of camp with Jackson. I was only gone for a few minutes, and she was gone,” Nolan said, looking at his feet.

“She didn’t have any nightmares while you were in the room?” Nick’s brow furrowed.

“No, she seemed like she was finally resting.” Nolan frowned, guilt washing off him in waves.

“You kept the dreams away,” I whispered, “You can block him like he blocks you.”

“Who are we talking about?” my mother demanded.

“Locke Blakely, he’s a new kid at school. He’s been harassing Em for a couple weeks,” guessed Kris.

“He can enter your dreams? Is he a wolf?” Victoria wondered.

“Yes, he can, but we’re not sure what he is,” Nolan explained. “And it seems he can make her sleepwalk too.”

“What does he want?” Arryssa asked, looking at her mate with worried eyes, “where was he taking her?”

“He threatened me. Locke wants me to leave Nolan for him,” I announced.

Nolan’s eyes turned amber, and he let out a growl unlike any I’ve ever heard from him.

I walked over to him, placing my hand over his heart. ‘I’m not going anywhere,’ I sent him.

‘No, you’re not,’ he agreed, clenching his teeth.

“How can you remember this time?” Nolan asked, frowning his brow.

I shrugged. “I have no idea. He must be able to control what I can and can’t remember. He wanted me to remember his threats,” I said, peeking over to where Kris and Doran stood next to each other.

“She’s going to need 24-hour surveillance from now on, you are not to go anywhere without Nolan or one of your brothers with you. For the foreseeable future you will go to school and

come straight back to the camp. And I think it would be wise for you girls to begin your training ASAP,” Nick ordered, “You will have to stay in Nolan’s room for now to keep the dreams at bay.”

“What about during classes?” Mer interrupted.

“You girls are with her for most of her classes, correct?” Nick asked.

“Yes,” Kris and Mer replied in unison.

“I’m going to have you girls keep an eye on her and if it looks like help is needed, you’ll either contact your mate, Nolan, or me. Understood?” Nick ordered, “Arryssa and I will look into what this Locke fellow could be, and if there is a way for us to block him out of Emelia’s dreams.”

“Yes, Alpha,” was heard all around, causing me to wince.

“Emelia, I’m sorry for all of this, but it is for your protection. When you are not in class, you are to be always escorted by either Nolan or one of your brothers. Understood?” Arryssa requested, placing her hands on my shoulders and looking me directly in my eyes.

“Understood,” I whispered, dropping my eyes to her shoulders.

Victoria came to stand beside me, interlocking her hand in mine and tugging on it, indicating for me to follow her. I looked back over my shoulder at Nolan, stopping him before he could follow.



Mom led me down to the tree line by the shore and stopped, crossing her arms and turning towards me. Her blue eyes were tearful and angry. Tears instantly welled up in my eyes at the sight of how upset she was.

“Mom, I’m okay. I promise,” I said.

“I know,” she paused, “but this has been happening for a while now? And you didn’t tell me? I knew you were having nightmares again, I should’ve asked more about them. I should’ve-” she stopped, tears streaming down her cheeks, “I’m so sorry, Emelia. I’ve been so caught up with trying to pay the bills and making sure you kids didn’t feel smothered so you would learn to be independent. I should’ve buckled down more, been around more, taken off work more.” she continued, sobbing at this point.

I stepped forwards and wrapped my arms around her, “You’re doing the best you can, Mom. It’s not your fault, I should’ve said something. I’ve just been in my own head lately and so tired I didn’t stop to think about how this could be affecting everyone else. I promise I won’t keep anything from you anymore.”

“I feel like such a failure, especially after losing Mia. I didn’t want to be that mom that became overprotective and didn’t give their kids room to grow and fly. But here I am letting you find out about a whole supernatural world and magical powers and whatever the hell this Locke kid is all alone. I should’ve told you about my past and your brothers right after they shifted. I should’ve told you all far before that really.” she

said, sniffing, “But you’ve been so strong through all of this, Emelia. I couldn’t be prouder of the strong young women you’ve become.”

Tears streamed down my cheeks, “I love you, Mom,” I said, throwing my arms around her once more.

“I love you too, sweetie.” she said, laying her cheek on the top of my head.

I looked out at the lake, watching the water as it slowly rippled and a group of ducks swam by, “You should paint this place, Mom,” I said, sniffing.

Victoria chuckled, “I’ve been thinking that since I got here, but all my supplies are still at the house. We’ll have to pack our stuff up soon and move it over here.”

“You should paint more often,” I said, “Might help with all these emotions you’re having. Maybe some nice herbal tea would help too.”

“Don’t knock my tea, Emmy,” Mom giggled, “It really does calm the soul.”

A familiar tingle ran up my spine, causing me to smile and peek over my shoulder. Sure enough Nolan was watching from the bottom of the lodge’s front steps.

“What is it?” Victoria asked.

“Nolan’s just being his usual creeper self,” I said loudly, laughing.

Victoria smiled softly. “You know he’s only going to get worse with everything that’s going on.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said, smiling, “Come on let’s head back to the house.”

As Victoria and I walked back up to the house, I noticed that Nolan had disappeared, probably felt bad for listening in on our conversation after I called him out. His overprotectiveness might’ve been annoying sometimes, but I also found it endearing. I knew that if something like this was happening to him, I would feel overprotective too. My smile faltered as I thought of Locke’s threat again, *‘I want you to tell him you were wrong. You don’t love him.’*

He was wrong, so very wrong. Nolan was my mate, and there was no changing that. There was no changing the fact that my heart belonged to the wolf with Emerald green eyes and black fur, to the Beta of the Adolfo Pack who loved his family and his friends, to the boy who overcame his stage fright just to sing me the song he had wrote just for me.



For the next month and a half, my life was constantly monitored. The only time I was alone was to go to the bathroom and to bathe. Don’t get me wrong, I LOVED my brothers and spending all this time with Nolan was lovely. But if I didn’t get a moment of peace soon, I was going to kill someone.

It had been surprisingly quiet at school since the last time Locke invaded my dreams and had made me sleepwalk into the woods. Doran and Kris seemed fine, so I didn't think he'd affected their dreams like he'd said he would. Every night I stayed with Nolan in his room so that he could block the nightmares, and Locke no longer sat next to me in our class together and hadn't tried to interact with any of us. He'd just sat in the back of the classroom, staring blankly ahead at the board. I kept waiting for the next shoe to drop, worried about what he would do next? What was he planning? I couldn't help but think of all the possible things he could do to my friends or family because of me. It had become almost protocol for Nolan to be outside of my Biology class waiting to calm me down from my self-induced panic attack. My meds seemed to be working less and less. It was probably time to go to the doctor to have them readjusted again. Nolan couldn't always be there to save the day, no matter how much he may want to.

Luckily though, Saturday had finally come, and we were outside having another training session. The girls and I had been practicing wielding our elements in our hands for extended periods of time and wrapping them around our bodies like shields.. There hadn't been any accidental pipe bursting's or singed chairs at least. I was practicing turning water I'd guided out of the wet ground into ice. This is something I'd only recently taught myself to do. Before I'd thought I could only control water from big sources like the river or a puddle. But I'd taught myself to feel the moisture

that had built up into the ground and how to pool it together into something I could move around between my hands or around others. I liked the idea that I could cover somebody with a shield of water, like maybe I wasn't so helpless. I'd learned that a lot of what we could do was powered by our emotions. So, when I tried to turn water into ice, I would imagine Locke. I'd think of how he threatened my friends. Threatened my family. Anger was a fiercely strong emotion, though Arryssa preferred we not use only anger to learn how to use our powers. Anger seemed more effective than thinking of cute puppies and happy thoughts though.

I tried to help the girls control their elements as well. We'd learned that when we were together, our powers were stronger. So once a day we'd all gathered with Arryssa and meditate in a circle, taking turns to think of each element and then thinking of them all together. When we did this, it wasn't like when we used our powers individually, we didn't throw actual water or fire into the circle, we would push the energy we felt from our powers and meld them together into one cohesive force. When we did this, it was like a wave of electricity would pass through the circle and leave my hair standing on edge, but then the power would short circuit, like it couldn't come to its complete fruition. It was extremely frustrating. However, I would always feel a little stronger after those sessions, like I could wrestle a bull and win the first round. And while our connections had been growing stronger and stronger, I could still feel that we were missing our final link. *Spirit*. We had yet to find them. I'd also noticed how the girls

started looking to me for guidance. Arryssa tried explaining this in a way an Alpha Female should feel. That her pack members looked to her and trusted her for protection and guidance, and that in them I should feel loyalty and acceptance. And I did. It was an odd feeling to go from just being a regular seventeen-year-old to someone that was supposed to be the leader of such a powerful group and one day Alpha Female.

“So, it’s the middle of October girls,” Kris announced randomly.

“Yes, it is, Kris. Your point?” Mer muttered, trying not to get distracted from practicing turning earth into an armor around her, she was covered in tree branches and mud.

“My point dear Meredith, is that it’s almost Halloween,” Kris smirked, tossing her blond hair over her shoulder.

“Shoot. There’s no way they’ll let us go!” I whined.

“Go where?” Ashlynn shouted from her training spot.

I was only slightly jealous of her at the moment, as she was levitating herself off the ground with wind.

“The annual Voodoo Festival in New Orleans. We go every year,” Mer replied.

“There’s food and art and spooky shit. It’s awesome,” Kris grinned.

“That sounds fun. I want to go!” Ashlynn whined. “Why wouldn’t they let us go?”

“Because Em is still on lock down,” Kris explained, “Get it? LOCKE down.” She started snorting.

“The guys can come with us. We’ll be fine.” Ashlynn shrugged.

“I’m sure if they won’t let me go, you guys could still go,” I relented.

“There’s no bloody way I’m going there without you Em. Who’s going to keep Kris in line?” Mer stomped her foot.

“I think I could handle that,” Doran said, coming up behind Kris and wrapping an arm around her.

“Oh sweetie,” Kris sneered, patting him on the cheek, “Only in your dreams.”

Doran suddenly yelped, removing his arm from around her, a small welt left on his arm, already beginning to heal. She’d burned him. Doran grumbled, heading back towards the direction he’d come from.

She’d been doing that a lot lately, pushing him away. You’d think there would have been some progress in the past month, but it was as if they’d gone backwards. And she won’t talk about it to anyone.

“Kris-” started.

“Don’t,” she said, sighing, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I know,” I sighed.

I looked over at Mer as if to say, ‘what are we going to do?’ Mer shrugged back at me.

“How are we doing today girls?” Arryssa greeted, coming just in time for our usual meditation circle.

“Fine.” We all muttered.

Arryssa took a second glance towards Kris and looked over at me questioningly. I shook my head. *No, don't ask.*

“Kris, would like to know if we can go to the Voodoo Festival, Ma?” Ashlynn announced, smirking.

Kris, who had been staring in the direction Doran had gone, scowled at Ash.

*Nice.*

I winked at Ashlynn, thanking her for the distraction.

“The one in New Orleans?” Arryssa’s brow’s furrowed, and she peeked over at me.

My smile faded, so much for me going.

“I’ll have to discuss it with Nick,” she told the group. “I’ll get back with a decision by dinner tonight, but for now are we ready for meditation, ladies?” she asked, clapping her hands together and bringing us to attention.

We gathered into our circle, taking a seat in the grass and closed our eyes to clear our minds. I could hear as Arryssa walked slowly around the group, choosing not to join the circle today as per her usual. I wondered why ...

“Emelia, I’d like you to lead circle today,” she said, answering my unspoken question.

*Oh. Okay.*



I shook my head, staying silent. I closed my eyes, thinking of the last rainy day I could remember. I thought of the cold wet droplets hitting my face and shoulders, and I imagined the smell of the wet grass. It was nice to feel on a hot day like today, and I felt that familiar hum of power move over my skin. I pushed that energy out of me, imagining that it was pouring out of my ears, my nose, and even my mouth. I heard some of the other girls sigh in appreciation as they started to feel what I was feeling. I opened my eyes to see that everyone's eyes were closed. I turned to Kris, and she opened her eyes. She nodded her head understanding that I wanted her to go next.

I suddenly felt a warmth spread over me where the last few droplets had touched and it spread all over my skin from head all the way to my toes. I could smell burning wood and leaves, reminding me of Nolan. No doubt I'd probably smell like a bonfire for the rest of the day. I basked in the warmth for just a moment more before looking towards Ashlynn. Without opening her eyes, she nodded at me, and I felt a cool breath of air move through the group, weaving in and out of the circle. Ashlynn smiled, enjoying the connection with her gift. I then moved on to Mer and with no response from her, I felt the ground beneath me start shaking, and small clumps of dirt and rocks began floating in the surrounding air. I smiled, knowing my favorite part was coming next.

I cleared my throat to let the group know I was ready and one by one we all let the energy we had created bleed into the circle. I could feel them mixing together and felt our powers

begin to bond into one cohesive force. I looked to the empty spot in the circle where we would hopefully one day have our *Spirit* wielder. I'd begun to imagine what they would look like and what they would be like when we found them. Suddenly an image of dark hair and emerald green eyes flashed into my mind. Almost identical to Nolan's and Ashlynn's, I let out a small gasp. I saw those green eyes go wide and change to a light shade of purple. I panicked momentarily thinking it was Locke's purple eyes, but these were different. Unlike his stiff dark purple, this girl's eyes were a soft almost mauve color. She looked young and innocent with freckles covering her nose, and I could already feel that she was a fiercely loyal and compassionate person.

"Em? Hellooo, Em?" I heard a distant voice saying, and somebody was snapping in my ear.

"Emelia, are you alright?" Arryssa asked as I felt someone grip my shoulders.

'Luna?' Nolan whispered to my mind.

My vision came back into focus and Nolan was kneeling in front of me, his green eyes filled with concern.

"You spaced out, Em," Mer grimaced, "Where did you go?"

"I saw her," I stated.

"Saw who?" Nolan asked.

"*Spirit*. I saw her eyes," I smiled up at him.

"Just her eyes? What did they look like?" Mer questioned.

“Wait, you’re psychic now?” Kris snorted.

“She is the leader of *The Sacred*. I’m sure with that she has special gifts that we know nothing about.” Arryssa interjected, hushing my friends, “But go on dear, tell us about the eyes you saw.”

I looked into Nolan’s emerald green eyes, showing him the image of her in my mind. His eyes widened, and he looked confused for a moment, shaking his head. Then I watched as realization dawn on him. He recognized those eyes. He sat up, looking up at his mother.

“I think it’s time to bring Alisa home from New York,” Nolan said.



# Life and Death

## Emelia

“**B**efore we get started, I would like to welcome everyone to this meeting,” Kris announced dramatically, banging a makeshift gavel on the table.

Where in the world she had gotten a gavel, I had no idea.

Kris continued, “I would especially like to thank the Adolfos and Victoria for taking the time out of their busy schedules to help us with the matter at hand.”

“Kris, it’s dinner time. Nobody even knows what you’re doing right now,” I groaned.

“I am merely stating our case, Emelia,” she gasped in faux offense.

“What case? Did you do something illegal and not include us?” I gasped back.

“Of course not. If I’d done something illegal, you wouldn’t know about it because I wouldn’t have gotten caught.” She grinned.

“As if,” Mer and I scoffed.

“Any-who. Back to the matter at hand. Meredith, if you would please bring in the whiteboard,” Kris said, holding her hand towards the door as Mer pushed in a small whiteboard on wheels as if she was some sort of assistant.

*This is what I get for leaving them alone for the evening.*

On the whiteboard were bullet points and a title that read ‘Reasons we should let the girls go to Voodoo Fest in NOLA.’

“As you all know in a couple weeks it will be Halloween, and during this special holiday weekend we—Emelia, Meredith, and myself—traditionally go to Voodoo Fest in NOLA...now I know what you’re all thinking, ‘It’s much too dangerous for these naïve girls to go to something like that at a time like this. When our dear-dear Emelia Suneer’s life is in your hands and in danger from the boogeyman!’” Kris shouted.

“Kris, aren’t you being a little dramatic?” I asked.

Kris shushed me, and carried on, “But I would like to give you some reasons for why you should let us go!” Kris declared with enthusiasm.

“Kris, this really isn’t—” Arryssa interjected.

“Reason number one: Nolan and Jackson would be with us for protection. There would also be Ashlynn and Alexander there as backup protection.” Kris began, pointing to the bullet point.

“Yes, but—” Nick added.

“Reason number two! We have all been practicing with our powers for over a month now and I am sure Em could drown somebody with a tsunami, if need be,” Kris continued.

“I don’t really think a tsunami would—” I inserted.

“Reason number three: the Voodoo Festival, while it is full of spooky party crazed weirdos, is also full of educational art pieces and history,” Kris continued.

“Okay,” Nick sighed.

*Oh my God is he actually listening to this?*

“Reason number fi—” Kris stopped mid-sentence and looked at Nick. “Okay, like we can go, okay?”

“Under some conditions and as long as Victoria is also okay with it.”

“Anything!” Mer and I shouted in excitement.

“There will be one wolf to escort each of you for protection. So, I’m sending Doran with you, Kristine,” Nick said.

“Doran? Why do I have to have Doran? Why can’t I have—” Kris whined, looking around in a panic. “Mason! I could take Mason!”

“I can’t,” Mason smirked.

“Oh come on, Mason, you’ve always been like a little brother to me! I feel so betrayed!” Kris groaned.

“Mason will be going to pick up my niece, Alisa, from New York that weekend. Also, I don’t think there is another wolf in

the pack that would protect you better than Doran,” Nick smiled knowingly.

Doran strode up beside Kris, crossing his arms, his eyes filled with mirth.

‘Dude must like the chase,’ I thought.

‘If that were you and me, I would never stop chasing you, Emelia,’ Nolan sent me.

‘Wouldn’t you get tired of rejection, eventually? You could go find a nice appeasing mate.’ I sent back.

‘No other would be able to complete me the way you do, Luna. That is why it’s called True Mates, and not just mates,’ he thought.

Kris scoffed, rolling her eyes at Doran. “Don’t get any ideas, pretty boy.”

“Pretty boy? I thought we were calling him White Wolf?” Mer asked.

“Yea, I liked that one,” I frowned.

