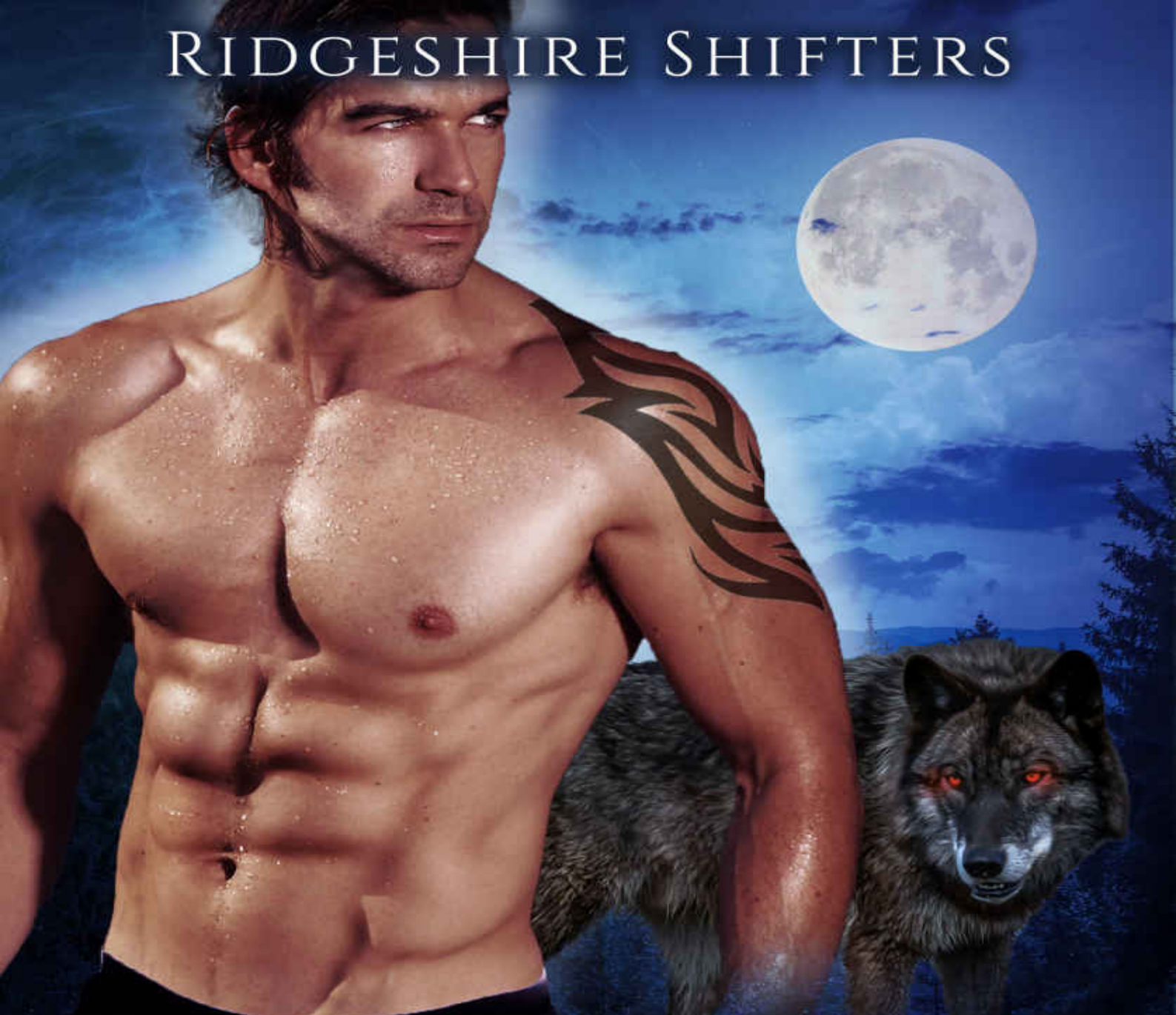


RIDGESHIRE SHIFTERS



MATED ALPHA WOLF

SLOW BURN PARANORMAL ROMANCE

ALEXA GRIFFIN

MATED ALPHA WOLF

Slow Burn Paranormal Romance

Ridgshire Shifters Book 3

Alexa Griffin

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Chapter 1 - Aaron

Aaron stepped up to the edge of the cliff, looking down at the deep ravine that seemed to go on forever. It was deep in the night, and the sounds of crickets chirping filled his ears. The air was sharp and cold, with the peak of the fall season arriving in Ridgeshire. He could see the little town sprawled off in the distance, the occasional vehicle traveling the single road that connected the town to the city.

The silence was palpable, and just being on that ledge made him realize what was expected of him. Times were changing for the Ridgeshire pack, and Aaron was to herald that change.

He turned around, taking in everyone behind him. Levi and Lyra stood off to the side, holding hands and smiling. Behind them, Emma, Jackson, and Isaac stood proudly, the rest of the Ridgeshire werewolf pack.

Aaron turned and nodded to Orson, the leader of the pack. Orson had taken the pack through so much and had kept them safe from rival packs, dragons, and otherworldly demons. He was a large burly man, who exuded leadership and fatherly qualities. He had done all he could to keep the pack safe—giving everything he had, and nearly dying on more than one occasion in the process. He was the kind of leader that anyone would die for.

Orson raised a hand, and Aaron nodded his head, raising his own palm. He put it against Orson's palm and shut his eyes for a moment. The air suddenly felt electric, and Aaron felt a clamminess fall on him.

“Aaron, are you with me?” Orson asked in a whisper that seemed to dance in Aaron's ears. The large man nodded his head, his lightly graying hair and grandfatherly aura filled the air.

“Yeah, I’m here, Orson,” Aaron replied, whispering back.