“I’ve decided he’s not cool enough for that nickname.” Kris shrugged.

“Ouch. You’ve wounded me darling,” Doran yelped, holding his chest as if he’d been shot and fell to his knees dramatically.

“Yeah, whatever, Cujo.” Kris snorted. “What are the other conditions, Nicholas?”



Nick laughed but continued, “You are all to be back to camp by midnight, and I mean back right here at this table by then for a headcount. Understood?”

“Yes Alpha,” voiced the group.

‘Have you talked to Jackson about the Omega thing yet?’ I asked Nolan.

‘I haven’t. There hasn’t been a good time lately.’ He frowned.

‘I get that,’ I nodded. ‘It has been hectic lately.’

‘I’m surprised my father is allowing this trip,’ he said, glancing towards his father.

‘He trusts you to protect me,’ I said.

‘Do you?’ he whispered.

‘I trust you completely, Nol,’ I smiled.

‘Good. I will protect you until my last breath, Luna,’ he promised.

‘Well, let’s hope my last breath is before yours because I don’t think I could survive if you were gone,’ I said honestly.

‘That won’t be a problem after our bonding ceremony Luna,’ he said, smiling.

My eyebrows creased. What did that mean?

‘After the bonding ceremony is completed, our souls will be forever bonded. If I were to die, your soul could not survive without mine. We would die almost simultaneously,’ he explained, still watching as his father talked.

“Holy shit,” I said out loud.

“Emelia, language. Please!” My mother scolded from her spot at the table. She’d been silent until that moment.

“Sorry.” I muttered.

I couldn’t breathe.

‘If I die. You die?’ I clarified.

‘Yes,’ he agreed.

‘But only after the ceremony?’ I asked.

‘Correct. Luna, what are you—’ he started.

Silence.

Nolan’s eyes widened, turning to amber. He looked at me from his seat and began to rise, anger rolling off him. I could feel it. But I couldn’t hear him. I’d shut him out.

*I’m gonna barf.*

I stood from my chair and bolted out the door faster than I knew I could. I ran upstairs and to the suite I shared with the girls, locking the door behind me. I ran into the bathroom and locked that door, too. I leaned against it, sliding to the floor. I made it just in time as I heard Nolan start banging on the door behind me, shouting my name and asking what was wrong. I had never shut him out like that. Never blocked him from my mind on purpose like that. It hurt not letting him in, already feeling like a piece of me was missing. Nolan slid to the floor, leaning his head against the door. He knew I wasn’t going to

open it, but he refused to leave. Why hadn't he told me sooner?

The thought of dying together, while romantic and bittersweet, terrified me. Because while Locke hadn't hurt anyone yet, what if he did? What if some other threat came along that wanted to misuse The Sacred's powers? What if something happened to me? Nolan would be gone too? The thought of dying had never scared me that much, because even if I was gone, at least Nolan and my friends would be okay. But Nolan would risk his life for me. I knew it. And if I died, so would he. And it would all be my fault. My soul would shatter forever if I was the cause of Nolan being gone. The cause of his mother and father having to bury their child. So, I couldn't do it. No matter how much I wanted to be with him and wanted to be bonded forever as mates, I couldn't go through with this ceremony. I couldn't go out of this world knowing I'd killed Nolan, too. I wouldn't.

I stayed there in the bathroom for what seemed like hours, with Nolan never leaving. Some others must've come into the room because I heard as they asked what was going on, if I was okay, if there was something to be done. But Nolan just stayed silent with me, growling at anyone that came too close to the door.

"Luna." Nolan eventually whispered, his voice cracking. Tears began to flow down my cheeks. I couldn't stand that I was hurting him. "Luna, please don't shut me out. Please don't leave me alone. Please," he let out a shuddering breath.

I could hear him sniffing through the door. Nolan was crying. Nolan. My loving, outgoing, always happy mate was crying because of me. I hated myself. I hated myself, yet I still didn't open the door.

Eventually I found myself dozing off as I rested my head against the door, hoping that when I woke, this would all have just been a nightmarish trick.



*I smooshed my foot into the sand beneath my swing until it was completely covered. I was hoping to feel some warmth from it, but I didn't. I couldn't tell you what had brought me back to this old swing set that sat behind Bernard Orphanage, but here I was. I moved my legs enough to slightly swing myself from side to side while still keeping my toes buried in the sand. I heard the swing beside me creak as someone took a seat, and I felt an eerie calm settle over me.*

*"It's been awhile, love. Why did you stay away for so long?" Locke asked, sounding dejected.*

*"You know why," I sighed.*

*"I scared you. I was mad. I'm sorry," he admitted.*

*Surprise rolled over me. He was sorry?*

*"Are you bipolar, Locke?" I asked.*

*He chuckled in response.*

*“You threatened me and everyone I love. Sounds like anger issues to me, dude,” I said.*

*“Yeah. Sorry about that. I just get very worked up when it comes to you,” he explained.*

*“You barely know me, Locke.” I sighed.*

*“That’s not true. I’ve known you for over a century,” he said.*

*“I’m seventeen. I’m pretty sure you’re eighteen.” I rolled my eyes.*

*“Yes, you are seventeen, but I’ve known Water for a long time. It doesn’t matter that you’re a different person. Deep down you have the same base as all the others. You may have different personalities, but you have the same core traits. Strong, loyal, loving, and head strong. You’re very similar to the one who came before you. But that is to be expected,” he said.*

*“The one before me?” I asked.*

*“Your mother, Elisha Suneer.” He shrugged.*

*My mother was the Water Spirit before me? Wait, how old is this dude?*

*“You knew my mom?” I asked.*

*“I did. She was lovely.” He smiled. “Also, I’m around one hundred and twenty years old since I know you’re going to ask.”*

*“Oh God. You’re not about to tell me you’re my father, are you?” I gagged.*

*Locke laughed. “No, love. I’m not your father. Sadly, no matter how much I’ve loved each Water Spirit before you, they always choose some other idiot to spend their time with. Our creator is a dick like that. Even you. With your wolf mate, you have chosen someone over me. Maybe if I had shown myself sooner, you would have picked me.” He sighed.*

*“I don’t think that’s how it works, Locke.” I smiled, raising a brow at him.*

*“Of course, you don’t. But that’s not your fault. They’ve drilled this whole mate bond thing into your brain. I will save you from it eventually.” He shrugged.*

*“Locke, I’m not going to—” I began.*

*“I won’t give up. I can’t give up on you, so don’t ask me to,” he huffed. I could see he was starting to get angry again, so I decided to change the subject.*

*I glanced around our setting again, wondering if he had chosen it or if he just decides to join my dream wherever I make it.*

*“Locke?” I asked.*

*“Hmm,” he grunted.*

*“What are you?” I asked, not for the first time.*

*“I’m-,” he sighed, “I’m what’s known as a Reincarnate.”*

*“What does that mean?” I grimaced.*

*“It means my soul will never die. Even when my body perishes, I am merely remade into this form again with all the same memories. But my soul always follows the same thing.” he explained.*

*“Water,” I mused.*

*“Yes.” He grinned.*

*“Why have you always followed water?” I asked.*

*Locke smirked, raising an eyebrow at me.*

*“You’re not going to tell me, are you?” I asked, sighing.*

*“No, not today,” he said.*

*“So, you’re not like a werewolf, but you’re also not human. Are you like me, an elemental?” I asked.*

*“No. There are only five elementals that can exist at a time, The Sacred. I’m an immortal dream-walker. I can enter and control anyone’s dreams.”*

*“What about the sparks that came out of your fingertips?” I asked.*

*Locke grinned, “Telekinesis.”*

*My eyes widened. “You’ll tell me all that, but you won’t tell me why you follow water?” I asked, shaking my head.*

*“Not today.” Locke chuckled.*

*“Are there others like you?” I asked.*

*“Nope. I am the only one of my kind,” he said, staring out at the orphanage.*

*“Sounds lonely,” I said, following his gaze. I hadn’t thought about this old place in a long time.*

*“I think I should go,” I said after a brief time.*

*Locke turned to me quickly, a look of panic in his eyes. He didn’t want me to go yet.*

*“When will you come back?” he asked.*

*“Locke, I don’t think that’s a good idea. You said you were sorry, but I still don’t trust you. You still want me to leave Nolan. You still want to hurt him,” I said.*

*“I won’t hurt him if you come see me again,” he promised.  
“Soon?”*

*“Okay,” I relented.*

*A wicked smile spread across Locke’s face before it started to blur.*

*I was waking up.*



I was still on the bathroom floor, but I must’ve laid on the ground instead of against the door. I glanced up, noticing that the door was still locked, and heard Nolan’s gentle snoring drifting through.

“Em?” Mer whispered through the door. “Em, are you awake? Please let me in.”



I took a deep breath and cracked the door open. Nolan's sleeping form leaned against the wall, but his snoring had stopped. He'd woken but didn't want me to know. I cracked the door enough so that Mer could fit through, and I glanced quickly behind her for Kris. I didn't see her.

"She's on a phone call with her parents. They're in Japan or something," Mer explained, noticing my line of sight.

"They're lucky Kris has always been so self-sufficient, or I would've called CPS years ago," I murmured, closing the door and locking it again.

I slid to the floor again and placed my head atop my knees.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Mer sighed.

"Mer, he's right there," I frowned.

"He's sleeping," she shook her head.

I snorted, "No, he's not. He woke up the second I cracked the door."

"How do you know that? He looked like he was asleep," she said.

"I just know. Trust me," I shrugged.

Mer sighed, coming to sit beside me, and leaning her head against my shoulder. I did the same against her head.

"Jackson's been talking about publicly claiming me soon. I should be excited, I know. I'm really not ready for the challenges, but I can see how much it pains him not to do it. Wolves are weird, man," she huffed, entwining her fingers

with mine. “How am I supposed to fight to the death with a werewolf? I can’t even image trying to punch someone.”

Nolan still hadn’t talked to Jackson about the Omega thing. I mean, how could he? He’d been in this room with me all night ...

“I don’t think anyone will challenge you, Mer. I mean, who else would want my brother?” I asked, scrunching my nose in faux disgust, “I wouldn’t worry about the challenges right now, just worry about you and Jackson. That’s all that matters. I’m excited for you guys!” I said, squeezing her hand.

“Okay, you’re right. I’ll worry about it when the time comes. So, how do you think Kris and Doran are doing? Do you have special psychic powers about that too?” She grinned.

I laughed, “No, I don’t think so. I can’t figure out why she’s shutting him out, though. Or maybe they’re both shutting each other out. Either way, they can’t seem to stay away from one another,” I commented.

“I’m just afraid she’s in pain,” she murmured.

“I’m sure she is Mer. This mate stuff is a real pickle it is,” I said, doing my best Australian accent.

“A pickle,” Mer snorted. “I think that’s putting it mildly, but okay.”

I took a deep breath, trying to push out all the stress from today.

“Has Jackson talked to you about the bonding ceremony?” I asked tentatively.

“A little. He’s never been to one either, so he’s not extremely familiar with it. He did explain the meaning of it, though, and what happens to us. Sounded kind of romantic that we’ll always be connected and never have to live without the other,” she said, looking over at me.

I stared down at my hand that was clasped together with Mer’s. Tears started to well up in my eyes.

“Oh, Em,” Mer said, wrapping her arms around me in an embrace. “Don’t do this to yourself. It wouldn’t be your fault,” she promised.

She knew me too well. She didn’t even have to think about why it would upset me. I loved her for that.

“How can you say that, Mer? It totally would be. I can’t be the cause of that!” I cried.

Suddenly Mer and I fell straight onto our backs through the now open bathroom door.

*So much for the lock.*

Kris stood above us with a scowl on her face.

“What?” Mer and I asked in unison.

“Emelia Suneer. You are being an idiot. Leaving this hot piece of meat out here all alone with his ear pressed against the door, so you can wallow about things that may or may not happen. Pull. Yourself. Together. Girl. Because you are a badass bitch.” Kris declared, clapping her hands between each word to make her point clearer.

“Quite the pep talk, Kristine, but I had this handled,” Mer said, picking herself up off the floor.

“Handled? She’s crying on the bathroom floor. This is not the time for a kumbaya moment—” Kris started babbling.

Mer and Kris continued to stand over me, arguing about the correct way to cheer up their best friend, and it was almost enough to make me smile. Almost enough to make me forget Nolan was sitting next to me, staring down at me as I lay on my back on the floor. I refused to look at him, knowing it would only cause me to cry more. He stayed silent but grabbed my hand gently and intertwined our fingers. The room suddenly grew quiet, and I realized my friends had left the room.

*Gee thanks, guys.*

“You are afraid you will get yourself killed and cause my destruction? You will feel like you have murdered me by getting killed?” he asked.

I didn’t respond as I look up at the ceiling, taking slow, deep breaths.

*Don’t panic. Don’t panic. Don’t panic.*

I glanced around the room, looking for escape options.

“Please don’t run from me again, Luna. I will catch you and I will carry you back if I must,” Nolan growled, causing me to look at him for the first time.

His eyes were glowing amber, and he looked miserable and angry. Angry with me. Tears started to roll down my cheeks.

Nolan's face softened. "Emelia, I cannot live without you. I refuse to."

I still don't respond.

"Luna, even if we never did the bonding ceremony and I would live if you died, I wouldn't make it. I couldn't survive in this world if you were not in it. You may not understand that. You may not understand the depths of my feelings for you, but you are my entire world, Emelia. My life begins and ends with you and without you I would have nothing to live for," he forced out.

"But—" I began.

"But to die alongside you. To never have to live without seeing your beautiful eyes open anymore. Or to never hear your laughter again. I would go into a darkness that my kind knows too well. A dangerous void. Would you want to live without me in the world, Luna?"

"No. I wouldn't," I relented, panicked at just the idea of Nolan being dead.

We stayed silent for a few moments, his fingers drawing circles on the back of my hand.

"Are you ready for bed, Emelia?" he finally spoke.

I nodded my head once. Nolan stood and picked me up into his arms, cradling me like a child. He carried me back to his room and placed me on the bed, but instead of lying next to me, he took a seat in the chair next to the bed. I still hadn't opened my mind to him. Why? I wasn't sure, but I could feel

that it bothered him still. Not knowing how I was feeling or how to make me feel better was haunting him. But I wasn't ready for him to feel what I was feeling at that moment. I fell asleep, knowing I wouldn't dream of Locke again as long as Nolan was beside me.



# Wolf in Disguise

## Emelia

“I’m thinking sexy black swan this year. What do you guys think?” Kris voiced, holding a black tutu up to her hips. We were at Covington’s Costume Shop searching for Halloween attire to wear to Voodoo Fest.

“You really want Doran to kill somebody, don’t you?” I mused.

She’d been like this for the past week. Ever since Nick told her Doran was going to basically be her babysitter on Halloween, she’d been doing everything she could to piss him off. At this rate, he wasn’t even going to let her go, especially in that outfit.

“He’s a pansy. He can get over it. I’m trying to find me a man and this is the perfect costume to do it in.” Kris smirked at herself in the mirror.

“Kris, you’re really going to go to NOLA looking for a man right in front of him? You do realize he’s a wolf, right? I saw



Alex throw a guy into the lake yesterday for checking out Ash's butt," Mer stated.

"It's true. Wolves are highly possessive and jealous creatures," Ashlynn explained, coming out from a dressing room dressed as what looked like an ugly duckling.

"Ash. You are not wearing that," I groaned, turning her around and pushing her back behind the curtain. "I'll find you a different costume. Just take that monstrosity off."

"I thought it was cute," she shouted from behind the curtain, but I heard as she unzipped it, anyway.

I shuffled through the racks to see if I could find something more fitting for her to wear.

"Why should I care if Doran gets his little feelings hurt?" Kris whined.

"Because you have feelings for him, moron," Mer retorted.

"I do NOT have feelings for that idiot White Wolf!" Kris yelled. "I hate him. I hate him with every fiber of my being!" Kris ranted, but I could see small tears starting to well up in Kris's blue eyes.

"That's kind of dramatic but okay." I snorted. "So, we're sticking with the Black Swan then?"

"Yes," Kris smiled wickedly before walking off to the next dressing room to change.

"I'm going to have to beat her ass," Mer whispered to me. "I don't understand why she's acting like this. She was so excited

to find a ‘wolf hottie’ to be her mate and now she’s pushing him away!” she groaned.

“Don’t interfere Mer. Please?” I begged, making puppy eyes at her.

“Why not? I just want her to be happy,” she pouted.

“Because if he’s her True Mate it will work out in the end I’m sure,” I frowned. *Why does that sound familiar?* “Doran just has a lot of walls to bust down first ... with a jackhammer.”

“Says the girl that’s still blocking her thoughts from my brother,” Ash scolded from behind the curtain, holding her hand out so I could hand her another costume.

I smirked and handed her the red outfit I’d picked out.

“Oh my God. I’m going to have to beat your ass too!” Mer groaned. “You’re still blocking him? I thought we fixed this problem last week?”

“Gee thanks Ash. But who told you?” I frowned, ignoring Mer.

“I could just tell from how you two have been acting. He’s been staring at you in frustration a lot. And you haven’t had that cross-eyed look on your face that you get when your mind chatting,” Ash giggled, walking out from the dressing room and placing a slender hand on her hip.

“Yup. That’s the one,” I nodded, looking at her costume approvingly.

She was dressed in an almost too short red dress and was sporting a small devil's headband.

"You think it looks good?" Ash asked, looking down at herself.

"I think you look hot!" Kris grinned, coming back dressed in her normal clothes with a shopping bag in hand.

*She bought the costume, I guess.*

"Alex will never let me out in this," Ash laughed.

"We'll just have to provide a united front against the boys," Kris smirked, throwing her fist into the air, "So Mer and Em. You two better pick out some sexy ones, too."

"No way," I rejected the idea.

"I was thinking sexy cheerleader," Mer replied, holding up some pom-poms she'd found.

"Traitor," I sighed.

"I think it'll be funny to see Jackson's face when I walk out in it." She smirked, her green eyes twinkling mischievously.

"Ooh, evil!" Kris smiled widely. "So what's it going to be, Em?"

I shrugged. *Not even going to try to fight this, I guess.* I began looking through the racks again to see if I could find something worthy of Kris's standards.