He felt as though he was in a trance, but all he could see was the darkness. Soon, he couldn’t feel the ground beneath him or hear the sounds of the crickets, or the low breathing of the pack around him. All that mattered was the hand of the man in front of him. It felt like a beacon of light in the darkness, and he had to get to it.

Aaron felt himself struggling, rushing to reach for the beacon in the darkness. He felt the darkness grip him like hands, and an invisible sludge trying to slow him down from reaching his target. Aaron tried his best to get to it, he pulled as hard as he could, but he felt as though he was going to fail.

He doubted himself. Despite all of his strengths, he was nothing compared to Orson. Aaron didn’t have the same qualities that made Orson who he was. But he had to try. He felt something behind him, shoving him forward. Aaron used the force to grab at the beacon of light, and once he had it he looked around and realized that Orson had bowed his head to him, and Aaron was standing taller than him on the pedestal.

The werewolves of Ridgeshire let out a deep howl, celebrating the new leader of the pack. Aaron Schechter, the new alpha. He looked around to see the smiles from everyone who had come out. Orson got to his feet and grabbed Aaron’s shoulder, taking him back to the edge of the cliff where both men stood, looking down into the distance.

“You know it won’t be easy, but Aaron, I couldn’t have chosen a better person to lead the pack. You have been beside me since the beginning, you are more than ready to lead them,” Orson said in his deep voice, smiling at Aaron.

“I have to,” Aaron replied, unsure of himself but doing his best to insert confidence into his voice.

“They aren’t just the pack.” Orson put both of his hands behind his back to speak. He looked out into the distance, making Aaron incredibly aware of just how small he

looked when compared to the man. Orson felt larger than life, and to think that now Aaron was the one to lead the pack as the new alpha. Aaron ran a hand through his hair, listening quietly. “They’re our family, Aaron. They are the ones who have been there for you, and always will be.”

“I understand.” Aaron nodded.

“Do you?” Orson continued, “The thing about us werewolves, we’re different from all of the other paranormals. We’re the only ones who gain power from our bond with our family. You are their strength, and they are yours. You have to keep them together, keep checking on them, and keep them safe.”

“I had a good teacher,” Aaron replied.

Orson nodded, showing his arm. On it, there was a tiny scar that seemed to not matter, as Orson had quite a number of scars on his body. “You see this little one? I got it when I was in my werewolf form.”

“Why didn’t you just let it heal?” Aaron asked, knowing that werewolves could normally heal so well there wouldn’t even be any scars.

“Because it was my first blow when I became leader of this pack. It was my first injury, and I wanted to make sure I wouldn’t forget how it started. That injury stayed with me, reminding me that I have to take the heavy blows for them. I have to take care of each and every one of you.” Orson paused, shaking Aaron’s hand. “I know this is a lot, but this is what you have to do now. I know you can do this.”

“I can,” Aaron replied, looking up at the man. He had to. Everyone was looking up to him, to make sure he would lead the pack. Aaron couldn’t let them down—he had to be a good leader, just as good as Orson had been. “I have to be, for the sake of the pack, and the people of Ridgeshire.”

As the words left his mouth, he felt a wave of nausea flow through him, a sudden weight he hadn’t felt before. It was just how it had been described to him, but it felt like more.

Aaron suddenly knew what Orson had always felt as alpha. He would now carry the weight and responsibility of the pack on his shoulders every day. It felt heavy on his shoulders. Looking at Orson, he realized that the man had a smile on his face, happy to no longer have to carry it.

“You are the alpha now!” Orson said loudly, drawing another round of howls from the werewolves.

“So, we’re done with the actual tradition now, yeah?” Jackson asked, reaching into the back of Orson’s truck and grabbing a bottle of wine. “So can we get this party started!”

“Heck yeah!” Isaac cheered, grabbing the cups as the wine bottle popped open, and Jackson began pouring it out for the pack.

“Should he be drinking?” Levi asked Jackson as he poured some out for Isaac.

“I’m over the age, and also I can’t get drunk, just like you, so it doesn’t matter,” Isaac replied, raising an eyebrow. He was the youngest member of the pack, his brown hair hanging to the side of his teenage face, showing his long slender arms. He turned to Aaron, shoving him slightly. “Congrats, you’re the leader now.”

“Thanks,” Aaron replied, laughing sheepishly. “I mean, it’s not like anything is going to be any different. I’m just going to be who I’ve always been, one of us.”

“You’re not just one of us,” Lyra replied. “You’re our leader, Aaron. I know you’ll do a great job.”

“Shame you won’t be with us,” Emma replied, walking up to Lyra with a smile.

Aaron watched both women as they talked, the past and the present. Lyra had been the beta of the pack when her father led them. She had fought diligently by his side. But everyone always knew that Lyra was meant for more. It had been hard to figure it out until she had shown up with her son, who happened to be a hybrid between Lyra and her husband, Levi.

Levi was a dragon, and under normal circumstances that would make him a natural enemy of the werewolves. But now that Lyra and Levi were together, there was peace between Levi's pack of dragons and the werewolves of Ridgeshire. With demons popping up and causing havoc all over, Lyra had decided to move to the city with Levi for a while, away from both of their packs so they could raise their child and start their family away from the madness.

"Aaron," Orson said, calling him off to the side, "want to take a ride with me back to the town?"

Aaron agreed and got into the truck with Orson. Jackson drove Isaac and Emma, who was to be the new beta of the pack. With Lyra moving, Emma would have quite a lot to prove, but Aaron was certain she would be fine. Emma was a powerful shifter, with deep black hair, and strikingly grey eyes.

She was incredibly beautiful, a true sight to behold. But her beauty was a cover for her deadliness, as Emma had just overcome her bloodlust, causing her to be a ferocious shifter, with deadly attacks. Emma would do great as the packs Beta, Aaron was sure.