*Sexy alien? No, that's weird. Sexy witch? That's basic. Sexy...?*

I held up a dress that stopped around mid-thigh with a corseted top. It had a red flannel pattern and at the bottom the fabric looked like it had been shredded by claws and was puffed up from the black tulle underneath. Attached to it was what looked like a wolf ear headband. It was a sexy werewolf costume ...

Kris came to stand beside me. "Holy crap. If that's not the most ironic costume I've ever seen. I'm jealous I didn't find it first," Kris cackled. "It's shorter than my tutu. I can't wait to see how angry Nolan gets!"

Did I really want to make him even more mad at me right now? I'd already torn a big gaping hole into our once beautiful relationship...

"You should wear it, Em," Ash winked at me. "He won't be able to keep his hands off you."

"Okay. I'll get it," I perked up.

We'd barely touched each other in days. It would be nice to feel his touch again. Even if it was from him trying to cover me up. We went to purchase our costumes and exited the store. The boys were all sitting on the park bench across the street, pretending to have patience. Jackson stood as he saw us and strutted over to Mer before plopping a kiss onto her forehead and trying to sneak a peek into her bag.

"No peeking," Mer smiled sweetly.

"It's a surprise?" Jackson asked.

"They're all a surprise, sweet cheeks," Kris smirked.

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Alex grimaced, wrapping his arms around Ashlynn. “Please tell me?” he begged, trying to use his best puppy dog eyes on her. It didn’t work.

We headed back down the street to the car, Nolan and I taking up the rear of the group. We stayed silent. Everyone in front of us was giggling and holding hands and being lovey-dovey. All except for Kris, who looked like she wanted to punch Doran for even being here. Doran just stared down at her with a crooked grin. Maybe he figured any attention she gave him was good attention?

“What costume did you pick, Emelia?” Nolan asked. It’s the first thing he had said to me all day. I almost fell over from the shock of hearing his voice for the first time in hours.

“It’s-. It’s um,” I stuttered.

“A surprise?” he asked, running a hand through his black hair.

“Yes,” I said.

“Am I going to like the surprise?” He raised a brow.

I laughed, “No, probably not.”

Nolan’s eyes flashed amber for a moment before he closed them, taking a deep breath.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, stopping in my tracks.

“I haven’t heard your laugh in so long,” he sighed.

My heart broke a little more.

*Why am I doing this to him? Why am I putting this wall up between us? Could my feelings be more painful than what I'm already doing to him.*

I didn't say anything as I crawled into my seat next to Kris. I missed him. I missed his thoughts in my head, I missed his touch on my skin. I even missed being called Luna. He'd just been calling me Emelia for days now and it was driving me crazy.

"I'm thinking we should have a bonfire tonight. What do you guys think?" Jackson voiced from the driver's seat.

"That sounds fun." Ashlynn smiled.

"Yes, lets party!" Kris shouted.

"As long as there are marshmallows I'm down." Mer agreed.

"I think we should start with tequila shots!" Kris smirked.

"Yeah sure. If you want to be dead tomorrow," Mer snorted.

"I'm in," I heard myself say.

*Oh shit. Why did I do that? I hate tequila.*

"Holy hell. Em is in? Let's get this party started!" Kris whooped, doing a little jig in her seat.

Mer looked back at me wide-eyed like I was crazy. I just shrugged at her. I peeked over at Nolan who was throwing daggers in my direction, but he didn't say anything. I'd pushed him far enough away that he didn't know how to react to my behavior anymore without me running even further from him.

“I’ll get the drinks then I guess,” Jackson said, looking at me through the rear-view mirror sternly.

*Oh God.*

He was going to give me a speech later for sure. I made eye contact with Kris who had suddenly gone quiet. She shifted her eyes between Nolan and me. I nodded. I do the same, shifting my glance between her and Doran. She nodded. We were in this together now, we had decided to collectively go crazy tonight and party away our boy issues. I heard Mer sigh as she realized what we were planning.

“I’m in too,” Mer sighed, resigned to her fate.

One thing my friends and I never did was leave a girl to mope alone.

“I won’t drink, but I’ll party with you guys too.” Ashlynn piped in from her seat.

I glanced at her questioningly and she did nothing but nod at me in solidarity. I loved her. She hadn’t known us for very long, but she’d already become like the little sister I never had. Mia would have loved her.

“Ash, will you make some—” I started.

“Beignets? You know it.” She smiled. I loved her so much.



Music filled the campsite as various pack members drank, danced, and were generally rambunctious around the fire. Kris wobbled around the fire, almost falling in a couple times, and would've had it not been for Doran standing behind her. She was going to be hungover tomorrow for sure. Even though I had planned to be a completely irresponsible teen tonight and party away my sorrows, I'd only taken one shot. I chose to spend my time sitting in the sand by the lakes shore instead. I hadn't spoken to Nolan since we'd gotten home that afternoon, and the longer we stayed separated the more uncomfortable I became. And Nolan was downright pissy, he'd been sitting in the same seat by the fire watching every step I took, his eyes glowing amber the entire time. Multiple people had tried to talk to him and get him to come hang out with them, but he didn't budge. Just sat there being as still as possible. The longer he stared at me the more restless I became, so I left the shoreline to find my friends.

"Let's danseuse, Emmmy." Kris giggled, grabbing my hand and twirling me in circles.

Wow, she was drunk. I got slightly nauseous as she stopped spinning me and began twirling Ashlynn.

"He's staring at you, Em," Mer whispered in my ear as she came to stand beside me.

"I know, Mer. Nothing I can do about it," I snapped, and immediately regretted it, "I'm sorry, Mer."

Mer smiled sadly. "Maybe you should go talk to him. You're only hurting each other more by avoiding each other."



My head started pounding and my world started to spin off its axis, but I kept my ground, “I’ll be back. Bathroom,” I grunted and turned to head towards the cabin.

I walked into the house and completely passed the bathroom, heading into the kitchen instead. I grabbed a bottle of water and chugged it. These headaches were really starting to affect me, and I knew they must’ve been from using all my energy to block out Nolan. Mer was right, I was hurting myself. I whirled back towards the front of the house and slammed into a wall. A tall sexy pissed off wall.

“Emelia, how much longer are you going to block me out?” Nolan asked, his eyes flashing from green to amber and back, as if he were fighting to keep control of himself.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, playing dumb.

I tried to move around him, but he pushed me back gently against the counter and placed a hand on each side of me. My breath hitched, this was the closest he’d stood to me in days. I could feel his warm breath as it washed over my face.

“Emelia,” he said.

“Nolan,” I said.

“Talk to me,” he demanded, moving his face within inches of mine.

“About what?” I asked.

“Anything,” he said.

“You smell nice,” I blurted.

He did. His scent was all around me, and his face was so close to mine. I almost couldn't take it. I moved towards him slowly, Nolan's eyes widened, glowing fully amber now. Realization dawned. What was I doing? This was not supposed to be happening. I froze, not moving any closer. I'd let my guard down.

*Rookie mistake.*

Nolan smirked, having caught on. I crawled out from under his arms and made a bee line for the front door. Once I was outside, I looked over my shoulder to see Nolan grinning by the door.

“Where did you gooo?” Kris moaned, hiccuping.

*Oh man. She's going to cry. What happened?*

“I got some water. What's wrong?” I asked.

I glanced around for Mer and saw that she was dancing with Jackson by the fire. Alex and Ash had disappeared, and I didn't see any sign of Doran. So, why was she upset?

“Do you think I'm dumb, Em?” Kris asked me seriously.

“No, I don't. Why would I think that?” I asked.

“Because I could be like that,” she waved a hand in the direction of Mer and Jackson, “but instead I'm a hot mess. I'm like the Great Wall of China and Doran's one of the Huns.”

I snorted. “Wow that's a pretty big metaphor for how drunk you are.”

“I know. I’m good like that.” She grinned crookedly.

“But no, I don’t think you’re dumb. You just have to learn to trust him and be open with him,” I advised her.

“But what if he hurts me, Em? I don’t think I could take it,” She whimpered.

“He won’t, Kris. He can’t. If anything, staying away from him is causing you more pain,” I explained, placing a hand on her shoulder.

“Maybe,” she whispered.

“Not maybe, Kris. He’s your mate. You know it. He knows it. I know it. He’ll be your other half. He’ll be everything you need and more,” I said, squeezing her shoulder.

“What if I open up and he’s not my mate?” she asked and her eyes widened, “What if he is and he thinks I’m a psycho?”

“I promise you there is no amount of crazy that he couldn’t-” I started.

*Shit. I’m an idiot. If there is one person in the entire world that could handle my crazy emotional ass it’s Nolan...*

“Em?” Kris asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“The room is spinning,” she said before falling over into Doran’s arms.

*Where did he come from?*

“Hi gorgeous,” Kris giggled before passing out.

Doran picked Kris up and cradled her against his chest, “Thanks,” he said, smiling at me.

“For what? Letting her get super drunk until she passed out?” I grimaced.

“What you said. I think she needed to hear you say that,” he explained.

“Oh. You’re welcome,” I murmured, not exactly sure if I had helped much, “but I think she needs to hear you say it more.”

Doran nodded at me before walking back to the house with Kris in his arms.

“Are you ready for bed, Emelia?” Nolan asked, suddenly standing beside me.

I looked up at him, trying to hold in the tears that had suddenly welled up. His face softened, “It’s alright, Luna.”

The tears fell anyway, and Nolan took me in his arms. “There is nothing you could do, say, or feel that would make me leave you. I will love you until my last breath, Luna. No matter what. We were made for each other,” Nolan consoled me.

My heart swelled as I pulled back to stare into Nolan’s emerald eyes, ‘I love you too, Nol,’

Nolan’s face lit up as he lifted me off the ground and twirled us around before sitting me back down and kissing me repeatedly. I started giggling, I’d caused us both so much stress over the last week, but seeing Nolan so happy now warmed my heart beyond belief.

“It was worth it. You’re worth it all,” he cooed, staring down at me with a lopsided grin that made him look even more boyish than he already did.

“Mind reader,” I smirked.

“Always,” he grinned.

I reached up, grabbing the collar of his shirt and pulled him down to me. I kissed him with everything I had to give. I put all the love, passion, and anxiety I’d been holding for the past week into this one kiss. Nolan groaned before picking me up and I wrapped my legs around him. He carried me off to the cabin.



As Nolan and I walked hand in hand towards the dining hall the next morning, I heard the sound of people arguing.

*It’s way too early for all this yelling.*

‘Would you rather go back to bed, my love?’ Nol cooed.

‘That does sound tempting.’ I smirked.

“I see you two have kissed and made up.” Ashlynn smiled, coming over to hand me a cinnamon roll. “You might want to take your love-sick self’s somewhere else though. Kris and Doran are having a moment,” she said, rolling her eyes.

A crash came from inside the dining hall.

*Jeez, Kris.*

I moved quickly into the dining room and saw that Kris and Doran were having a screaming match and Kris had just thrown a cinnamon roll at him. It had clearly missed as it looked like it had smacked into the grandfather clock behind him.

“You had no right you pervy weirdo!” Kris yelled.

“I have every right Kristine, and you know it,” Doran spat through gritted teeth.

*Man, I thought we solved this problem.*

“You’re crazy! And don’t you call me Kristine you white-haired freak!” Kris shrieked.

I glanced around the room to see most people were looking down at their plates or pretending they hadn’t noticed this very public confrontation. Nolan’s parents were not present.

‘What do we do?’ I asked Nolan.

‘What do you think we should do, Luna?’ he responded.

‘Why are you asking me? You’re the AIT!’ I scoffed.

‘AIT?’ he frowned.

‘Alpha in training,’ I explained with a ‘duh’ expression.

Nolan chuckled. ‘Yes. And so are you technically. You are her leader, Emelia. Lead.’

‘Thanks for the help, Cujo.’ I sighed.

Kris threw a fork across the room at Doran and missed. Which only seemed to make her angrier.

“Kris,” I said.

She didn't respond, too focused on Doran.

“Kris!” I yelled. Still nothing. She was ignoring me. I stepped between her and Doran and said her name again.

“Not now, Em, I'm about to beat this guy's ass,” Kris barked, her eyes beginning to glow red.

“No, you're not,” I said calmly.

I noticed as Arryssa stepped into the kitchen doorway, and just watched.

*How long has she been standing there?*

“What do you mean I'm not? He deserves it!” she spat.

“No, he doesn't,” I said sternly.

Kris's eyes turned scarlet as she looked directly at me. She was furious. I'd betrayed her. She stepped towards me, ready to take me on to get to Doran. I could see now why a normal person shouldn't get between mates like this ...

“Stop!” I commanded using some of the power I felt inside me.

Kris stopped mid-stride and her eyes widened. She shook it off and continued towards me, refusing to listen to me. I pushed more of my power towards her and when it hit her, she froze in place, her knees giving way beneath her. She knelt only a foot away, but she was looking straight forwards at my stomach, she couldn't seem to move her eyes any higher. Her eyes were still glowing scarlet, so I didn't stop pushing my

power towards her, it was the most I'd ever tried to use. I noticed then that along the back of my hands some new marking had appeared. Blue swirls that branched around my fingers and halfway up my wrist, and they were glowing. Kris's eyes moved towards them as well, and her eyes widened even more. It was enough of a distraction for her that some of her anger dissipated. Her eyes returned to normal, and I only saw a light ring of red around her blue irises. Kris instinctively bent her head slightly to the left, bearing her neck to me as a sign I'd only seen other wolves use towards Nick and Arryssa. Submission. She was submitting to me. I let go of the power and took a deep cleansing breath. The swirls on my hands no longer glowed, but they did not disappear either. They'd turned black and looked like intricate tattoos going up my hands.

*What the hell?*

I glanced over to see Nolan looking at me with a mixture of pride and shock on his face. He stepped between Kris, who was still kneeling, and I to grab my hand. He examined the markings, looking awestruck. Arryssa walked towards me, taking my other hand in hers. Pride was written all over her face as well.

“Have you ever seen anything like this?” Nolan asked his mother.

“No, I haven't. *The Sacred* are somewhat of a mystery to those who haven't met one in person, everything that is written in our history has either been written off as myth or was very



vague in the details. I'm not sure if this is normal, so we'll have to see if the others gain markings as well. Or perhaps because Emelia is the Sacred Leader she gets these markings, it would make sense with the display of dominance she just exerted. But again, this is all just theory." she smiled in wonder as she traced the swirls with her fingers.

"My mother didn't have them," I murmured.

"Your mother was a part of *The Sacred*? How would you know that?" Arryssa asked.

My eyes widened. Locke had told me, and with all the craziness going on with Nolan I had forgotten to mention it. Nolan's eyes widened, turning amber as he began growling. Arryssa glanced at him in confusion.

"What is it?" she asked.

"When did you speak with him?" Nolan said through gritted teeth.

"A week ago," I whispered.

"A week ago?!" He shouted, causing me to wince.

He'd never yelled at me like that before. I thought back to the last dream I had of Locke while I was locked in the bathroom. Nolan's eyes widened again, and I could feel his instant remorse at getting angry with me, but I deserved it.

'No, you don't Luna. I am sorry. Please forgive me,' he begged.

'There's nothing to forgive,' I smiled.

A small smile appeared on Nolan's face, but I could still feel his guilt. He looked towards his mother who had been observing our silent conversation.

"Locke knew her mother," He explained.

"How can that be? He's only eighteen, isn't he?" she asked.

"He's a hundred and twenty years old," I blurted.

"Holy shit he's old!" Kris gasped, still sitting on the floor in front of us, "Pretty hot for an old guy though."

Doran growled from behind us.

"Mother of all that is holy!" I yelled and pointed to Doran and Kris, "you two, outside now! I will be there in a minute."

Kris opened her mouth to protest but she must've noticed my facial expression because she immediately closed it. She and Doran left the room.

"I'll be right back," I said to Arryssa.

"No problem, dear, I'll have Nolan fill me in," she said, smirking. "Very proud of you by the way. You handled that nicely."

I blushed, suddenly realizing the entire pack had just witnessed me put Kris on her knees.

*Great.*

'It is great, love. It showed them that you are an Alpha and should be shown respect and loyalty,' Nol praised me.

'I'm seventeen. These older people shouldn't have to respect a seventeen-year-old girl.' I grimaced.

‘Age doesn’t matter like that here, love,’ he said.

‘Whatever. I’ll be back,’ I promised.

I stepped out of the room, walking out the front door to where Kris and Doran stood ten feet apart.

*What am I going to do with these two?*

“Em, I’d just like to say—” Kris started.

“Bzzzt!” I zipped, making a shut it motion with my hand, “Come with me.”

I walked down to the sand by the river and sat down. Doran and Kris stood awkwardly in front of me. I motioned for them to take a seat in front of me and pushed them to face each other. Kris grimaced, looking uncomfortable with their close distance.

“Doran?” I asked. Kris’s frown deepened.

“Yes ma’am,” Doran said, fighting back a smile.

“What happened last night after she passed out?” I asked.

“I took her into the cabin and put her in bed,” he explained.

“That was very nice of you. Wasn’t it very nice of him, Kris?” I smiled, cocking my head at Kris.

“Whose bed?” she asked, throwing daggers at Doran, “Ask him whose bed he put me in.”

My eyes widened, and I turned back to Doran.

“There wasn’t anybody in her suite. I didn’t want her to wake up and be alone if she got sick,” Doran explained,

crossing his arms and looking directly at Kris who was looking anywhere but at him.

“Mer would have come to bed eventually,” She muttered, crossing her arms.

“Meredith was with Jackson when you passed out,” Doran replied angrily, facing Kris head on.

Kris growled, her eyes flashing red, “I am NOT being difficult!” she yelled, stomping her foot.

I glanced at Doran confused, but his eyes had lit up, a small smile playing on his face.

“Stubborn? You’re stubborn you white-haired weirdo!” Kris seethed.

Doran’s smile grew bigger. He hadn’t said a word out loud, but Kris didn’t seem to realize. Kris’s face suddenly blushed scarlet.

“That is incredibly inappropriate to say in front of-” she stopped mid-sentence, her eyes wide, “Oh my God your mouth is not moving.”

“Hasn’t been for a while. It’s been really confusing hearing this one-sided conversation.” I snorted. “I’m a little curious what the last thing he said was.”

Kris’s entire face turned red. Oh, I really wanted to know now. Kris’s eyes snapped to Doran’s, tears began to fall down her cheeks. Doran grabbed Kris’s hands in his and started to massage circles on the back of them. I chose this moment to take my exit and headed back into the cabin. Once on the

porch I turned back one more time to check on my therapy clients.

‘Looks like whatever you did worked, Emelia,’ Nol praised.

‘I didn’t really do anything,’ I confessed.

‘Something must’ve made her put a little bit of her wall down. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been able to hear him,’ he explained.

I looked up at Nolan with sorrow filled eyes.

“What’s wrong Luna?” he frowned.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about Locke,” I sighed.

“That’s okay. No more secrets though, okay?” Nol smiled.

“Okay,” I relented.

Nolan’s eyebrows furrowed, “You told him you’d see him again?”

“I did,” I nodded.

“Why?” asked Nolan.

“I don’t know,” I confessed.

“You have feelings for him?” He grimaced, closing his eyes tightly.

“Not like that. He just seems like—I don’t know,” I frowned.

“Like he needs help. Like he needs a friend?” Nol sighed, running a hand through his hair.

“Yeah,” I smiled back.

“And you think you should be that friend?” he asked.

I thought of my birth mom and how Locke had said every Water Spirit before me had chosen someone else over him.

*He must be pretty lonely.*

“I adore your kind heart Emelia, but I don’t like how dangerous he is,” Nolan confessed.

“He’s not always like he was in the classroom that day. It’s like he has two different personalities sometimes,” I observed.

“Or just anger issues,” Nolan said.

“Well, he is over a century old and has been chasing some dream of the Water Spirit this whole time. Do you think he has a True Mate out there?” I wondered.

“He’s not a wolf so I’m not sure,” he said.

“He did tell me what he is,” I remembered.

Nolan looked at me with surprise. He hadn’t delved deep enough into my thoughts to see that.

“What is he?” he asked.

“He said he’s a Reincarnate. Ever heard of that?” I asked.

“Nope,” he frowned.

“Didn’t think so,” I sighed.



# The Big Easy

## Emelia

“**J**ackson is never going to let me leave the house dressed like this, guys. It’s just not going to happen. It looks like I ordered my clothes two sizes too small!” Mer assessed while practicing a fake cheer in the mirror. She was NOT taking this outfit off, she looked HOT.

“If you take that off, I’m going to burn all your other clothes, so you’re forced to put it back on,” Kris told her, a huge grin on her face.

“That’s a bit much Kris, but she’s right, Mer. You look amazing. You should’ve been a cheerleader. Maybe you can be one in college,” I giggled.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Where’s your costume, Em? Go change!” Mer said, pushing me towards the closet.

“I’m going, I’m going. Don’t get your panties in a twist,” I laughed, grabbing my costume and heading for the bathroom on the opposite side of the room.



“The only one who should be keeping her panties—” Kris started.

“KRISTINE!” Victoria scolded from the doorway, “Don’t you finish that sentence. It’s hard enough on me that my seventeen-year-old daughter is sleeping in the same bed as her mate, but if you three start making sexual innuendos in front of me, I might die.”

We busted out laughing at my mother’s petrified expression. If only she knew the things we talked about when she wasn’t here.

‘And what might those things be, Emelia?’ Nolan chuckled.

My laughter turned into me choking on air and I was sure my face had turned to a nice shade of scarlet. I tried looking in the opposite direction of the girls so they wouldn’t notice but it was too late. Kris had seen it all over my face.

“Ooh what did he say? I’m sure it was wildly inappropriate, and your mother would love to hear it!” Kris grinned wickedly.

*Two can play at this game, Kristine Aguya.*

I looked at her with my most innocent-looking smile.

Her eyebrows raised in alarm, “You wouldn’t dare, Suneer.”

“Oh, wouldn’t I? I’m sure my mother—Actually, I’m sure Doran would LOVE to hear all about—” was all I got out before Kris was covering my mouth with her hands, but I

could tell my plan had worked because Kris's eyes widened and her face blanched. I smirked.

*Gotcha.*

“What did White Wolf have to say about your little escapade into the world of strippers?” I smirked.

“Strippers?! Emelia Rae Suneer, please tell me you did not go to a strip club?!” Victoria shouted

‘Yes, Luna. Please tell her so that I will not have to go kill some poor guy that thinks he’s Magic Mike,’ Nolan growled in my mind. He and my brother were currently waiting for us downstairs.

“We did not go to a strip club, Mom. It’s just that Kris once thought it would be a good idea to show Covington High’s dance squad how she thought it should be done,” I confessed, laughing.

“And she did. In front of them AND the entire football team,” Mer snorted, bending over from laughter.

My mother glanced over at Kris whose entire face had turned blood red. She was also wincing, so I was sure Doran was really letting her have it. For a fleeting moment I worried about the football team’s safety.

*Nah, they’ll be fine.*

‘What brought on this conversation, anyway? Are your Halloween costumes really that controversial? Because I will be happy to lock you in my room for the evening, Luna,’ Nolan warned.

‘Sounds fun. Will you be there?’ I asked playfully.

I could feel Nolan’s shock at my flirtatious comment, he wasn’t sure how to respond.

‘I will be happy to spend the evening with you there, love. In however little amount of clothing you desire,’ Nolan purred.

*Oh shit.*

I shut my mind off from Nolan momentarily, not wanting him to hear or feel my reaction. I wasn’t quite ready for our relationship to head in that particular direction. No matter how much I wanted to throw myself at him like a horny teenager in this moment. I turned my attention back to my mother and two friends that were still adjusting their Halloween costumes.

Victoria walked over to me while my friends were distracted, “Emelia?” My mother whispered to me.

“Yes, Mom,” I answered.

“I know you and Nolan are mates, but if you need to talk about anything. You know...serious. You can talk to me about it no matter how much it’s going to make me squirm,” she grimaced.

I blushed. “I know, Mom. I still remember the ‘talk’ we had when I started high school though. So, no worries for now, okay?” I said, cringing.

My mother sighed in relief.

Something banged against my mind painfully, ‘Luna?!’ Nolan’s voice broke through the block I’d put up.

*Ouch!* I held my temple with my hand as it began to throb.

‘What is it? What’s wrong?’ I groaned.

‘I’m sorry to yell. You shut me out, and I panicked. Are you okay? What happened? Did I upset you?’ Nolan rambled.

*Oh my God.*

I’d traumatized him by shutting him out for so long. I hadn’t even thought about how shutting him out, even for just a moment, would make him feel.

‘I’m sorry Nol. I’m fine. I just needed a minute to collect myself,’ I explained.

‘Collect yourself? I did upset you with my comment. I apologize Luna,’ he chided himself.

‘No don’t apologize. You didn’t upset me you-,’ I began. Jeez this was embarrassing. I felt as the realization hit Nolan and felt his mirth.

‘I would never pressure you into anything Luna. Any pace you choose is completely fine with me,’ Nolan thought.

Even though what he was saying was sweet and romantic, I still blushed from head to toe, especially with my mom standing blissfully unaware beside me.

‘I love you Nol,’ I whispered.

‘I love you Emelia,’ Nolan cooed.



The girls and I stepped out onto the front porch of the cabin fully dressed in our costumes. Well as dressed as we could be in what little clothes we'd chosen. My vision roamed over the entire group of boys, and I tried to hold in my laughter. Jackson was staring jaw dropped at Mer. He'd frozen in place, looking dumbfounded. Alex was dressed as a shirtless angel, so obviously Ash hadn't been able to hold in the secret of her devil's costume. Doran was covering his mouth with his fist and staring at Kris, his eyes filled with mischief. If Nolan looked at me like that, I think I'd have to go change cause *woof*. He was scary looking, but Kris didn't budge. She stared right back at him and smirked. This would be fun to watch.

'Well you'll have to miss the show unfortunately, my love,' Nolan voiced.

'What, why?' I frowned.

I looked around, noticing that Nolan was not with us. Suddenly I was lifted off the ground and thrown over someone's shoulder. Nolan was carrying me back towards the house and had thrown his leather jacket over my rear end. I reached down and smacked his butt in retaliation.

'Keep testing me Luna and see where it gets you,' Nolan growled playfully.

'Where are you taking me?' I demanded, giggling.

'To change. Maybe you can go as a nice ghost for Halloween. I'll find a lovely sheet for you to wear,' he chuckled.

I began laughing uncontrollably, and here I thought the worst reaction would come from Doran and Kris.

‘I have my limits, Emelia. And letting a bunch of idiots drunk on Sazerac’s see your beautiful ass is way past them,’ Nolan said.

“You don’t like my costume, Nol?” I frowned, pretending to sound hurt.

“I love your costume, Luna. As will the rest of Louisiana. So, you are either going to change or we’re staying home,” he ordered, leaving no room for objection.

*Bossy much?*

Nolan had reached the front door and stopped in the doorway.

“Hello, Son. Is there a reason your mate is upside down?” Nick asked, chuckling.

“Because Nolan doesn’t like my costume,” I said, pretending to mope.

“Ahh. Well, I’d like to see it, but it’s covered in leather at the moment,” Nick laughed.

Nolan sighed, setting me down on the ground. Nick examined my outfit, his signature Cheshire grin taking over his face as he glanced over to the rest of the girls to see that they were sporting similar amounts of clothing, “You girls really are a treat. Have fun.” Nick laughed before closing the door so that Nolan couldn’t bring me inside to change. Nolan

growled at his father who just laughed in response and walked away.

“If it makes you happy, I’ll go put on some leggings,” I said, pouting.

“No way Jose. If I have to go out there looking like a Halloween Ho, then so do you Emelia,” Mer shouted from her spot by the group, “So you better hop off that high horse Nolan because I will shove your ass in a crate for the evening.”

I burst out laughing, and I couldn’t stop. I bent over as tears began rolling down my cheeks. Who would have thought two months ago that our life’s would be like this? We were just three normal girls starting their junior year of high school, and now were here with a werewolf pack fighting over short skirts and a little too much cleavage. Two months ago my best friend Meredith Terran would never have threatened a guy like that. Now Kris-she would have. But not Mer. In just two months my smart and loving friend had grown so much confidence. I smiled over at my brother Jackson knowing I’d have to thank him for helping Mer to turn into the badass she was meant to be. Jackson raised an eyebrow at me, confused with my sudden appraisal towards him. Nolan smiled down at me lovingly, ‘My mate. What a wonder she is.’

Nolan sighed, “Very well. But I make no promises I won’t kill anyone that looks at you Luna. And I’ll make sure Meredith attends their funerals as it will be her fault as well,” Nolan grinned wickedly at my brunette friend.

“I’m good with that,” Mer conceited before she clapped her hands together loudly, “Let’s hit the road ladies. No more detours boys. Straight on to the Big Easy!”

We walked towards Jackson’s Jeep, and I watched as the girls began to pile in. I realized- *oh shit we’re not all going to fit in there.*

“You and I aren’t riding with them, Emelia,” Nolan said, reading my thoughts.

“What? Then what car are we—” I began but stopped mid-sentence, noticing that Nolan was holding a helmet out to me.

It was one I’d never seen before. It looked new and shiny and black, and printed on the side of it in cursive script was a large E.A. written in baby blue colored letters.

*E.A.? What’s that?*

I was sidetracked from thinking about the mysterious letters when I heard a loud roar. I glanced up to see Nolan had straddled and revved up his black motorcycle. It had been a while since I’d seen him on it.

“We’re taking this?” I asked, grinning from ear to ear.

“We are. You didn’t seem that enthused to ride it last time, so I didn’t think you liked it. You seem excited now though. Why is that?” Nolan smirked at me.

“Last time I thought you were the voodoo man straight out of *The Princess and the Frog*, so excuse me if I wasn’t thrilled to ride on what I assumed was your death bike. But I love



motorcycles, Nol,” I confessed, placing my helmet on and taking a seat behind Nolan on the bike.

“I prefer you sit in front, Luna,” he requested.

“Why?” I frowned.

“So, that I can protect you,” he explained.

“From wha—Oh never mind, whatever. Fricken werewolves.” I stood up and switched positions with Nolan, “Can we go?” I asked.

“Yes, let’s go.” He smiled, picking his feet up off the ground and following closely behind Jay’s Jeep.

The breeze on my face felt great. I could smell the recent rain in the air as it washed over my face and I relaxed into Nolan’s chest. I thought back to the first night I’d met Nolan and how he made me sit in front of him that time as well. Protecting me from day one.

‘Always, Luna,’ Nolan agreed.

‘Nolan Adolfo, you are a wonder,’ I told him, remembering his thoughts from earlier. Nolan let out a wolfish laugh and wrapped one arm around my stomach. How he could keep this bike steady with one hand I’d never understand.

‘I like my new helmet. Did you get it for me?’ I asked.

‘I did. That’s why it’s monogrammed for you,’ he explained.

I grinned, wondering how long he’d had this helmet for me. It really was a thoughtful gift. My eyes widened suddenly-

*Nolan Adolfo.*

*E.A. Holy crap.*

*Emelia Adolfo.*

Nolan growled possessively behind me, obviously having heard my train of thought.

‘Getting a little ahead of yourself there handsome. Only seventeen remember. I know you’re all grown and eighteen but I’m not really into the whole shotgun wedding thing,’ I confessed.

Nolan barked out a laugh, “Luna a shotgun wedding usually involves-”

“Don’t finish that sentence, Nol. Just don’t,” I giggled. “We do not need to put that into the universe.”

“Why? Because you already can’t keep your hands off me?” he grinned.

“Why yes, Nolan. That’s exactly it. You’re just so incredibly irresistible I don’t know how much longer I can keep until I take your virtue,” I rolled my eyes.

“My virtue, Emelia? You can have that whenever you please.” He smirked.

I blushed, looking down at Nolan’s hands on the handlebars. Wow this conversation was coming up a lot today. I didn’t say anything, choosing instead to pay attention to the passing trees on either side of the road. Nolan removed one hand from the

handlebars again, placing it at the bottom of stomach and slipping it under my shirt.

*Holy hell.*

He ran his fingertips lightly up my side and I stopped breathing. He stopped halfway up my stomach and used his nails to lightly graze my skin. I let out a breathy moan. It was a sound I didn't even know I could make. Nolan growled, liking my response.

'Please Luna. You cannot make sounds like that. I am trying to drive,' Nolan teased.

'Excuse me? Like that was my fault?' I scoffed.

Nolan chose that moment to stay quiet. But I could feel that he was grinning from ear to ear. I noticed a street sign as we passed it that read five miles to New Orleans. We were almost there. The excitement took over me, distracting me from my recent conversation with Nolan. We pulled off an exit and entered the city. It was exactly as I'd remembered it. Street performers lined the street as we passed through the business district, including a familiar silver face. Every year that the girls and I had come here we saw the same man painted in silver from head to toe. He stood still on the side of the street all day and people gave him money for it. The girls and I had sat on a park bench near him a few times and just watched as he would scare unsuspecting passers who assumed he was an actual statue. I saw the statue's eyes turn towards me and watched as he tried to fight a smile. He recognized me. I laughed out loud. I loved this city. We pulled off into some

parking spaces and unloaded. Kris looked grumpy as she climbed out of the car and a grinning Doran followed closely behind her.

Kris looked at me seriously, “Em,” she said.

“Kris,” I replied.

“Doran told me I look like a dwarf cat after a nap,” she stated.

“Wow that’s a unique thing to say about a person,” I said, fighting my grin.

“Yes. So. I’d like a refund,” She explained, holding her hand out to me, palm up.

“A refund?” Doran asked, looking at Kris quizzically.

“Yes. A refund. My mate here is broken, and I’d like a replacement,” she stated looking back at me. Doran’s face softened, his eyes glowing.

Kris looked at him like he was crazy, “Why are you looking at me like that? I just insulted you?” she asked incredulously.

“You called me your mate,” He smiled.

Kris’s eyes widened. She hadn’t realized she’d said that.

‘Wow these two are taking it at turtle speed,’ Nolan shook his head.

‘It might be for the best. Don’t want to scare Kris off,’ I thought.

‘She acts very tough for someone so—’ Nolan trailed off.

‘So skittish? Yeah. Can you blame her though? Mer and I have been her only real family for a long time,’ I confessed.

‘I suppose not. I feel bad she had to go through that,’ he sighed.

‘You and me both, Nol. You and me both,’ I said, ‘but she has a whole pack for family now, right?’

Nolan smiled down at me. ‘Right.’

“O-M-G. It’s Tim, you guys!” Mer shrieked, running past the group and up to the man painted in silver.

“Tim?” Nolan asked.

“We’re only here for five minutes and they’re already running up to strangers on the side of the road!” Doran grumbled.

“That’s Tim,” Jackson explained, “The girls see him every time they come to the city.”

“Tim, my man! Give me five!” Kris shouted, holding her hand up to Tim for a high five. He didn’t reciprocate, but instead continued to stand perfectly still.

“Has he ever actually talked to you guys?” Alex snorted.

“Nope,” I replied. Dude was a professional. He wouldn’t crack.

“What if I throw something at him?” Ashlynn asked.

“I would beat your ass.” Kris frowned. “Tim is family. We don’t hurt Tim.”

“If he doesn’t talk, how do you know his name is Tim?” Alex asked.

The girls and I stared at Alex like the answer was obvious. He didn’t catch on.

“Because he looks like the Tin Man.” Mer sighed.

“Get it? Tin. Tim?” Kris snorted.

Alex just blinked at us. I looked over at Ashlynn bewildered.

“You sure this is the one, Ash? Where’s the sense of humor?” I asked.

“It takes him a minute to get things. Just wait a while,” Ashlynn giggled.

We all stared at Alex collectively, waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop. Nothing.

“Oh well.” Kris shrugged, growing impatient.

She walked up to Tim and did a once over and turned back around to make the same exact pose as him and froze. Mer giggled and stood to his other side copying her.

*So, we’re doing this.*

Alright. I busted out laughing but stood next to Mer and got into the same position. We were all now matching Tin Man Tim. A few tourists passed by, placing a couple twenties into Tim’s money can. I glanced up at Tim and saw him glance at me and wink before returning to his pose.