What worried him the most was his own ability as a leader. Lyra and Levi took their car, heading off to Levi's place where Adam would be asleep, waiting for them.

"I sensed something while we were talking, Aaron. Something tells me you're not really fine with this," Orson began, keeping his hands on the wheel.

Aaron smiled, looking out the window. They could easily outrun the car at the speed it was going, but there they were, just enjoying the ride. "I don't think I'm the right choice for this."

"Well I know you won't recommend Jackson," Orson retorted, drawing a chuckle from both of them.

"No, that's not what I mean," Aaron continued. "Orson, you know how it is. I follow your orders; I know how

to take instructions. But...I don't know how to lead. I'm not like you. Hell, no one is like you, Orson."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Orson replied. They drove in silence for a moment, and Orson pulled the car to a stop at a red light. "But the thing you need to understand is that no one is born a leader, Aaron. I wasn't always the leader of the pack, and I had to deal with my own insecurities."

"Yeah, but look at you. You make all of the right decisions, things come to you naturally..."

"And I make mistakes," Orson replied. "I made a mistake when I thought all of the dragons were bad people who wanted nothing but to hurt us. I made a mistake when I split up the pack, and Garret almost killed my daughter. I've made a lot of mistakes in the past. But I overcame them. I worked through them, and you are going to make mistakes too. But Aaron, you have to take responsibility for them, you have to get in front of them, and make sure that those errors are fixed. It's not meant to be easy—if it was, anyone could be an alpha."

"Yeah, well Jackson couldn't be an alpha." Aaron chuckled, causing Orson to laugh as well.

"Maybe not, or maybe. The kid has some growing to do, and who knows? With time, he might just."

As Orson pulled the car to a stop in front of the shifter house, Aaron saw that the others had gotten back before them. He raised an eyebrow, confused as to how they had.

As he stepped out of the car, he saw shadows drop down from the trees around the house. Jackson, Isaac, and Emma surrounded him, shifting into their werewolf forms. They bowed their heads, honoring Aaron and showing their support for him. Aaron smiled at them, knowing that Orson was right.

It definitely wasn't going to be easy. With demons running around, they were going to face a lot of adversaries. It wasn't going to matter what he felt. Whether or not he could,

Aaron would have to step up to the plate and do the job. The pack needed him, and he needed them. He nodded at them, taking a step forward before shifting into his wolf form as well.

Together, the pack let out one more howl under the full moon, the sound echoing through the night air and drowning out everything else.

Chapter 2 - Lenna

Lenna dashed toward the woods, cutting out into the street without a care in the world. In that moment, nothing else mattered to her. She had to get across the forest to the house in the middle of the woods. She felt her heart beating intensely in her chest, but not from exhaustion. She felt a crippling fear as she zoomed by trees and branches, taking a straight line to her house.

She had gotten a call from Lin, her daughter. Lenna had gone into the city to buy supplies for them. She had stopped in Ridgeshire, looking to get some of the things she'd missed. Lenna and Lin lived off the grid near Ridgeshire. When Lenna and her husband had been attacked by a pack of werewolves, Lenna knew she had to get as far as she could from the craziness of Ridgeshire.

The werewolves had killed her husband, and when Lenna had called out to any dragons in the area, no one had come to her aid. As a dragon herself, she felt as though she had been let down by her own people. With three dragon packs within range of her call, no one had come to save her and her husband.

And now, Lin had called out to say that someone had come to the house. Lenna never got visitors, she didn't have any friends, and she lived off the grid to stay away from everyone else and raise her daughter alone in peace. But if someone had found her home in the woods, Lenna knew it wasn't going to be good. She dashed past a vehicle, not caring that the humans inside it would probably see her running into the woods.

The trees and branches came rushing past her at incredible speeds, as Lenna pushed herself as fast as she could. By the time she got to the clearing around her house, she saw that the front door was left wide open. Her eyes went wide as she stared at it in shock. She paused to listen for heartbeats or

conversations around her. As she did, she noticed a heartbeat behind her.

Lenna ducked, just as a tranquilizer dart flew over her shoulder. She turned around, rushing up a tree to a woman who was perched on the top branch. The woman quickly tried to reload the gun and fire again, but Lenna shifted her fingers into claws, and quickly took a swipe at the gun, breaking it along the barrel.

“Woah!” the woman yelled, a smile on her face, before falling backward off the tree.

Lenna paused for a moment, knowing the woman was just a human, and a fall from that height would kill her. But at the last moment, the woman fired off a grapple from her belt, latching on to the tree and slowing herself down for a moment before disconnecting and dropping the rest of the way to the ground. She turned and began running off. Lenna took one look at her, knowing she didn’t have Lin with her. She had to find her daughter, so she ignored the woman and rushed toward the house.

“Lin! Baby! Where are you?” Lenna yelled, looking around. She quickly made the rounds through the rooms, trying to find her, but the entire house was empty. “Lin!”

“She’s not here,” came a voice from the door. Lenna turned to see a man in a tan trench coat leaning against the frame. He lit a cigarette, inhaled a little, and flashed a smile at her. “I mean, you should know that. You’re her mother, after all.”

Lenna felt a heat begin rising in her gut, her face beginning to shift even more into her dragon form. Some humans had come into her house, and they had taken her daughter. She took a step forward, her voice coming in heaving growls that caused the pictures on the wall to rattle as she spoke loudly.

“Where is she?”

“I took her,” the man responded, almost as though he didn’t see the beast in front of him. He wiped at his nose and reached into his pocket, pulling out another cigarette. “I’m Caspian. You smoke?”

Lenna crossed the distance between them so quickly she surprised herself. Her hand wrapped around the man’s neck and she broke the front door off its hinges with his body before slamming him into a tree.