“Well. this was fun. Can we go home now?” Doran whined.

“Why so rushed, Cujo?” Kris laughed.

“The longer we stay here the more innocent humans I’m going to have to maim for looking up that extremely short tutu of yours,” Doran growled.

“Glad it’s not just me,” Nolan smirked.

I looked over at Ashlynn as we all began to walk towards The French Quarter.

“Are they always like this?” I asked.

“Possessive and controlling? No. Sometimes they’re arses too.” She smirked.

“Arses? Ooh, I like that one mate. I’m stealing it,” I giggled, trying to use my fake Australian accent.

“So what are the plans for the rest of the evening ladies?” Jackson asked.

“The usual of course,” Kris answered.

“Kris, sweetie. I’m not sure if you know this but most of us aren’t usually here for this,” Ashlynn laughed.

“I guess you’re right. Well after bugging Tim for a little while we usually go look at the new art showcases around the Garden District and then head over to Canal Street for the real action,” Kris explained.

“What’s on Canal Street?” Doran asked.

“It’s where we’ll find New Orleans’ Underground,” Kris grinned.

“The Underground?” Nolan asked.

“It’s where they have all the hidden teen clubs,” I said.

“Oh, so we’re not planning to illegally sneak onto Bourbon Street?” Doran asked, “That’s a relief.”

“Who told you that’s what we were doing?” I asked, “Wait. Don’t answer that, dumb question,” I said, staring at the back of Kris’s head.



“There is no way,” Ashlynn protested.

“Oh come on Ash!” Kris pouted, using her best puppy dog eyes.

We were currently sitting in a karaoke bar in one of the clubs that Kris had chosen. “There is nothing you could say that would convince me to go up there and sing, Kris.” Ash snorted.

“I would love to hear you sing, Mon Petit Chou,” Alex smiled, looking lovingly into Ash’s eyes as she turned a deep shade of red.

“What language was that? Do all you wolves just know every language?” Kris wondered.

“Sounded French to me,” Mer assessed.

“It is. It means-” was all Alex could get out before Ash was covering his mouth with her hand.



“Don’t you dare!” She growled at him, her face still red as could be.

“Might as well let him tell us Ash. Otherwise, I’ll be forced to Google it and use it against you later,” I smirked.

Ash squinted her eyes at me, clearly feeling betrayed by her new sister. I couldn’t help but laugh at her expression causing me to think of Mia. We used to be like this.

“If you must know it means—” she started, but Alex covered her mouth in revenge. She dropped her hands from his mouth, rolling her eyes at him.

“It means my little cabbage,” Alex announced before plopping a wet kiss onto Ash’s mouth. We all burst out laughing.

“Why on earth would you call her that?” I asked.

“When Alex first joined our pack when we were young, he got in trouble with some of the other boys. So as his punishment he was put on kitchen duty by the Alpha,” Ashlynn explained, grinning fondly at the memory.

“I came into the kitchen on my first day of punishment and it was empty. Except for one little girl sitting in the floor surrounded by multiple rolls of cabbage. She had dropped a whole crate full,” Alex laughed.

“I was covered in it. And I was so upset because now it was ruined and wouldn’t be usable for dinner. But Alex didn’t care about that. He just laughed and laughed at me,” Ash smiled.

“So, she’s always been my little cabbage since then,” Alex pressed a soft kiss to Ash’s forehead and even though she still looked embarrassed, I could see how much she adored him.

“So, are you going to sing for him, Ash?” Kris asked, smirking.

Ash rolled her eyes and just shrugged in response.

“Excellent.” Kris grinned.

An hour and a half later I’d found myself somehow on stage with my two neurotic best friends and Ash singing Taylor Swift. We sounded horrendous.

‘You sound wonderful, Luna. Like a beautiful dying cat,’ Nolan chuckled.

I couldn’t help but start cracking up mid-lyric.

‘That’s so not nice, Nol,’ I said.

‘Just being honest, my love.’ Nol smiled.

After we finished our concert to an unwilling crowd, we decided it was time to hit the next stop.

“I think it’s time for dinner, gents,” Ash announced, “I could eat an entire herd of—”

“Gross!” the girls and I cringed in unison.

“What’s gross?” Ash asked.

“Sometimes I forgot you all are werewolves and hunt live animals. It’s a little gross to think about for me,” Mer grimaced.

“Ditto,” Kris and I said.

“Don’t knock it till you try it, girls.” Ash grinned at us wickedly.

“I prefer my beef not to moo, thank you.” Kris snorted.

“Ditto again,” voiced Mer and I.

“Alright, ladies. Let’s find some dinner then. I promise it won’t moo.” Nolan laughed at us and lead us towards a group of restaurants down the street.



# Let The Good Times Roll

## Emelia

“**W**hose idea was it to get seafood again?” Kris moaned, leaning her head against her knees on the floor of a sketchy bathroom stall.

“Probably the same person who decided to enter the crab leg eating contest,” Doran growled from outside the women’s bathroom.

“Damn. Who was that?” Kris asked.

“You, dummy,” Mer snorted.

“Oh, yeah,” Kris said, letting out a loud belch, “Wow, that was attractive. No wonder I can’t keep a man.”

“I’m sure Doran is happy about that also,” I smirked.

“Damn, Em. That hit me. Right in the chest,” Kris said, hitting herself in the chest with a fist as if I had shot her with an arrow.

Mer rolled her eyes. “Em, you go back out. I’ll take care of the sickling here.”

“Yeah, Emmy. Don’t let me ruin your night. Go get some hot werewolf ass!” Kris chuckled, looking up at me with a lopsided grin.

“Kristine,” I heard Doran growl from the doorway, “Don’t make me come in there.”

“Oh, are you jealous, Dor? My bad. Don’t worry, you’re the only hot werewolf I’m interested in,” Kris giggled, trying to stand up without puking.

“I think he was more concerned about the announcing werewolves to humans thing, Kris,” Mer sighed.

Kris shrugged as if it wasn’t important to keep the supernatural world a secret from unsuspecting humans. Kris walked over to the bathroom sink and rinsed her mouth before she threw her head upside down to throw her messy hair into a high ponytail and adjusted her boobs in her much too revealing costume. Mer sighed again before handing Kris a piece of spearmint gum to wash out the smell of vomit on her breath.

“Thanks, doll.” Kris winked before throwing the door open and pushing a grumpy-looking Doran aside. “Alright, ladies, let’s get back out there.”

“I think it’s time for you to sit down, Kristine,” Doran ordered.

Kris's eyes flashed red as her vision snapped to him. "Who do you think you're talking to? You're not the boss of me!" she said, stomping her foot like a child.

Doran's white eyes flashed amber before he lifted Kris into his arms and cradled her against his chest, carrying her off into the crowd as Kris continued to yell and smack her fist against his chest.

"Should we go after them?" Mer asked.

"We can't put ourselves between them when they're like this," I said, watching as Doran and Kris disappeared into the crowd.

"Why?" Mer cocked her head slightly sideways, almost in a wolfish fashion.

"Because they're mates, Mer. I feel like it's best to just let Doran take the lead. We've known Kris for a long time, but Doran. He's different. She needs him," I explained, shrugging.

"He's the other half to her soul. He can help to balance the feelings within Kris and break down the walls in a way only he can," Nolan explained to Mer, suddenly standing beside me.

"You'd think this whole mind connection thing would tell me when you're sneaking up on me," I grumbled.

"It would if you were paying attention to me, Luna." Nolan pouted.

"Aw. Are you feeling lonely, Nol?" I giggled.

“A little. Dance with me?” He smiled playfully.

“I thought you’d never ask.” I grinned, grabbing Nolan’s outstretched hand and following him to the floor as the beginnings of *Demons* by Imagine Dragons pumped through the speakers.

‘I love this song!’ I squealed.

‘I know, Luna. That’s why I requested it,’ Nolan smirked.

“I’m not sure it’s fair that you just instantly know everything about me. Where’s the mystery?” I laughed.

“The whole werewolf mated to a water elemental isn’t mystery enough for you, Emelia.” Nolan chuckled as I leaned my head onto his chest.

“Well, when you put it that way,” I snorted.

We stayed like that for the next couple of slow songs. Not saying anything, just enjoying each other’s company. I took in his woody scent and sighed. I felt Nolan’s chest rumble and noticed that he was singing softly. So softly that only I could hear him. His voice was beautiful, like a balm to my soul.

“We should probably head back to camp soon, Nol. Have to be back by midnight remember.” I sighed sadly.

Nolan chuckled, placing a small kiss on the top of my hair. “Actually, I talked my father into letting us stay the night in NOLA.”

My head popped up quickly and I looked at Nolan, shocked he’d kept this surprise from me.



Nolan's grin widened. "We've gotten a few rooms at one of the hotels a street over from here."

"And how did you convince our overprotective Alpha to agree to that?" I asked.

"Each of you girls will be roomed with your mates for the night as protection," Nolan whispered, his voice dropping slightly and his eyes glowing a light shade of amber.

*Oh my.*

My breath hitched as I realized what Nolan was telling me. He and I would be spending the night alone in a hotel room. Which shouldn't make me nervous since I'd spent every night with him already to keep the dreams away, but this would be different. We wouldn't be under the same roof as Nolan's parents or across the hall from my too nosy for their own good best friends. I felt that all too familiar sense of anxiety begin to build in my chest, like an old friend I hadn't seen in a while but still remembered like yesterday's breakfast.

Nolan's eyes widened as he obviously felt my inner turmoil. "Emelia. I would never force you into something you didn't want to do."

"I know," I whispered, "It's just that I don't-" I stopped, not knowing what I was trying to say.

"You don't?" Nolan's eyes began to glow, and he looked stricken. "You don't want me?" he dropped his hands from my arms and left me feeling bereft. He looked at my arms and

then down at his palms, as if he thought he'd been forcing himself on me this whole time.

“No, Nolan I-” I started, stumbling over the words in a panic as I saw how upset he'd gotten.

*Pain.*

*Pain, hurt, and regret.*

The emotions came over me so strongly that I thought they were my own. They squeezed around my heart in a way that stole my breath worse than any anxiety attack I'd ever had. I grabbed the front of Nolan's shirt and pulled him towards me so that our chests were touching, taking Nolan by surprise as I smashed my lips to his in a way that had me feeling bold. I completely dropped my walls around my mind in a way I had never done before and pushed every emotion I was feeling towards the fire I felt in Nolan's soul. I felt his soul swirl around mine in a clash of fire and waves that should be wrong, but felt righter than anything in this world. I pushed all my desire, love, and even my anxious thoughts towards Nolan's mind in a surrender of complete vulnerability. We pulled away from the kiss breathlessly and stared into each other's eyes. Our faces were still so close I could feel his breath wash across my nose and cheeks.

“Emelia, you are the water that quenches the flames that burn inside my soul. I could drown in my love for you. Sometimes I'm afraid you'll slip right through my fingers and evaporate,” Nolan said, his eyes closed.

“I will love you until my last dying breath, Nolan. Sometimes my feelings for you are so strong I feel like I might combust. Please never doubt that I want you,” I whispered as I placed a feather-like kiss on his lips.

“Ooh mama. Is it hot in here or is it just these two?” Kris interrupted, fanning herself.

“Kristine,” Doran grumbled, coming to stand beside Kris.

I glanced away from Nolan and saw that our group of friends had gathered around us. Jackson was cradling a knocked-out Mer in his arms.

“What happened?” I sighed.

“She’s a loser and fell asleep,” Kris snorted.

“Are we ready to head back to the hotel, ladies?” Alex asked, holding a sleepy Ashlynn against his chest.

“Hotel?” Kris asked. “I thought it was weird that we hadn’t left already. We were totally going to miss our Cinderella deadline,” she nodded her head towards me.

“Remind me to drop my glass slipper on the way out,” I said, rolling my eyes.

“So, what’s the room situation, guys?” Kris asked.

Doran smiled mischievously, wrapping his arms around Kris from behind. “The Alpha has requested the females stay in rooms with their respective mates.”

Kris’s eyes widened and her face paled. She said nothing, speechless.

“I didn’t know she could be brought to silence like that,” Ash giggled.

“Yes, well, she’s also never been mated to a hot werewolf.” I smirked.

“Luna, I would appreciate if you didn’t call other males hot,” Nolan grumbled.

“I hang out with Kris too much for that so you’ll have to get used to that—” I began.

‘I’m sure I can think of a way to put all others hotties from your mind Luna,’ Nolan flirted.

My vision snapped towards Nolan and his eyes had darkened to an amber glow again.

“All three of them brought to silence in one night. I feel like that’s a win gentleman.” Jackson smirked, and a sleepy Meredith grumbled in his arms.



Nolan locked the door behind him after we entered our small exterior hotel room. I looked around the small room. There was one queen size bed, a nightstand, a desk, a dresser, a pull-out couch, and a bathroom near the end of the room. I turned to Nolan to see him placing our bags on the dresser and pulling out some pajamas for me.

“When did you pack us a bag?” I asked.

“I didn’t. My mother packed bags for the three of you while we were at school, so that it could be a surprise,” he said.

“Oh,” I mumbled, walking over to the bag to see what else she had packed.

“Are you hungry, Luna?” Nolan asked.

“A little,” I admitted.

“I’ll go find us something to eat,” Nolan kissed my forehead before leaving to exit the room, “Lock this door behind me. You can shower while I’m gone if you’d like. I’ll take my turn when I get back.”

I blushed, suddenly envisioning the two of us showering together, and tried to block the thought before it got to Nolan. He made no move that showed he had heard it besides a short pause as his hand turned the doorknob.

Nolan cleared his throat and took a shallow breath, “I’ll be back soon, love. Lock this door. Jackson and Mer are next door if you need them.”

“Okay,” I whispered before Nolan left.

As the door closed behind him, I grabbed my pajamas and headed to the bathroom. I quickly showered, washing away the sweat and glitter I’d procured from the various clubs we’d been to over the night. I put my pajamas on and was thankful that Arryssa had picked out my comfortable but modest pajama pants and band T-shirt for the trip. I left the bathroom to grab my hairbrush.

A cool breeze washed over my skin, and I noticed that the room's door was slightly ajar. I'd forgotten to lock it.

*Shit. Someone is in here.*

'Nolan? Are you on your way back?' I sent to him.

Nothing. He didn't answer.

*That's odd. I can't feel him.*

I moved to the door and closed it, locking the deadbolt. I still felt eyes on me and knew that I'd locked whomever the trespasser was in the room with me. I took a small breath and tried to calm myself, remembering my training from the camp. I pushed where I felt my power low in my stomach towards my hands and prepared to push it at my enemy as soon as they made themselves known. I turned towards the rest of the room to find it completely empty, but the dark shadows in each corner still felt ominous. I slowly walked towards the back of the room and took notice of a small closet I hadn't known was there before. I reached for the handle to peek inside when I suddenly felt an arm wrap around my stomach, pulling me against a hard chest. Another hand wrapped around my mouth to keep anyone from hearing my screams. I pulled my arms up and around me to face my palms towards my assailant and pushed a stream of water at them as hard as I could. They let go of me quickly and I turned around to aim another blast at him when I saw a dripping wet Nolan sputtering and coughing out water.

"WHAT THE HELL?!" I screeched, furious that he'd tricked me.

“You left the door unlocked, Emelia. What if I hadn’t been the first one back to the room? What if Locke had snuck in here while you were taking a shower and tried to take you?” he frowned.

“Well, as you can see, I can take care of myself,” I muttered, crossing my arms over my chest and staring daggers at him.

Nolan frowned right back at me, clearly unimpressed with my performance. His features softened slightly, and he stepped towards me, but I stepped backwards out of his reach.

“I have confidence in you, Luna. I’d just rather you not be put in the position to have to defend yourself like that. I am supposed to be your protector,” he said.

“You cannot be with me at all times, Nolan. You have to trust that I can take care of myself if you are not there, or you will drive yourself crazy with worry,” I argued.

“I know that. I just wish you’d at least take the steps of basic safety. Like locking the door when I ask,” Nolan frowned.

“Okay, I’m sorry about that. I forgot,” I relented.

“I can’t lose you, Emelia,” Nolan admitted, his eyes glowing. A rush of panic washed over me- it was coming from him.

“You won’t,” I promised, stepping closer to him and wrapping my arms around him.

I placed a small, chaste kiss on first his nose, then both cheeks, and finally landed on his smirking lips. Nolan wrapped his arms around me and moved them up so that one hand was

in my hair and the other was caressing my cheek as he deepened the kiss, requesting permission to push his tongue into my mouth to intertwine it with mine. Nolan lifted me off the ground as I let out a small embarrassing moan and placed me on the bed, hovering over me as he continued to torture me with chaste kisses down my throat and across my shoulder.

“Still hungry?” he whispered across my skin. I shook my head no, not trusting my voice. Nolan chuckled but slowed his kissing as he rolled off me and laid on the pillow beside me.

“Then I do believe it’s time for bed, Ms. Suneer.” Nolan grinned wickedly.

“You’re evil. I can’t believe I’m just realizing that,” I pouted, but Nolan simply placed a small kiss on my forehead before ushering me to roll over so that he could hold me.

“Rest well, Luna. I love you,” he whispered.



*\*Ding\**

I woke feeling groggy to the sound of my phone beeping, a text notification from Kris lighting up the screen. The soft snores coming from Nolan told me that he hadn’t woken. I rolled back towards my phone. It was almost 2:00 a.m. I groaned, but opened the text:

***Kris: u up?***

***Me: yup.***



*Kris: let's sneak out?*

*Me: you have a death wish...*

*Me: where to?*

*Kris: That's my girl. I hear NOLA has this new secret club called Alien that's open from midnight to 4:00 a.m.*

*Me: If it's secret, how do people know about it?*

*Me: Nvm. You know how to get there?*

*Kris: yup. It's nearby actually, just a few minutes' walk.*

*Me: Mer?*

*Kris: Asleep and probably won't sneak away from lover boy Jay.*

*Me: Why aren't you asleep?*

*Kris: I just can't. Isn't this the city that never sleeps?*

*Me: That's New York, Kris ...*

*Kris. Whatever, you in?*

*Me: Nolan's going to kill me, but I know you'll go with or without me. So, what's the plan?*

*Kris: Meet me outside in ten mins. ;-)*



“This was a terrible idea,” I groaned as I walked into *Alien* with Kris at my side.

“When did you turn into such a pansy?” Kris smirked, looping her arm through my elbow.

“When a crazy dream invader entered my life and threatened me and all of my loved ones. Also, Nolan is gonna kill me. We just had an argument about me not locking the door,” I sighed.

“Well, luckily you have me here to protect you.” Kris grinned wickedly.

“Yes, I’m sure if Locke showed up, we could just drown him or barbecue his ass,” I snorted. “Honestly, I don’t feel like he’d really follow through with any of his threats.”

“Why not?” Kris asked, looking at me quizzically.

“I don’t really know. He just seems kinda lonely to me. I mean, he has been following every Water Spirit for however long he’s been alive, and we all seem to reject him,” I explained.

“Please tell me he isn’t giving you some weird dream-ish Stockholm syndrome?” Kris looked at me with concern.

“What? No way. I just feel bad, you know?” I confessed.

“Your heart is too big for this mediocre world, Em,” Kris smiled fondly.

“Yeah, whatever. Come on, let’s go dance while we wait for our mates to come skin us alive,” I grimaced, dragging Kris to the dance floor.

Before we knew it, we were sweating and panting from all our dancing. This DJ really knew what he was doing. I began

fanning myself as Kris found someone else to entertain herself with. Some guy that was dressed in a Mardi Gras Jester costume, still celebrating Halloween. I reached for Nolan's mind, surprised that he hadn't come to maim us yet. He felt relaxed and his mind was wandering to random things. He was still sleeping. I glanced at Kris to see her mouthing something to me. It almost looked like "He's hot, right?"

"Hotter than Doran?" I mouthed back, raising an eyebrow. She simply shrugged at me and winked up at the jester.

"I'm gonna step outside for some fresh air real quick. You okay?" I shouted to Kris over the music.

"Yeah, I'm good. You be careful, okay?" she ordered, giving me a quick hug before turning her attention back to the jester.

I turned to head for the door and grabbed my coat off a chair on my way out. Doran wasn't just going to kill Kris when he got here, he was going to kill me too for allowing her to dance with that jester dude. It was chilly outside, and the sky was still dark. I looked around the parking lot. I was the only one outside. It was nice to get away from the loud crowd for a moment and just breathe in the night air.

'Emelia?! Where are you?!' Nolan's panicked voice broke through my reverie.

'I'm at a club called *Alien* with Kris,' I admitted

'Luna, why would you—' Nolan began shouting.

I interrupted, 'Don't worry, I'm fi—'

*Crack!*

Suddenly I was sprawled out on the ground and as I raised my hand to touch the back of my head, I felt a stickiness there. Blood. Someone had hit me on the back of the head.

‘Luna!’ Nolan yelled.

But I couldn’t answer. Darkness engulfed me as I tried to turn and identify my assailant, but it was too late. The darkness consumed my mind.



# Finding Luna

## Nolan

“**W**hat is it, Nolan? What’s wrong?” Jackson shouted from the other side of the hotel door.

He must’ve felt my distress through the pack bond, but I didn’t answer. I couldn’t even move. Where Emelia’s constant warmth and ever-present consciousness usually resided in my mind, I now felt an icy silence. I could still feel that string there that attached us, but I couldn’t feel her mind. Someone had knocked my mate out, and that person was going to die by my hands.

“Nolan!” Jackson growled, shaking the door handle and almost breaking it from its hinges.

*Deep breaths.*

I moved towards the door, unlocking it, and stepping to the side. The door fell from its place in the door frame and smashed to the ground with a loud *womp*.

“Jesus Jay! You didn’t have to break the door down! What the hell is going on?” I heard Jackson’s mate, Meredith, demand.

Jackson and Meredith walked in with the rest of my pack members behind them. The males were already on edge, ready for whatever battle had come. When Jackson’s eyes met mine, he flinched from the dominant power I was resonating and dropped to the ground before baring his neck to me in submission. Alexander and Ashlynn followed closely behind. Meredith looked around the group with wide eyes.

“Should I be bowing?” Meredith whispered to Jackson, bringing a small snort from my sister.

“It’s called submitting to your Alpha, Meredith. Or in his case at the moment- Beta. Now would someone like to tell me where the HELL Kristine has run off to?” Doran growled from the broken doorway.

Meredith’s eyes widened as if she had just realized we were missing two members of our party and now understood the seriousness of the moment.

“Em and Kris are gone?” Meredith asked, looking at me with worried eyes, but dropping her gaze at the sight of what I’m sure were my glowing amber eyes.

“Yes,” I said and saw Jackson visibly stiffen. He could tell I was holding myself back.

“Now that we’ve established who to put on the milk cartons, can someone explain to me what’s going on?” Doran

demanded, crossing his arms and shifting from foot to foot. He was anxious without his mate and was quickly losing his composure. The rest of the group slowly stood to their feet, awaiting my instruction and explanation.

“The girls snuck off to a club called *Alien*. I’m not sure about Kristine’s condition, but Emelia has been attacked-” I announced.

Suddenly the floor started shaking uncontrollably and screams were heard throughout the hotel.

*Is this an earthquake? No.*

I looked to Meredith to see her eyes were glowing a bright mossy green and her teeth and fists were clenched. A small tear escaped, running down the left side of her cheek as she tried to rein in her anger. Jackson laid his hand on her shoulder, but this only seemed to calm her slightly.

“What do you mean she was attacked, Beta?” Jackson asked, his expression an eerie calm, although his eyes were amber.

“She was communicating with me through the bond and then suddenly I felt a sharp pain hit the back of my head, but it wasn’t me. It was Emelia. She felt blood on the back of her head and then she passed out,” I said, clenching and unclenching my fists.

“She’s been knocked unconscious? Did she recognize her attacker?” Ashlynn probed.

“She passed out before she could see their face,” I growled.



“Was Kristine with her when she was attacked?” Doran asked, teeth clenched.

“I don’t think so,” I said.

“Well, think no longer, Nolan. I was not with Em when she was attacked or I would’ve beaten someone’s ass,” Kristine declared, marching into the room as if she’d been here the entire time.

“Kristine. What the hell were you thinking?” Doran shouted, getting in Kris’s face and placing a hand on each of her elbows. He immediately yanked his hands away. Red welts now showed on Doran’s hands but were already healing thanks to his wolf blood.

“Excuse me, Asshat. Who told you it was okay to yell at me like an—” Kris started.

“ENOUGH!” I ordered, causing everyone in the room to go silent and drop their eyes.

“Kristine. Where is Emelia?” I asked calmly.

Kris’s eyes began to water, and a few tears dropped onto her shoes. Doran moved to wrap his arms around her, attempting to comfort his now emotional mate.

“I don’t know,” Kris said, sniffing. “Em went outside to get some fresh air. I should’ve followed her, but she said she’d only be gone for a moment. I got worried and decided to follow her outside, but she was gone. I thought maybe she came back here, so I headed back.”

“Who would’ve done this?” Jackson asked.

“Isn’t it obvious who did this?” Kristine asked, looking around the group.

“You obviously have a theory, Kris. So lay it on us,” Meredith sighed.

“Locke Blakely,” I growled.

“Locke Blakely,” Kristine repeated, nodding.



“He is being escorted back to the camp as we speak, son,” my father told me as he watched me pace back and forth in his office.

“Father, I am going to-” I started.

“You are not going to kill him. We need information, Son. We need to find your mate, and killing him will not solve that. We do not even know if he’s the one who took her,” Dad argued, clasping a hand on my shoulder, trying to steady me.

“Who else would’ve done it, Alpha? He has been invading her nightmares and threatening her for months now. I should’ve done something about it instead of just letting him-” I ranted.

“And you didn’t, because you knew Emelia wouldn’t want you to. You could feel that she felt compassion and sympathy for him. That she didn’t truly believe he would harm her or her friends. And you trusted her, as mates should. So, trust her.

Give Locke Blakely the benefit of the doubt, son,” my father said.

A bell rang, alerting us to someone entering the camp through the front gates.

“They have arrived,” my father stated.



As Locke walked into the main entrance of the cabin, he looked around the room curiously. He was stopped midway by two of our more dominant wolves, holding on to either of his arms. His clothes were messy, his lip bleeding from an obvious fight with our pack mates. He didn't want to come here. I moved forwards, unable to stand still any longer. I reached for Locke, grabbing him by his throat and raised him into the air and snarled at him, baring my now elongated teeth and almost shifted right there.

“WHERE IS SHE?” I snarled, but he didn't answer.

He simply coughed and reached for his throat, as I cut off more and more of his air supply. His eyes shifted to a deep purple, and I was thrown across the room into the opposite wall, smashing an entry table and two vases. I heard my mother gasp, but she was held back by my father, who knew this was my fight. I got to my feet and marched towards Locke again, fully prepared to shift and tear him apart.

“Where is Emelia, you bastard?!” I shouted, raising my arm to grab the collar of Locke’s shirt before kicking him in the groin. He let out a gasp of breath before falling to his knees in pain.

“What do you mean, where is Emelia? How would I know? Doesn’t she live here with you? Oh, did the princess run away from her tower, oh Prince of Douches?” Locke smirked up at me, his hands still holding his crotch.

“Don’t mess with me, Blakely. Tell me where she is right now and I won’t beat the shit out of you,” I snarled.

Locke looked up at me, ready to make another snarky comment when realization dawned on his face. He glanced around the room at each of my pack members and didn’t find what he was looking for. He clenched his fists and looked back up at me.

“She’s gone?” he asked, his eyes now glowing even darker.

I released his shirt collar and took a step back. He genuinely hadn’t known she was gone.

“She’s gone,” I answered.

“WHERE THE HELL IS MY DAUGHTER?!” Victoria Lyall shouted from the front door, with a weary-looking Jackson beside her.

My mother rushed to her side, embracing her in her arms. “Oh, Victoria. She has been taken, but we will find her. We will not rest until Emelia is safe at home.”

Victoria moved her gaze from my mother to look at me. “Can you hear her?”

“No, she is still unconscious, it seems. I am so sorry, Victoria,” I apologized.

“I have my best tracker wolves following her scent from NOLA, and we will act as soon as they find a lead. However, until then we have no way of knowing how to find her,” my father told Victoria honestly.

“She’s unconscious?” Locke asked, suddenly standing beside me at an uncomfortably close distance.

“Yes, she was knocked—” I began, realizing something and met Locke’s eyes, “You can contact her?”

Locke grimaced. “I can try. She has to be conscious enough for me to enter her dreams.”

“I’m sorry. Let me get this straight. We want Lockey-boy here to enter her dreams? Haven’t we been trying to avoid that?” Kris asked dubiously. “I mean make up your mind Nolan. Do we like this guy or not?”

I grinned for the first time in over twelve hours, “That is to be determined, Kris. But at the moment, he is our best chance of communicating with Emelia and I will not risk her life over petty jealousy.”

“I still don’t like you.” Locke smirked. “But I will do whatever I can to help protect Emelia and bring her home safely.”

“So, we’re at a truce?” Meredith grinned. “Great. Perfect time to get you two to be friends.”

“Yes sweetie, and then we can all go sing Kumbaya around the fire.” Kris snorted, rolling her eyes at her optimistic friend.

“Are they always like this?” Locke whispered to me.

“Only on days ending in Y,” I murmured back, only halfway paying attention.

“Hey,” Locke said seriously.

“What?” I answered.

“We’ll find her,” he promised.

“There is no other option.” I nodded.



# Emelia

There was a throbbing pain in the back of my skull as I tried to open my eyes, and a flashing white light blinded my vision.

*What happened?*

I peered around the room to see what looked like the interior to a cabin room.

*Am I home? No.*

I'm in an empty room with only a cot and nothing else. How did I get here? I was at *Alien* with Kris. I went outside to get some air and then... and then what? I couldn't remember. The throbbing in my skull reared its ugly head and pushed me back into the darkness.

*I counted the thirteen daisies in my hands and decided that it was enough for Mia. I wished there were some lilies out here, but sadly I was surrounded by a field of daisies. I only paused a moment to think of the peculiarity of standing in a field with only one type of flower; I headed back to the blanket where I'd left my sister Mia and found her lying on her back, staring up at the clouds. I turned, plopping down on the spot beside her and tried to see what she was seeing.*

*“Do you think that cloud looks like an Iguana?” Mia asked, pointing up at an obscure-looking cloud.*

*“I think it looks like a cloud, Mia,” I snorted.*

*“Where’s your imagination, Em? Last time I saw you, you had imagination coming out of your ears,” Mia scolded.*

*“Last time you saw me, I was thirteen,” I said, raising an eyebrow. Mia’s eyebrows furrowed, as if she didn’t understand what I was saying. She didn’t realize she’d been missing for four years.*

*“How old are you now?” she asked.*

*“Seventeen,” I answered.*

*“And how old am I?” Mia asked, sitting up suddenly.*

*“You would have been nineteen this year,” I sighed, sitting up to rest my chin on my knees.*

*“Would have been. You think I’m dead?” she asked me.*

*“It’s been four years since you disappeared, Mia. What do you think?” I asked, curious why Mia would be so quizzical in my dreams. Mia didn’t answer with anything other than a hum before she stood up.*

*“My turn to get you flowers. I’ll be back in a few minutes,” Mia said before sauntering off into the distant trees.*

*I didn’t know what she thought she was going to find out there. There was nothing but daisies for miles. I shrugged my thoughts off and laid back down to stare at the clouds. I closed my eyes and hummed a familiar melody that I couldn’t quite*



*place, but it made me think of amber-colored eyes behind a smoke-filled barrier and the scent of firewood and home.*

*“More daisies ... ” came a curious, yet familiar voice.*

*I shot up like a bolt to see who had snuck up on me. A tall guy with messy blond waves and piercing blue eyes stared down at me.*

*“Do I know you?” I asked, “Wait. How do you know I’m dreaming?”*

*The blond guy turned his head curiously at me and furrowed his brows. “You don’t remember me, love?” he asked.*

*I shook my head no and frowned at the term of endearment coming from a complete stranger.*

*“May I sit?” he asked me, pointing to the spot Mia had left bereft.*

*“Sure,” I replied, resigned to whatever my mind had come up with for a dream. The guy sat down beside me and looked around. I asked, “How do you know I don’t normally dream of this place?”*

*“Because I’ve entered your dreams many times before. Not that you are aware of every time I come,” he explained.*

*“Is that why I don’t remember you?” I asked.*

*“No. Sometimes I make it so you won’t remember when you wake up. But you always remember me when I come to you in your dreams.” He frowned.*

*“And I welcome you into these dreams with open arms?” I quirked a brow.*

*“Not always,” he chuckled.*

*“So why can’t I remember you this time?” I asked.*

*“I’m not sure. I believe you hit your head and that might be the cause. Do you remember what happened? Before you started to dream?” he questioned.*

*Before? I tried to think back to before I fell asleep, but all I could remember was pain. A throbbing pain in my skull.*

*“I remember my head hurting. But that’s it,” I frowned. Blond guy frowned at me as well, clearly unhappy with my response. I asked, “Why, what happened to me?”*

*“You were taken by someone. We don’t know by who,” he explained.*

*“We? Whose we?” I asked, turning to face him more head on.*

*“Excuse me? Who the hell are you?” Mia asked, plopping down beside me with a handful of Sunflowers.*

*Where did she find those?*

*“Oh Mia. This is—. This is—um. Who are you again?” I asked the guy who was now staring at my sister with wide eyes.*

*“Helloooo—” Mia said, snapping her fingers in the dude’s face to get his attention. “Who are you? And what are you doing with my sister?”*

*“Your sister?” blond guy asked, looking back at me.*

*“Yes. This is Mia. She vanished when I was thirteen. You sure we know each other?” I asked doubtfully.*

*“Yes, we do. You’ve just never dreamed of her before. Not with me here at least.” Blond guy pursed his lips towards Mia, still confused with her presence.*

*“Enough small talk, buddy. Who are you?” Mia demanded, crossing her arms.*

*“I’m Locke,” he answered her, before looking back at me for recognition.*

*Locke? Why is that so familiar? Locke. Locke. Locke.*

*“Locke? The guy that’s been invading Em’s dreams and trying to keep her away from her True Mate?” Mia questioned.*

*“How do you know that and I don’t?” I asked Mia.*

*“Because you’ve told me about him in past dreams,” Mia said, looking at me with an unamused expression. Locke’s eyebrows raised as he stared at my sister in disbelief.*

*“What? What is it?” I asked him.*

*“Didn’t you say your sister was—” he started.*

*PAIN.*

*A sharp throbbing pain struck me between my eyebrows and I was pulled back from the meadow and was surrounded in nothing but darkness.*





# Freaking Werewolf's (Insert Eye Roll)

## Nolan

Locke sat up abruptly from his place in the corner of the room where he had been reaching for Emelia's mind. I couldn't help but feel jealous that he had the power to enter her mind when I, her mate, did not. All I could feel was a light throbbing between my temples, but I couldn't hear her thoughts no matter how hard I tried.

"Well, did it work?" I asked Locke.

I was still surprised that he was willing to help us, especially after we accused the guy of taking Emelia in the first place. But could you blame me? He had been after her since the moment he stepped into Covington High. Even after finding out that he wasn't the one to take her, I still wanted to pummel the guy. I still felt that he had ulterior motives for wanting to find Emelia, and I didn't like that. However, he was the only one that could help us find her as our tracker wolves hadn't been able to catch Emelia's scent, but I wasn't surprised. I

scoured almost all of New Orleans looking for her before I returned to Covington to regroup with my father. I looked into Locke's eyes and saw confusion and surprise where I'd once seen arrogance and superiority. Something had changed in him, but I couldn't place my finger on it.

"It did. I was able to speak with Em," he finally answered, still staring off into space.

"And what happened? Does she know where she is?" Nick asked.

Locke's eyebrow furrowed before he looked at me. "Where is Em's mother?"

"She is resting with her sons. Should I get her?" Arryssa asked from the chair she'd been sitting in quietly.

"Yes. Please," Locke answered.

"I don't understand. What do you need Victoria for?" I growled, "Do you know where my mate is or not, Blakely?"