Caspian took a look at her, his body still trying to make sense of what had happened. He smiled and blew smoke at her face. The smoke covered his body, and Lenna realized her grip on him was slipping.

Soon, there was nothing but smoke, and Lenna couldn’t see him through it. She heard his voice behind her, and turned around growling. It didn’t make any sense. He should have been knocked unconscious, and completely shell-shocked from what she had done to him. Any harder and she would have shattered his spine against the tree. But somehow he was doing just fine, resting on the door frame, pulling out another cigarette.

“You should really learn to talk to people nicely. I offered you a smoke and you tried to kill me? Come on, where are your manners? I didn’t even get your name.”

Lenna heard a sound behind her, and turned just in time to see a whip rushing at her face. It slammed across the bridge of her nose, stunning her. She took a step backward, realizing that she couldn’t see. She heard someone rushing toward her, and a sharp pain hit her in the back of her leg, forcing her down to one knee. Lenna forced her eyes open, seeing a man and a woman standing in front of her. Lenna swung her claws, but the whip wrapped around her wrist, stopping her hand from moving.

“Hi!” The woman said in a high-pitched tone, kicking Lenna across the face. It didn’t hurt, as she didn’t have the strength to hurt her. But the pain in Lenna’s leg made it impossible for her to get back on her feet, and the whip

seemed to stop her entire arm from moving. “You look hideous!”

Lenna dug deep and drew on the heat inside of her. She let out a breath, spitting fire all around, forcing the whip off of her and forcing the humans to step back. Lenna got back to her feet, realizing that she was standing in the middle of five humans. Caspian stepped away from the door frame, running a hand through his hair.

“Look, I’m going to drop the niceties. If we wanted to kill you, you’d be dead already. So—”

Lenna rushed at him again, driving a clawed fist at him. The man brought his palms together at the last moment, just before her fist would hit him. A black void appeared in front of his body, and Lenna felt a heavy blow strike her across the face. It knocked her to the side and she lost her balance, falling over. As she looked back, she saw that the same void had appeared right beside her face, as if her hand had gone through it.

“Neat trick, huh?” Caspian said with a chuckle, pulling his cigarette from his lips and tapping it to get the ash off the end. “Now, are you going to stay down, or are you going to need us to embarrass you some more?”

Lenna looked around, trying to make sense of what was going on. They were just humans, there was no way they should be able to take her on. But somehow, they had some sort of magic and items that allowed them to go toe-to-toe with her, a powerful dragon. But Lenna wasn’t going to go down without a fight. She knew what she had to do.

Lenna pushed off from the floor, grabbing a woman and running off with her. Lenna took her far off into the woods, separating her from the rest of the crew, before throwing her into a tree. She bounced off a branch and fell face-first to the ground. Lenna growled, knowing that she had found one she could take on with ease. She rushed at the woman, driving a knee into her jaw, shattering some of her

teeth instantly. She pushed her against the tree, using her claws to cut into her neck slowly.

“I’m going to ask you just once, and if you give me the answer I want, I am going to let you live,” Lenna spoke through gritted teeth. “Where did you take my daughter?”

“Somewhere you won’t find her.” The woman laughed. “You paranormals have been making this world a sewage dump, killing humans and causing a great unbalance in the world. But we’re going to make sure everything is settled, and you’re all left with nothing.”

Lenna was about to ask who they were, but then it became clear. They were hunters. The woman smiled, taking her hand out of her pocket. She opened her palm and blew a chalky powder in Lenna’s face, instantly causing her to cough and choke. The powder blinded her and burned her eyes, causing her so much pain.

“Unlike my friends who use weapons, I like to go all natural. It’s crazy to believe that the earth has already given us everything we need to kill you abominations.” The woman laughed, quickly getting away from Lenna. She let out a loud, shrill whistle, signaling the others to let them know where she was. “You’re not enough to do what needs to be done, so just give—”

Lenna could feel her eyes healing, but she didn’t need her eyes to finish the woman off. Picking up on her rapidly beating heart and the sound of her voice, Lenna threw herself forward, putting her clawed hands out in front of her. She drove her claws into the gut of the woman before throwing her into a boulder. Lenna rushed up to her bloodied body, pulling her head up so she could focus.

“Tell me where Lin is!”

The woman chuckled, blood gurgling in her mouth. “Oh come now, and allow another baby abomination into this world? You’ll never see her again.”

“No!” came a yell from behind Lenna.

As she turned around, not yet able to see, she felt a heavy blow to the side of her face. It knocked her down to one knee before something slammed into her chest, forcing her onto her back. Lenna felt a sharp pain driving into her leg, and she let out a cry as it sliced right through and popped out the other side.

“That’s enough, Max,” said Caspian.

“She...she killed Eunice...I’m going to...”

Lenna could barely make out what she was seeing, but the man who had stabbed her with the end of his bat was struggling to hold his tears back. It looked like a conventional baseball bat, save for the runes and inscriptions that were inscribed along the side of the weapon. Along it, there were holes that seemed to contain several things, spikes, a roll of wire, and more. Beneath the handle, a sharp blade jutted out, slick with some dark liquid.

It was evident that Caspian was the leader, and he had stopped Max from doing any more damage to her. Max pulled the bat out, causing Lenna to scream again, feeling the pain in every nerve ending.

“Take care of the body, I’ll deal with the abomination,” Caspian ordered the others, before turning back to face Lenna. He bent low, looking at her with a smile on his face. He pulled out another cigarette and put it to his lips. “You want your daughter, don’t you?”

“Give her back.”

“I will. And in fact, I’ll make sure you’re not bothered. Look, Lenna, I’ve been studying you for a while now, and I know you’re not like the others. You don’t want to make the world a shitty place for everyone. You live here with your daughter, away from the other dragons and paranormals, because they only cause problems for this world.”

Lenna grunted, listening to the man. She considered ripping his throat out, but the pain in her leg was just too much

and she could slowly feel herself becoming paralyzed. “What did he do to me?”

“Just a paralytic, it’ll go away soon. I want to make you a deal. You come work with us, help us find other abominations like you, and once we’ve rid Ridgeshire of them, we’ll let you and your daughter live in peace.”

Chapter 3 - Lenna

Lenna heard the sound of feet thumping into the ground, rushing toward her location. They were quick, and would be upon them in a matter of moments. She had no idea who it was, but if somehow dragons were coming to help her it would mean that she was going to be saved, or would at least have a chance to get away. She tried reaching up, but her hands refused to cooperate.

“How about we just take her with us and have her think about it?” One of the men asked, smiling ear to ear. He walked over to Lenna and threw a net over her body, and she felt it begin to tighten around her on its own.

“I want...my daughter,” Lenna whispered, looking back to see the group as they arrived.

Caspian noticed them too, and he quickly got to his feet, letting out smoke from his lips. “Looks like we’ve got company.”

“What’s going on here?” asked a man who Lenna had never seen. He had large, muscular biceps, and dark brown hair. Despite his imposing figure, there was a certain softness to him. His deep brown eyes held an unspoken kindness, and behind him were three others who followed him. It was obvious to Lenna that they were a pack of werewolves.

“Nothing really,” Caspian replied. “I suggest you run along and...oh, well well well. We have some paranormals here.”

“Who are you?” the man asked, his eyes locked on all of the hunters.

“Caspian, leader of the hunters. You’ve probably heard about us—we travel across the country and the world, taking down paranormal fuckups like you to make sure the world is a safer place for humans.”

The leader of the pack took a step forward, raising his hands. “My name is Aaron, and I think that is very noble. Just like you, we want to make sure the world is safe, and no one gets hurt.”

“Wow, you’re a walking contradiction. You realize that your very existence will always cause chaos?” Caspian retorted, shaking his head.

“I do, which is why we make sure that when there is a problem caused by us, a problem that we can do something about, we make sure we’re there to stop whatever that problem is.”

“Yeah, well that’s the problem, Aaron.” Caspian reached into his pocket, pulling out two pieces of metal that looked like flint. “I don’t want to wait for the problem to deal with itself. I want to deal with the problem first. I want all of you gone.”

Aaron raised his hands. “Look, let her go, and we can talk this over, peacefully.”

“Hard pass,” said Max, rushing at them.

Lenna watched in shock, seeing a human rush to attack a werewolf. A single one of the werewolves could easily rip their heads off. But the hunters marched in headfirst, without a care in the world. They were incredibly fit, and in top human condition. As Max got closer, he threw down a smoke bomb that instantly filled the clearing with smoke, obscuring the werewolves’ vision.

Caspian slammed the pieces of metal together and pulled them apart quickly, causing a bolt of lightning to travel out of them, heading straight toward the werewolves. Aaron leaped out of the way and the bolt of lightning hit a tree, going right through it. He dropped to the ground beside Caspian and threw a punch.

The man waved his trench coat between himself and the werewolf, and the blow was deflected. Aaron looked up in shock, stunned that a piece of fabric would stop him.

Caspian smiled. “Surprised?” He pulled out a small curved dagger and swung it, missing Aaron by inches. The werewolf shoved him backward with an open hand, getting out of the way of the blade.

“What is that, silver? You realize that’s a myth, right?” Aaron retorted.

“True, it is. But with the right spell imbued into it, should get the job done quite well,” Caspian replied.

Lenna felt her hands begin to regain feeling, and she looked around to see that the rest of the werewolves were trying to fight off the hunters. The smoke was stopping the werewolves from seeing clearly, giving the hunters the advantage. Lenna pushed against the net, trying to get it off of her, but the injury in her leg throbbed, leaving her extremely weakened.

Lenna watched as Max landed on the ground right beside her, looking up to see a female werewolf standing over him. Lenna looked around to see that the other hunters were being pushed back.

Caspian saw that his people had been pinned back, turned to Aaron, and reached for his neck. “As much as I would have liked to finish this, I have to go,” he said.

He brought his hands together, just as he had done before, and the black void opened right in front of him. The hunters quickly jumped into the voids that appeared in front of each of them, and in a second they were gone.

Caspian turned to Lenna, smirking at her. “Darling, I wish you’d listened.”

He vanished into the portal, gone.

“No!” Lenna yelled, trying to get out from underneath the net, but it just wouldn’t move.

Aaron quickly ran over to her, grabbing the net. The searing sound of heat on flesh reached her ears, as the net

burned his hands. He pulled away. “There’s a curse on it, but I’ll get it off, just hold on.”

Lenna watched in shock as the man took the brunt of the pain, the sound of the net searing into his skin as he pulled it off of her. Aaron tossed it to the side as soon as Lenna had enough room to crawl away from the magic object.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“My leg,” Lenna cried, trying to stay upright.

“Let me see it,” Aaron said, dropping to a knee. He took one look at the injury and frowned. “There’s something else on this. Emma, do you think...”

Lenna wasn’t willing to wait and see. She had seen the hunters use the portal, and while they were gone, Lenna knew that she wouldn’t be safe staying with these werewolves. Once they figured out she was a dragon, things would go bad for her. She pushed Aaron out of the way and quickly dashed downhill.

She felt an intense pain in her thigh as she ran, but she tried to hold out. She had been slowed down immensely, and against werewolves she wouldn’t get far. But she had to try. Lenna wasn’t going to sit and let herself get killed. She had to get away, she had to find Lin. A fallen tree blocked her path, and she tried to leap over it, but pain shot through her body, stopping her from leaping high enough to clear it.