"Son," my father reprimanded, causing me to lower my eyes, "Give him time. If he needs Victoria, we will get Victoria."

I looked back at Locke to see him staring into the distance again, and it was grating on my last nerve that I didn't know why he looked like that.

"Is she okay?" I whispered to him bleakly.

Locke blinked a few times to clear his vision before looking up at me. "She seemed alright. She has little memory of what

happened. Only the pain in her head,” he replied with a sad smile.

“I can feel the pain. Between my temples.” I nodded.

“You’ll get her back,” Locke promised me.

“I have to. If I don’t, you can kill me,” I stated.

Locke chuckled at my response, “As appealing as that sounds, I have no desire for Emelia to be lost to whatever has taken her. She has not had enough time in this world yet and deserves to grow into the great Water Spirit I know she will be.”

“Well that’s good to hear,” I said.

*Did he say, ‘You will get her back’, not ‘We?’*

I looked at Locke quizzically. What happened in that dream that had made him so open towards Emelia and I being together?

“I’m here. What is it? What’s happened? Is she alright?” Victoria stormed into the room in her nightgown. Her hair was ruffled and there were bags under her eyes. She was sporting one slipper and one flip-flop. She had clearly rushed over here. Jackson entered the room behind her and came to stand beside me.

“Have you heard from Mason?” I asked him.

“No. He is still with your cousin, Alisa. Your father called and requested they stay up north longer for their safety. We did



not tell him about Emelia's situation. We did not want to worry him and distract him from keeping Alisa safe," he explained.

I nodded my head once in acknowledgment.

"Victoria, take a seat, sweetie," Arryssa said, pulling a chair up behind Emelia's mother and guiding her into the seat.

"Oh God. You couldn't contact her, could you?" Victoria started sniffing.

"I contacted her," Locke responded quickly, "She doesn't remember much at the moment. She remembers the pain before she blacked out but nothing else. She didn't recognize me either."

"Did she remember Nolan?" Victoria asked, grabbing Locke's hands in hers and squeezing.

"We didn't exactly get to that part of the conversation before she was pulled away from me," Locke grimaced.

"Well, what did you get to then?" I grumbled, bringing a snort from Locke.

"I didn't avoid you on purpose, Adolfo. I don't think she really remembers anything right now, and I don't think it's because she was hit on the head. She wasn't alone in there," he explained.

"What do you mean she wasn't alone? Like in her mind?" Jackson asked, placing his hand on my shoulder to help calm me.

Locke looked at Victoria now, unsure of how to continue, “She was in a meadow full of white flowers on a picnic blanket. At first, she was alone when I approached her and began asking her if she remembered being hit on the head,” he told Victoria who was still grasping his hands in hers.

“But before I could really try to help her remember, a girl showed up. She was a little older looking than Emelia, and she had long black hair. She was very protective of her. She instantly didn’t like me.” Locke chuckled.

Victoria cocked her head to the side in a wolfish manner and smiled. “She was dreaming of Mia?”

“Mia?” Jackson whispered, dropping his hand from my shoulder.

“Yes. Mia,” Locke stated.

“She was dreaming of her sister?” Arryssa asked softly.

“I don’t think she was actually,” Locke said looking up at me to see if I understood.

“She was in her dream for real? Like you can do?” I asked.

“What? What does that mean?” Victoria looked from me to Locke.

“One of my immortal gifts is dream-walking. I can enter the dreams of the people I choose and control them in a manner of speaking. I think Mia is also a dream-walker,” Locke said.

“But Mia is—” Victoria shook her head in denial, tears starting to flow down her cheeks.

“She’s alive. I could feel it,” Locke said resolutely, and Victoria let out a sob.

“If she can enter Emelia’s dreams, then why doesn’t she tell her where she is?” Jackson asked.

“She might not know where she is. Or she might not feel like it’s safe for you all to find her. But she’s obviously been entering Emelia’s dreams for a while now and erasing her memories of it when she awakens,” Locke told Jackson.

“What would make you think that?” I asked.

“She knew of you. And of me.” Locke smirked up at me with a strange twinkle in his eye that I didn’t think even he knew was there.

“You think she is keeping Emelia’s memories away from her?” I asked.

“I think so. I’m not sure why she would do that though,” Locke replied.

“It doesn’t sound like something Mia would do,” Victoria said, finding her voice.

“Unless she thinks it will help protect Em,” Jackson voiced.

“Protect her from what though?” Nick asked.

“From Locke?” Arryssa asked.

“No that doesn’t make sense. If Mia can get to Emelia’s memories, then she would know it wasn’t Locke, right?” I asked.

“Unless she didn’t see her attacker,” Nick stated.

“I don’t think Emelia would think it was Locke to begin with,” I sighed.

“Why not?” Locke asked, looking at me.

I sighed again, “Because deep down Emelia believes you’re a good guy.”



# Emelia

*“Mia, you’re such a cheater!” I groaned, as I handed her most of my Monopoly money.*

*She grabbed the cash out of my hand with a greedy-looking grin, “You’ve never been good at board games. That’s not my fault.” Mia snorted, flipping through her cash and silently mouthing numbers as she counted.*

*“Well how can I be good at them when my siblings always cheat, dear sister?” I asked, crossing my arms.*

*“You learn to cheat yourself,” Came a voice standing behind me. I turned quickly to find Locke standing above me.*

*“Well hello, Locke,” I smirked up at my mysterious friend.*

*Locke raised an eyebrow at me in surprise, “You remember me this time, huh?” he asked, looking towards Mia suspiciously.*

*“Of course, I remember you, silly. Why wouldn’t I?” I asked, cocking my head to the side.*

*Mia covered her mouth to hide a cough, and I turned to see her glaring up at my immortal friend.*

*“Oh. This is Locke, Mia. I think I’ve mentioned him before,” I introduced him, trying to decipher why she was looking at*

*him like he'd just thrown the Monopoly board across the meadow.*

*"Yes. Lovely to see you again, Locke," Mia muttered through clenched teeth, and this seemed to make Locke's grin grow even bigger.*

*"Thought you could block me from seeing her, huh?" Locke asked Mia as he took a seat on the blanket next to us, "It was a cute attempt, but I have been dream-walking for over a century, love. It's going to take a lot more power than yours to keep me out."*

*A low growl came from Mia and her eyes began to glow an almost amber color.*

*How odd? Wait, she's a werewolf. Duh.*

*"Wait. What powers? What are you talking about, Locke?" I asked.*

*"Your sister is a dream-walker," Locke stated, not looking at me but instead staring at my sister.*

*"Would you shut up you cocky weirdo!" Mia shouted, shoving Locke's shoulder.*

*I stare at Mia wide-eyed. A dream-walker? Like Locke?*

*"Wait. Hold the Phone, pause the TV, and put away the cookie dough. Mia Renee Lyall!" I shouted, suddenly unable catch my breath. I felt a pounding in my chest, my neck felt like it was constricting.*

*“Now look what you’ve done, Locke. She’s having a panic attack. I didn’t even know that could happen in a dreamscape.” Mia snapped, coming to lay her hands on my shoulders, “Breathe Em. Breathe.”*

*“You’re really here right now?” I grabbed Mia’s hands that were lying on my shoulders, “You’re alive? Where are you? Why didn’t you tell me this was real?” I rambled off question after question, not letting Mia even a moment to answer.*

*Mia’s eyes filled with tears and she dropped her hands from me, “Why Locke? Why?” Mia sniffled angrily.*

*“Because Emelia is in danger and you are keeping us from finding her. Why?” Locke asked gruffly.*

*“Protect her from what? I’m trying to protect her from you!” Mia shouted, and this caused Locke to cock his head to the side.*

*“From whoever has taken her,” Locke said.*

*“Someone took me?” I asked, distracted from the knowledge that my sister was alive and had been hiding it from me.*

*“And it wasn’t you?” Mia asked Locke incredulously.*

*“Locke wouldn’t do that,” I told her firmly.*

*“You trust too easily little sister. Now who has taken Em? Where is she?” Mia asked Locke.*

*“That’s what I’m trying to find out. I thought you were holding her memories,” he explained.*

*“I was keeping them from you because I thought you were the one that had hit her on the head. You’ve been trying to take her away from Nolan this whole time. Why would I think any differently?” Mia argued with Locke, who looked like he’d just been slapped in the face.*

*But I didn’t care about Mia or Locke anymore. Nolan. My mate. It felt as if I hadn’t seen him in years. My throat became dry, my soul reached for Nolan’s.*

*“Nolan,” was all I said.*

*“He is looking for you. He sent me here to help find you,” Locke stated, “Do you remember anything?”*

*I racked my brain for the last thing I could remember before I’d started dreaming, and my head started throbbing.*

*“Careful Em. Every time you try to remember what happened your mind starts to waver, and you leave the dreamscape,” Mia frowned, placing a feather-like touch to my cheek. Tears began to cloud my vision as I looked at Mia. My sister. She’d been alive this entire time, and we hadn’t known.*

*“I’m so sorry, Mia,” I sobbed, “We should’ve kept looking for you.”*

*“Oh, Emmy. You never would’ve found me, and I wouldn’t want you to. The people that have me are too dangerous,” she explained.*

*“Who has you?” Locke interjected, moving to stand within an inch of Mia’s personal space. Mia had to move her head almost completely skyward to make eye contact with him.*



*“A wolf pack,” Mia whispered and froze, as if shocked she’d let those details slip.*

*“What wolf pack?” Locke asked.*

*“I don’t know. They keep me alone and locked up,” she said, sighing, “but that doesn’t matter right now. It’s too dangerous.”*

*“I will come for you,” Locke promised her and my head snapped towards him.*

*Was he being protective of her? Now that I thought about it, he hadn’t been as forward with me as he normally was. Mia didn’t respond. Instead, she and Locke were now almost chest to chest.*

*“Holy shit,” I said without thinking.*

*“What?” Locke and Mia asked in unison, quickly stepping away from each other. Locke cleared his throat, wiping his hands on his jeans.*

*Interesting.*

*“Oh. Nothing, I just remembered something. I was with Kris at Club Alien,” I stuttered.*

*When did I remember that? I had no clue.*

*“That’s great, Emelia. Kris said you went outside for some air and that was the last time she saw you,” Locke explained.*

*“I vaguely remember that.” I sighed.*

*Shoot. How were they going to find me?*

*“Have you woken up at all?” Locke asked.*

*“I don’t know,” I whimpered.*

*They were never going to find me. I was trapped. I’d never see Nolan again. I wanted my mate.*

*“NOLAN! Nolan!” I screamed, dropping to my knees. I tried to reach for him. Tried to feel for his mind or his soul. I felt nothing.*

*“Calm down, Em. You’re going to overexert yourself,” Mia chided and stepped towards me, but I backed away. I was done being the victim here. Done hiding in my mind like a little girl.*

*“No, Mia. I can’t stay here any longer. I need my mate. I need Nolan,” I told her firmly.*

*Mia winced, not use to me behaving this way towards her.*

*“We’re going to find you Emelia,” Locke promised, trying to reason with me.*

*“Nolan will find me. But not before I wake up and beat the crap out of whoever dared to mess with the Water Spirit.” I smirked.*

*“The what?” Mia asked, dropping her jaw.*

*But I didn’t answer. I closed my eyes and felt for my body. I tried to imagine my hands and what they were feeling. I felt something scratchy, something almost wool-like. Maybe a blanket? I focused on the feeling of the fabric and imagined myself grasping it. I felt for a nearby water source, and that was when I smelled it. Sea salt and sand. I reached for it. I reached for it with all the strength I had.*



A sharp pain rushed through my head, and it was almost enough to knock me back into the darkness. I felt the wool between my fingers and smiled. I'd done it. I peeked my eyes open and squinted at the bright shining light hanging above me in what appeared to be a cabin room. The walls were made purely of dark oaky wood and the ceiling was almost identical. The room had only the cot I was lying on and a tray near the door. I moved to sit on the side of the cot, grabbing my head as the room began to spin. How long had I been out? A low growl emitted from my stomach, I'd never felt so hungry in my life. I should have asked Locke how long I'd been gone. Days? Weeks? I had no clue. I was too concerned with the realization that Mia was out there somewhere, and she was alive. I was only concerned with that and getting to Nolan.

Nolan.

'Nolan?' I reached out.

'Luna?! You're awake? Are you injured? Do you know where you are?' Nolan asked frantically.

'My head hurts. But that's all. I have no idea where I am. It looks like a cabin or something. How long have I been out?' I asked.

'Three days, Luna,' he admitted.

‘Holy crap. It only felt like I was dreaming for a couple hours,’ I reeled.

‘You were deeply sedated for the most part. I’m not sure if it’s from the head injury or from whoever took you. Locke was only able to reach you twice,’ he explained.

‘Oh My God, Nolan! Mia is alive. You have to tell Victoria!’ I shouted.

‘We know, Luna. Locke figured it out the first time he entered the dream with her. She is a dream-walker like he him,’ he said.

‘We have to find her!’ I demanded.

‘We have to find you first, Emelia. I need you to stay awake. I need to be able to feel you so that I can follow our bond to find you,’ he explained.

‘I’ll do my best. Do you promise we’ll go find her?’ I asked.

‘I promise, Luna,’ he swore.

‘I love you, Nol,’ I said.

‘And I you, Emelia. You have no idea how happy I am to hear your voice in my mind,’ he admitted.

‘I need you to find me Nol. I need you more than I need air,’ I sniffled.

‘I will burn the world to the ground to find you if I have to Emelia,’ Nolan promised.

*Knock, knock!*

I bolted up off the cot and faced the doorway.

*Shit. What do I do? Do I attack them?*

‘Stay calm. Luna, I don’t want them to sedate you again. Let me look through your eyes with you, Luna. I want to see their faces and hear their voices,’ Nolan requested.

‘Okay,’ I said.

The door slowly creaked open and a masculine hand wrapped around the door with a young maybe seventeen-year-old looking boy behind it. He paused in the doorway with a shocked expression.

“You’re awake,” he observed.

“Yup,” Is all I said.

“Well that’s good. I was beginning to worry you’d never rouse. Thought maybe Tyler had put you in a coma,” he rambled nervously.

“Who’s Tyler?” I asked.

The young boy’s eyes widened, he wasn’t supposed to say names.

“He’s the Alpha of our pack. He brought you here,” he said bluntly.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because he has claimed you as his mate,” he declared.

I almost lost my balance at the growl I heard in the back of my mind.

‘The hell he has!’ Nolan growled.



# Men...They're All Moron's

## Nolan

I dropped to my knees as a rush of unwavering dominant power pounded through me and a small nagging in the back of my head told me to submit. My father was pulling rank on me. I blinked rapidly to clear out some of the rage induced fog to see I had thrown a table through the glass panel doors along the side of the room. I looked up to find ten pairs of eyes staring widely at me.

“Mer, I told you we were missing out on all the drama, but what did you tell me? No, Kris. It’s time for bed. And then I told you only ninnies go to bed at 7 p.m.,” Kris babbled from the bottom of the staircase with a frowning Meredith beside her.

Jackson moved to stand beside his mate and pushed a small piece of brown hair behind her ear, although it did not really help the bedhead she was already sporting.

“Sleep well, Meri?” Jackson smirked.



“I was until Cujo here decided it was time to redecorate the foyer.” Mer raised an eyebrow at me. “So, anybody want to tell us what’s going on with Jane?”

“Jane?” Nick asked.

“Yes, Jane. ‘Cause after that demonstration of barbarianism, Nolan obviously fancies himself a Tarzan.” Mer smirked down at me as a few members of the group tried to hide their laughter.

I turned to look at my father, silently asking permission to stand. I felt as the weight came off my shoulders and could breathe a little easier. “Emelia is with another pack of werewolves,” I announced bitterly.

“She has woken and can speak to you again?” my mother asked me.

I nodded.

“Does she know what pack it is? Or where she is?” my father asked.

“She doesn’t. She only knows their Alpha’s first name,” I conveyed.

“What is it?” Dad asked.

“Tyler,” I said.

Victoria bolted up from her chair and wavered, almost losing her balance. Locke laid a steadying hand on her shoulder.

“You recognize the name?” I assessed.

“I’m not sure. It’s a pretty common name, but I can think of only one Tyler out there that might want to kidnap one of my children,” Victoria grimaced up towards Jackson.

“Who, Mom?” Jackson asked, stepping towards her.

“My father. He was banished from my original pack after killing Mia’s birth family. I betrayed him by not leaving with him,” she confessed.

“I don’t think it’s the same Tyler. This one wanted to claim Emelia as their mate,” I said through gritted teeth.

“Freaking possessive ass werewolf!” Kris growled, her eyes flashing to a scarlet red and all the candles in the room seemed to burn brighter.

“You rang, love?” Doran smirked, coming to stand beside Kris.

“As if. So if it’s not Victoria’s dad, who is it?” Kris asked.

“I’m not sure.” Victoria’s brow furrowed.

“Did Emelia have anything else to say? Is she alright?” Mom asked me.

“She seemed okay. She shut me out after I almost knocked her over with my anger,” I told my mother sheepishly, which earned me a small smirk from my father.

“I think it’s time we all get some rest, children. Tomorrow we will find Emelia and we must be rested and ready for any battle,” Nick announced.

“Yes, Alpha,” everyone said in unison.

I headed towards the stairs but couldn't help but feel bereft, knowing that I would spend another night without Emelia in my arms. Locke placed a gentle hand on my shoulder as I reached the first step.

"The trackers have picked up on her scent," he whispered to me.

I looked at him, frozen. The trackers had found her, and we weren't leaving immediately?

"You and I could sneak away and get a head start there," Locke suggested.

"Let's go," I said.



# Emelia

*“Stop pacing, Em. You’re freaking me out,” Mia shouted from behind me as I walked back and forth along the shoreline.*

*“I can’t help it, Mia. How am I going to get out of here? I’ve only had these powers for a couple months, and I still barely know how to use them. How am I supposed to take on a whole pack of werewolves and a deranged Alpha?” I groaned.*

*“I don’t know, Em. Can’t you just hit them all with a tidal wave or something? How does this elemental stuff work, anyway?” Mia asked, waving her hands in the air.*

*I snorted. “I think it’s based on my emotions, so I’d probably have to be really angry to make a tidal wave that big. At least that’s what I learned after this mean blonde girl started messing with me.”*

*“Well, just be angry then,” Mia yelled, throwing her hands in the air exasperated, “What did blondie do, anyway?”*

*“I believe she tried to claim what wasn’t hers,” Locke said, appearing beside me and causing me to almost fall into the oncoming waves.*

*“You’re one to talk,” I snorted, “meet one pretty girl and you’re over me, huh?”*

*“You’re here again? And what pretty girl?” Mia asks, scrunching her nose at Locke.*

*I rolled my eyes. “Mia, be nice. He’s helping Nolan to find me. And then we can come find you.”*

*“Speaking of finding you,” Locke interrupted, “we’re coming for you now.”*

*“What? How do you know where I am? The whole pack is coming?” I asked.*

*Locke shook his head. “The trackers finally picked up your scent, but no. The pack doesn’t know we left yet.”*

*“We?” Mia asked.*

*“Nolan and I decided to get a head start,” Locke confessed.*

*“And Nick was okay with that?” I quirked a brow.*

*“Well. I’m sure he’ll understand,” he grinned.*

*“YOU DIDN’T TELL HIM! You’re both going to get yourselves killed!” I shouted.*

*“We can handle ourselves, Em,” Locke smirked.*

*“Men ... they’re all morons,” Mia sighed.*

*I suddenly felt a strange tapping in the back of my mind, and I was involuntarily pulled back away from the sand and waves.*



Blue eyes stared down at me from where I lay on my cot. I sat upright and shoved him away from me.

“Who are you?” I spat.

“I’m your mate,” he grinned.

This was Tyler? I looked at him from head to toe, going as slow as possible to draw out the suspense. He was of average build and height, with auburn hair that stopped at his shoulders. He looked like he might be in his early twenties.

I shook my head, “Nope. Sorry you’ve got the wrong gal! My mate has black hair, not red. Also, he doesn’t drug me and lock me in rooms like a prisoner.”

“You’re going to be loads of fun I see,” he rolled his eyes, “get up. We’re going to eat breakfast,” he announced, tossing a tan bag filled with clothes onto my cot.

I ignored him. “Where are we?”

“Sorry sweetheart. I can’t tell you that.” He smirked.

*Ass.*

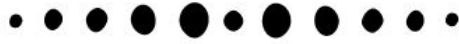
“Why do I have to come to breakfast with you?” I spat.

“Because it’s time for you to meet your new pack,” he explained plainly.

“They’re not my pack!” I seethed.

“They are now, but like I said, get up. Get dressed. Somebody will be back to escort you to the dining hall soon,”

he said before walking out and slamming the door.



# Nolan

“It doesn’t look like they have anyone guarding the perimeter,” I told Locke as we crouched behind a bush not far from the enemy pack’s main cabin.

I felt a buzz from my pocket. It was the tenth time my phone had gone off in the last few minutes. Most likely it was my father blowing my phone up after realizing we had left in the middle of the night. The sun had just risen and there wasn’t much movement seen through the territory. Even so, Locke and I had been hiding on the outskirts of it and learning the area in order to have as much information as we could before creating a plan to infiltrate it.

How I thought Locke and I alone would be able to take on an entire pack by ourselves, I wasn’t sure. I wasn’t foolish enough to think I alone could successfully get Emelia out without injury to one of us. Grabbing her and leaving Locke to fight the pack seemed like an enticing idea, but I knew Emelia would not approve. Especially after Locke had been so helpful up until this point with assisting me to find Emelia.

‘You are correct, Nol. I would not appreciate that. He is being kind to help us,’ my mate chided me.

‘We’ll see how he acts after we get you back home and safe,’ I thought.



‘Maybe he’ll surprise you and we can all be friends!’ Emelia thought cheerfully.

‘Locked in a room with a pack you don’t know, and you’re still as optimistic as ever, Luna,’ I chuckled.

‘I have to stay optimistic, or I’ll go crazy. This Alpha is demanding my presence at breakfast in order to meet his pack. Should I ask that they set you up a place setting?’ she plotted.

‘I think I’d rather crash the party, Luna. You know I’ve always been one for the dramatics,’ I grinned.

‘Indeed,’ she giggled, ‘Come for me soon? I don’t want to meet these people,’ she sighed.

‘I’m on my way, love,’ I promised.

Locke whistled to get my attention, and I glanced over to see he had moved behind a bush that was closer to the cabin. I nodded before sneaking up beside him. I pulled my phone out of my pocket, finally deciding to update my father on my location.

***Dad: Where are you?***

***Dad: We are on our way.***

***Dad: Be there in thirty minutes.***

***Dad: We have surrounded the territory. We will infiltrate on your word.***

“Damn,” I muttered.

“What is it?” Locke asked, crouching down lower so that he could look at my phone screen. “Wow, he moves fast. Well,

are we ready then?"

"Let's go," I confirmed, texting my dad back to let him know we were on the move.

Locke and I stood and began walking directly for the front door to the cabin. Halfway there though, Locke stopped in his tracks, eyes wide. He was looking towards a cabin that was further back in the territory that looked abandoned.

"What is it?" I asked, looking around to see if anyone had noticed us yet.

"You go ahead. I'll be back momentarily," was all he said as he walked off in the direction of the cabin.

I knew he wasn't going there to retrieve Emelia, because I could sense that she was in the main cabin. I shook off my hesitation, deciding to deal with him later. I continued walking up to the cabin and knocked on the door.

*Why the hell am I knocking? Luna was right. I should've just asked them to set me a place setting ...*

I shook my head at myself, rolling my eyes. I cracked my neck before taking a step back and lifting my foot up off the ground. I kicked the door as hard as I could, knocking it off its hinges. It slammed to the floor with a loud *thunk*, and I stepped directly into the dining hall.

*How convenient.*





# Rescue Mission

## Emelia

I frowned down at the dress I was wearing. This guy was a really sadistic piece of work. I'd been given a long, flowing dress to wear to breakfast. A long, flowing dress that was pure white. I looked like I was heading to that shotgun wedding, after all. Luckily though, Nolan was just outside the territory, ready to come save me from this nightmare. And then we could go save Mia. We could go save Mia, and then I was going to finish this thing that Nolan and I had started. Because there was no way in hell I was going through this again. After we saved Mia, I was going to demand that Nick performed the bonding ceremony between Nolan and I.

“Ready to go, Luna?” The young boy from the other day asked from the doorway.

“Don't call me that!” I snapped at him.

The boy's eyes widened, taken aback by my outburst. He frowned, but nodded before holding his hand out to me. I glanced down at his extended hand and sighed before taking it

. We headed out of my prison room and turned left to head towards where I assumed was their dining hall. I glanced around the hall, trying to assess my surroundings. The walls were bare, lacking any artwork or design that might have told me where we were located. I frowned and glanced over at the young boy holding my hand. He was around the same height as Nolan and Jackson, but he looked younger. He was frowning and staring off into space.

“How old are you?” I asked, drawing him from his reverie.

“Seventeen,” He answered.

“Same age as me. What’s your name?” I asked, deciding to learn about my young escort.

“Danny. Well Daniel,” he stuttered, nervously.

“Danny.” I smiled. “Do you have a mate, Danny?”

“I’m sure I do. I just haven’t met her yet,” he smiled back.

“How would you feel if somebody stole your mate and claimed them as theirs?” I asked.

His smile dropped, and he sighed. “I’d be pissed. I’d have to kill anyone that got in my way while I retrieved her,” he answered honestly.

I quirked my brow at him, silently asking if he really wanted to be around when the shit hit the fan. He stopped walking, pulling me to a halt along with him. He glanced ahead and behind his shoulder.

“He’ll kill me if I let you escape,” he whispered.

“No, he won’t. I won’t let him. Come with me,” I urged him, “Come with me and you can join my pack. We’ll protect you, I promise.”

Danny glanced around again, contemplating my offer.

“Do you have family here, Danny? They can come as well,” I added.

“No, it’s just me. My parents are dead,” he said. “Well, I do have a friend I’d like to bring.”

“We can grab them on the way out, as long as they want to come,” I offered.

“She’ll want to go, I promise. But the Alpha will be very angry if we take her, so we’ll have to be discreet,” he grimaced, “All the wolves are pretty abusive to her here.”

“We’ll definitely have to bring her with us,” I agreed. “Danny, why do you stay here if they’re like this?”

“I didn’t want to be a lone wolf. I wouldn’t make it alone.” He frowned. “Alright, let’s go eat breakfast. It will be suspicious if we don’t show up soon. Then we’ll escape.” He nodded.

“Okay, but stay with me in there?” I begged.

“Okay,” he promised.

I sent an image of Danny’s face to Nolan, warning him that he was on our side and wasn’t to be hurt. Nolan didn’t respond.

We stepped into the dining hall as everyone was chatting and eating their meals. Tyler stood from his seat at the head table and grinned grotesquely at me. Danny squeezed my hand before leading me in the direction of Tyler's table. I pulled my shoulders back and lifted my chin. I looked Tyler directly in the eyes, wanting him to know I wasn't afraid of him and I wasn't going to go down without a fight. His piercing blue eyes widened, and I realized in that moment that I was staring into my brother's eyes. This man had Jackson and Mason's eyes. This man had my mother, Victoria Lyall's, eyes.

"You said your name is Tyler?" I asked as we came to stand before him.

"It is," he answered, cocking his head to the side.

"Are we related, Tyler?" I asked, and Danny's eyes widened as his head whipped towards me.

"Not technically, since you are adopted, Emelia Suneer." He smirked.

"Who are you to Victoria? You're too young to be her father," I stated.

Tyler grinned. "Victoria Lyall is my older sister. Not that she knows I exist."

*THUNK!*

The front door came off its hinges, slamming to the floor, and as the dust settled, glowing amber eyes and a domineering power unlike any I'd ever felt entered the room. Nolan was here.



He took ten steps into the room and made eye contact with Tyler across the room. Danny tugged on my hand, pushing me behind him, catching onto what was about to happen.

A slow grin spread across Nolan's face as he stared into the eyes of my captor, "I hate to break up the family reunion, but I'm going to give you to the count of five to hand my mate over before your territory is shredded," Nolan said too calmly.

Tyler's eyes turned amber and suddenly where a man had once been, an auburn-colored wolf now stood. Hackles raised and teeth bared.

"Okay, so we're doing this," Nolan nodded, stepping forwards.

Nolan cracked his neck and shifted before my eyes, shredding his clothes into a heap of ruined fabric on the ground. Like in his human form, Nolan's fur was pitch black and his eyes were still glowing amber. They might've even been darker now, but I knew had he not been about to battle this asshole that his eyes would have turned to the beautiful shade of emerald I'd always loved.

Nolan and Tyler clashed together into a pile of teeth and claws and brutality. I clenched my jaw, hating that Nolan might be injured in order to save me. The other pack members around the room had stood from their tables and either backed up against the wall to give the two fighting wolves space or to stand in a circle around them. The men that remained circling

the two wolves shifted to their wolf forms and began closing in on Nolan. This wasn't going to be a fair fight.

I shoved Danny out from in front of me and assessed my surroundings, looking for any sort of water source I could find. I looked to the ceiling and there were multiple sprinklers scattered throughout the room. I reached for them, pushing my power at them the way I had in my Biology class. They busted, water now showering everyone in the room.

“What are you doing?” Danny whispered, eyes wide and staring at my arms. The markings glowed blue again, and spread even further up my arms.

My arms rose above my head as I pulled the raining liquid towards me and formed it into a spinning circular ring. I placed the ring of water around the two fighting wolves, creating a barrier that the other wolves could not pass. One wolf growled and jumped at the ring, but was shoved back by the force of its spinning.

“Holy shit,” Danny blurted, “Why would you need my help to escape when you can do that?”

“I didn't think I could take on an entire pack by myself,” I grunted, trying to focus on keeping the ring intact.

Unwavering power resonated through the room, causing everyone to fall to their knees, including the two wolves that had been fighting within my watery shield. Nicholas Adolfo, Alpha to The Adolfo Pack, had entered the building. Arryssa stood beside him, holding the hand of my mother, Victoria.

“Shift back,” Nick ordered, his power ricocheted through the room.

Every wolf in the room whimpered before phasing back to their human forms. I relinquished the hold on my power, causing the floating water to splash to the ground, drenching anyone that was nearby in cool water. I had never seen so many naked men in my life. It took a great effort not to stare at the floor, so instead I looked to my mate. I stared into his emerald eyes as he stared back into mine. I tried not to blush, knowing that if I looked any lower, I would see parts of Nolan I had yet to see.

“Tyler, Alpha to this pack,” Nick commanded. “Stand.”

Tyler stood, not of his own will, and looked at Nick. However, he did not meet his gaze, but stared below his chin. Nick was more dominant than him.

“What is your full name?” Arryssa demanded, frowning at the younger Alpha.

“I am Tyler Sweeney the Second, Alpha to The Metairie Pack,” Tyler announced, and I heard as Victoria let out a loud gasp, “Yes. I am your younger brother, Victoria.”

“Umm ... so you’re like Em’s uncle?” Mer asked, walking into the room.

“That’s so nasty dude. She’s your niece!” Kris groaned.

“Girls!” Arryssa hushed them.

“Why would you do this?” Victoria demanded, clenching her fists. “You don’t even know me.”

“For abandoning our father. For forsaking our family name, I had no other choice than to take what was most precious to you,” Tyler seethed, “These charity cases that you chose over your own family!”

“Charity cases?” Victoria asked incredulously.

“Enough,” Nick ordered. “Tyler Sweeney of the Metairie Pack, per pack law Emelia Suneer has been publicly claimed by my Beta, Nolan Adolfo. You cannot claim her.”

Tyler’s jaw clenched. “That may be so. But I can still challenge Nolan outright. Should I beat him, and I will, I will take Emelia and I will perform the bonding ceremony.”

Nolan growled from where he kneeled on the floor. Nick held a hand up to silence him.

“Very well. As per pack law, there will be a four-week grace period before the challenge can take place. That way, should one of you fall, you can have your affairs in order. Understood?” Nick ordered.

“Understood, Alpha,” Nolan and Tyler responded in unison.

“But know this, Tyler Sweeney. Should my son fall, I will not allow you to take Emelia. Should Nolan fall, I will issue my own challenge against you. You and your entire pack,” Nick warned.

“Understood,” Tyler repeated. His pack members throughout the room gasped, not appreciating that their Alpha would risk them for someone that was not his True Mate.

“Adolfo Pack, head out!” Nick ordered.

Nolan stood, coming to stand beside me.

‘Ready to go, Luna?’ he thought.

‘Yes, let’s go home,’ I replied.

“Let’s go, Danny,” I said, grabbing his hand before walking towards the door.

“Hold on,” Danny requested and looked back at his Alpha. “I renounce myself from the Metairie Pack.”

“Okay, now I’m ready,” he stated, pulling me outside through the front door. Nolan trailed behind us, watching the other wolves as we went to make sure nobody made a move.

‘Nolan,’ I reached for his mind.

‘Yes, Luna,’ he answered gruffly.

‘I want to perform the bonding ceremony,’ I said.

‘We’ll start planning it as soon as we get home,’ Nolan agreed. ‘We will have it performed before the four weeks are up.’

‘Agreed,’ I nodded.

‘I love you, Luna,’ he whispered.

‘And I you,’ I sighed, relieved to be going home.

# Epilogue

## Locke

I walked towards the main cabin alongside Nolan Adolfo, the beta of the Adolfo Pack, to retrieve Emelia from her kidnappers. I had planned to knock everyone out as we stepped in beside Emelia and the Alpha that had taken her. But I'd felt a strange tug in my gut as we had drawn closer to the door. I glanced over to where I felt the tug coming. There in the back of the camp was a small, run down cabin that looked like it hadn't been used in years.

“You go ahead. I'll be back momentarily,” I told Nolan, as I changed direction and headed towards the small cabin.

As I approached the small cabin, I felt her. It was a strange feeling, to feel another person's emotions. Her mind was wandering as she dreamed of daisies in a field off the shore of a lake. It was a familiar place to me. I had seen it twice now through Emelia's dreams. I knew who I'd find when I opened that door, but I still stood there in the doorway, shocked.

Laying on a bed in the far side of the room laid a young woman, no older than twenty. Her long straight hair was dark, reminiscent of the midnight sky. However, her hair color was the only similarity I noted to her family. She did not share any characteristics with her brothers, Jackson or Mason. Although I couldn't see her eyes, as they were still closed. I felt around in her mind and realized she could not wake. They had sedated her. Nasty red claw marks were lined down her slender pale arms and a bruise was on her cheek. She had fought somebody trying to get out of here. Most likely trying to go save her younger sister, Emelia. She was a fighter.

I grabbed a gray blanket off the end of the bed and wrapped it around her before lifting her up into my arms. I turned around and headed back out of the small, abandoned cabin. The girl didn't rouse.

"I think it's time we brought you back to your family, Mia," I declared, placing a tender kiss on her wrinkled-up forehead. "But for now, just continue to dream about those daisies."

**To Be Continued...**

# Acknowledgements

I never imagined I would write a book, let alone publish one, but I've had this one story stuck in my head since I was in middle school and it has been bursting at the seams to come out ever since. Still Waters may never be perfect, and it may never be a best-seller, but I could not be more proud of myself for getting this far.

I could not have gotten this far without the tremendous amount of support I am surrounded by.

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## About the Author



Brandee Paschall is the debut author of *The Keepers of The Sacred Series: Book One, Still Waters*. With upcoming works filled with fantasy, magick, and werewolves you won't want to miss a step on this young authors journey into the unknown. When she isn't creating captivating stories filled with hard-willed and sarcastic heroines she fills her time with books, horror movies, and all things Broadway. She is blessed with a crazy, loving, adoring family which includes her amazing husband, two dogs, two cats, and a bearded dragon. Be sure to follow Brandee on her journey as she leaves updates on her upcoming works and events on her socials, [@brandee\\_paschall\\_books](#) via TikTok and Instagram.

Also by Brandee:

Kandy Apple Karma, a spooky short story featured in the anthology, Crumpled Papers and Empty Caskets from EJM Editing.