She tripped over it and fell face-first to the ground. Before she could get back to her feet, Aaron was right next to her, reaching out for her. She kicked his hand away. “Get away from me!”

“Wait, I’m trying to help you,” Aaron replied, his eyebrows raised in confusion.

“You’re trying to kill me,” Lenna shot back as she crawled backward, trying to get away from him.

“No, I’m trying to help.” Aaron got down next to her. “We came here to help, all of us. We’re not going to hurt you;

you have my word. What's your name?"

Lenna looked at them in confusion. It didn't make any sense, but she didn't sense any hostility from them. They had managed to chase off the hunters, and now they were trying to help her. She reached out and took Aaron's hand, sitting up. He smiled at her. "Lenna."

"Lenna, nice to meet you," he replied with a smile, his eyes scanning over her face.

"I'm a dragon, I don't understand. What is this?" Lenna asked, knowing there was no escape at this point. If they hadn't already known she was a dragon by now, it would eventually come up, and when they figured it out, they would kill her. "Why are you werewolves trying to help me?"

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, we just tried to help you without knowing who you were first," said the one he had called Emma. "As long as you're not looking to hurt us, we have no reason to hurt you."

Lenna shook her head. "We've hated each other for generations, why are you guys any different?"

Aaron helped her up to her feet, draping her arm over his shoulder. "Because the hate is pointless, and there's no reason for us to keep hurting each other." He held her tightly, and instantly Lenna was incredibly aware of just how strong he was. She took in his scent, and somehow felt at ease. Aaron was going to take care of her. "Jackson, get the car around, we'll meet you out front."

"Thank you for this," Lenna replied. "I just need to get somewhere I can get whatever this is out of my leg so it can heal, then I'll be on my way."

Aaron walked side by side with her, while Emma and another werewolf, much younger than the others, walked ahead of them, their heads tilted to the side, keeping their ears open for the hunters. Aaron looked down at her leg. "It looks like some sort of toxin. I don't think we can get it out with ease."

“Yeah, it got me paralyzed for a bit, but I’m sure I can force it out,” Lenna replied.

“Well, I know dragons are tough, and I’m sure you handled yourself quite well, but there are limits to what we can heal from, and a toxin running through your system will take you out for a few days. You need to get adequate rest. Where’s your pack?”

Lenna froze, not sure what to say. “I’m not...”

“It’s alright, we don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to,” Aaron replied.

Lenna let out a breath, stunned by just how kind Aaron was being.

“Can I ask what happened?” Aaron continued.

“They took my daughter, and I’m going to get her back,” Lenna replied. She realized that she had no friends, and no other place to return to. Her home in the woods had been destroyed in the fight, and if she went back there, the hunters could return and finish her off or capture her. Lenna’s best chance was with the werewolves. They had accepted her, and she could lay low with them until she was healed.

“Your daughter? Okay, we can help you. First of all, we need to get you rested. I’ll have my pack head out to see if they can pick up on the hunters’ scents. They’ll still be in Ridgeshire, at least until they’ve gotten what they want,” Aaron replied. “I think you should stay with us for the time being. Once you’re strong enough, you’ll join the search, and we’ll get your daughter back.”

Lenna nodded silently, not sure what to say. It was the longest conversation she’d ever had with a werewolf, without trying to rip them to shreds. “Thank you, Aaron.”

He smiled at her as they stepped out of the woods. He helped her into the back seat, and climbed in beside her. The youngest of the pack sat in the bucket of the truck, with the one Aaron had called ‘Jackson’ at the wheel, and Emma in the front seat. Lenna was surrounded by werewolves and,

instinctively, she didn't trust them. If it came down to it, she would kill every single one of them if they tried to hurt her. She had to survive—not just for herself, but for Lin.

But Aaron confused her. He was different. He was trying to help her, and Lenna didn't know what to make of him.

Chapter 4 - Aaron

The car came to a stop in front of the house, with Aaron looking out the window. “Here we are.”

“I’ll help her inside,” Jackson piped up as he got out of the car. “Isaac, come with me, help me get a room ready for her.”

“I got some clothes you can change into,” Emma began. “We’ll get you some more later.”

“Thanks, guys,” Lenna replied, “I appreciate it.”

As Lenna began to limp away with Jackson holding her, Emma put out a hand, stopping Aaron. He took a look at her, confused. Emma pointed to the distance. “Walk with me.”

“What’s up?” Aaron asked when they were far enough. With the enhanced hearing of both dragons and werewolves, they had to be careful to make sure Lenna didn’t hear them.

“I know you’re doing what’s right, and we trust your decision, but we just thought we should tell you what we think,” Emma began.

“We? You mean Jackson and Isaac.”

“Yeah,” Emma replied. She folded her hands and relaxed. “She’s a dragon, and I know things are different because of Lyra, but we shouldn’t forget who they are. Dragons are still incredibly vicious and selfish.”

“And Levi showed us that’s not always the case,” Aaron shot back.

“Maybe, but there’s no telling what the case with this one is. Yes, she’s injured, and she doesn’t seem like a threat now. But think about it—she doesn’t talk about her pack or why she was facing off the hunters alone. I have a bad feeling about her, and I’m not the only one.”

Aaron paused, thinking about what she had said. He scratched his stubble, thinking. Dragons weren't the most trustworthy, but Aaron's gut had told him what he needed to know. Lenna could be trusted, and he wanted to believe that. He knew he could believe her.

"I don't think we have a reason to distrust her," Aaron finished.

"Other than the fact that she's a dragon?" Emma prodded.

Aaron smiled, reaching out to touch Emma. He was glad to have her by his side. Emma had finally gotten her bloodlust in check, and was able to shift perfectly now without losing control. She had struggled with it early on, but as time moved on, she got better and better at it and only allowed herself to let loose when they were in a fight.

"We'll keep an eye out, but for now she hasn't done anything to make us think otherwise, so let's treat her as a guest and make sure she knows she's welcome. Look, if we have Levi's pack saying good things about werewolves, and maybe her pack as well, we could change the narrative between werewolves and dragons. So let's try to keep an open mind."

"Alright," Emma replied. "I'll go check on what we have to help her with the toxin."

"Great, you do that," Aaron replied, making a mental note to talk to Jackson and Isaac. If the hunters were in town, they would need a place to stay. Ridgeshire had quite a few motels, but they could all be covered in a few hours. Jackson and Isaac would check them out and find the hunters. That way, the pack would be able to keep eye on them.

"I'll go talk to her," Aaron said to Emma, before heading for the house.

He wasn't sure what he was going to talk about though, and that was because Aaron was stunned by the woman. When he had pulled the net off of her, he'd realized just how

beautiful she was. Lenna had jet-black hair and the face of a European model. She had high cheekbones and hazel-brown eyes that felt to Aaron like they could see right through him.

Her body looked amazing, with great curves that rose and fell in all the right places. Lenna was absolutely stunning, and there was no denying it. Aaron had found it hard to take his eyes off of her, and as much as he didn't want to admit it to himself, one of the reasons he was knocking on her door now was just so he could see her again.

He knocked on the door before pushing it in. Lenna sat on the bed, looking at her leg. She had showered and changed into Emma's clothes, which were a size too small. It accentuated her body, her breasts struggling to be held back by the top. It was all she had to work with, and it would have to do for the night. Aaron struggled to keep his eyes level.

"Hey, how are you doing?" he asked.

"Bad. My leg really hurts, and I have to do something about it," Lenna replied. "I can't heal, I can feel my body trying, but it hurts too much."

"I have Emma looking for something to help flush it out of your system, she should be here soon. It'll heal quite fast once you've gotten it out of you." Aaron pulled out a chair and got in it. "In the meantime, I wanted to ask what you know about the hunters."

"I just met them," Lenna replied instantly.

"Yeah, but you managed to fight them off, we could pick up on the sounds. I mean, they're just humans, but they were able to take on a dragon."

"Yeah. They have tools, as all hunters do. But they're very effective with theirs. I mean, they're really highly trained, and really strong. I could only take on one of them when I separated her from the rest of the group, and she still pushed me to my limit."

"How many of them are there?" Aaron asked. "I counted four."

“There was a fifth, but that was the one I took down. I think she was the weakest of them, but if things had gone her way just a little, she could have taken me down. They’re just humans, but you shouldn’t underestimate them. They’re cocky, and they know exactly what they’re doing.”

Aaron nodded. It wasn’t the first time he had heard about hunters, and it certainly wasn’t the first time he had seen one. They were an offshoot of the wizards. Several hundred years ago, humans had realized that they needed a way to protect themselves against the threat of paranormals.

Conventional weapons like axes, arrows, and swords didn’t work, but the dark arts of magic had some effect, and managed to slow down the creatures enough to stop them. That was what had birthed the wizards, allowing some humans to train in the ways of the supernatural, unlocking a force that could keep paranormals at bay.

But finding humans who had the ability to learn and use magic as sorcerers did was difficult. As sorcerers became a rare commodity, humans needed to improvise. Sorcerers began making tools which would help humans defend themselves, teaching them simple things they could do to keep safe. In time, the humans banded together to create the hunters.

The first hunters were made to ward off the Bashka, a snakelike paranormal that hunted and ate humans in their sleep. The hunters were able to chase them off, and eventually they killed every single one of them, erasing the Bashka from the face of the earth. But with time, the hunters wanted more. They began training to get better, to get stronger, looking to exterminate everyone who wasn’t human.

Over time, the hunters had faded into obscurity when they realized that they did not stand much of a chance against the paranormals. But they popped up often, and whenever they did they caused trouble. Aaron hadn’t dealt with them personally in the past, but if they were going to be a threat to him and his pack, he was going to deal with it.

“They said they were going to cleanse Ridgeshire. Take out everyone who was a paranormal,” said Lenna.

“I won’t allow that,” Aaron replied, reaching out to hold her hand. “I’m sorry they did this to you, but we won’t let them hurt anyone else again. Ridgeshire has gone through some things, but we are doing our best to keep the town safe. My pack has never hurt a single hair on anyone’s head. We’ve made certain of it, and if the hunters think killing us is going to make this town safer, I’m going to beg to differ.”

Lenna nodded and turned to look away. Aaron realized that she was upset. He let out a somber breath. “What’s her name?”

“Lin,” Lenna replied, her voice breaking. “She’s my whole world.”

“How old is she?”

“Nine,” Lenna replied. “She’s nine. If you’re going to ask about her powers, they’re beginning to show up.”

“I saw the leader, we talked. Caspian doesn’t seem like the type who would kill a child. I’m sure Lin is okay; they’re just holding her for a bargain.”

“She isn’t supposed to be a bargain, she’s supposed to be my daughter!” Lenna fired back, shaking her head. She pulled her hair to the side and began nervously picking at it. “I have to save her.”

“You’re going to,” Aaron replied, nodding at her as they locked eyes for a moment. “We’re going to help you bring her home.”

Aaron realized that she hadn’t pulled her gaze away for a moment, and his eyes scanned her face, taking in the details. He picked out the ghost freckles that danced across the bridge of her nose, her scattered hair hanging loosely off the side of her face. The bags under her eyes told of the tiredness she was facing.

But even at that, she was the most beautiful woman Aaron had ever seen. Her face pulled at his heart, and he found it hard to maintain eye contact with her. But when he looked away, all he wanted was to see her face again.

Aaron shook the thought from his head. She was a dragon, one who had found a mate already and had a child with him. There was no need for him to allow any feelings to begin to fester. He had to crush it instantly. He realized his hand was still on hers and he pulled away awkwardly, flashing a smile as he did.

“You’re werewolves, I still don’t understand why you care,” Lenna argued. “We’re enemies.”

Just before Aaron could answer, the door was pulled open and Emma walked in with a tray of materials to clean up the wound. Aaron pulled away, causing Emma to pause for a moment, staring at both of them before she set the tray down. She raised an eyebrow. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, it’s fine,” Aaron replied and got to his feet. “I have a few things to run over with the others, but Emma will be here with you for a bit, and she’ll help you with whatever you need.”

“Thank you,” Lenna replied, shooting a glance at Emma.

Aaron quickly saw the look on Emma’s face and could tell the woman was not pleased to be cleaning up Lenna’s injury. It was evident that Emma didn’t like her. Aaron didn’t want to stay and see how awkward it was going to be. He had to make other plans. He had to talk to the guys and figure out what they were going to do about the hunters.

“I’ll be back,” Aaron said before he left.

If they were under attack, Aaron wanted to make sure everything went well. Their first tango with the hunters had been a complete disaster, and if the hunters were already a man down and demoralized from the fight, there was a chance that things could have gone the other way.

Whatever they were going to do, Aaron had to make sure the pack was prepared for it. He walked out into the main foyer, seeing Isaac and Jackson sitting on chairs waiting for him. They quickly got to their feet as he approached. Aaron smiled at them.

“Time we hunt down some hunters.”

Chapter 5 - Lenna

Emma sat opposite Lenna, and instantly Lenna could tell she was the beta of the pack. She didn't trust Lenna, and it was actually nice to see so familiar a feeling. Being around a trusting werewolf had caused Lenna to get complacent, but now she felt on edge, waiting for a reason to strike. But Emma was treating her leg, and so Lenna had to stay still.

"Why don't you live in the town with everyone else? It's safer," Emma began, as she mixed the bright yellow concoction she was going to use on the wound.

"Dragons of Ridgeshire live in the town. The leader of the pack used to have a store in town. So, I wasn't looking to run into dragons casually," Lenna replied. She sniffed, trying to figure out what was in the container. "What's in that stuff?"

"Worried I'm going to hurt you?" Emma asked, smirking.

"Yes," Lenna replied without missing a beat. She didn't trust the werewolf either.

"Well trust me, if we were going to hurt you, we would've done so," Emma replied, walking over to her. "We're trying to be different, trying to make sure that the pointless war between us ends with us. But trust me, if you give us a reason to hurt you, we will."

Lenna smiled, knowing the woman was trying to exert dominance. It was her pack after all. She had a responsibility to look after all of them and make sure they were fine. It only made sense that she would be the one to threaten her. Lenna didn't care about them—she knew that if it came down to it, she would put herself before the werewolves, and they would do the same.

"The feeling is mutual," Lenna replied.

Emma smiled, dropping a large dollop of the liquid right onto the wound. Lenna felt a burning sensation run right

through her. Her claws shot out, cutting into her own palms as she bit back the pain. She could feel her blood pressure shoot up, and her heart rate quickly doubled, sending blood all through her. Lenna looked up to see the werewolf smile as the substance began flowing through her.

“It’s going to hurt like a bitch,” Emma explained as she began spreading it around the surface of the injury, before she began wrapping it up with a bandage. “I tested the poison, and this is the only way to kick it out. This is going to burn it out of you, it’ll go into your bloodstream, and in a couple of days it’ll get all of the toxins out, and you’ll be able to heal fine again.”

“A couple of days?” Lenna asked through gritted teeth. “My daughter is out there, and I need to go help her. I don’t have a few days.”

“Well, you’re going to have to work with that, unless you want to risk it and die at the hands of the hunters all on your own,” Emma replied.

Lenna sat up straight, feeling the burn. Its intensity seemed to have reduced, but she could still feel a low throbbing sting in her veins as the liquid worked its way through her body. Emma left her alone, and Lenna decided to take a nap. She walked toward the only window in her bedroom, looking out at the woods in the distance.

There was a chance that Aaron and the werewolves would figure out where the hunters were holding her daughter, and by the time she woke up Lin would be in her arms. It was hard to believe, but Lenna had to hope for the best. She shut her eyes and allowed the pain and exhaustion of the injury to take her into dreamland.

By the time she woke up, Aaron and the rest of the pack had returned. Lenna listened to their conversation, listening in on how they had checked all of the motels to find where the hunters had decided to hunker down, but they had turned up empty in all of them.

Lenna felt her heart sink. If Lin wasn't in a motel, there was no telling where they were holding her. The hunters could easily take on Lin—a little dragon who had no idea how her powers worked would be a plaything to them—and they could hurt her by accident.

The pack left again. This time, Isaac stayed back to watch over Lenna as the pack began canvassing the east side of the town. They would go door to door, quickly doing a scan of each building when they saw a chance. Ridgeshire was a small town, but they would be looking for a needle in a haystack, and going through all of the houses was going to take a few days.

The next morning, Lenna found that she could stand upright without too much pain. It wasn't easy walking, and each time she put her weight on the leg the pain shot up to her brain. But she felt she had to do something. She had to get back on her feet. She changed into the clothes that had been brought for her. They fit her a lot better and allowed her to move freely. She wore shorts that exposed her thighs so the bandage wouldn't get smudged up.

Lenna walked out to the living room area to see that no one else had come down from their individual rooms. She shut her eyes, listening for the sounds of the house to figure out who was where, but realized that she couldn't pick up on the sounds from the rooms.

“We use dampeners. As much as we're a family here, we often need a bit of privacy,” Jackson said as he walked around the corner of the kitchen, startling Lenna.

“You couldn't sense me.” Jackson chuckled as he ate a spoonful of cereal. “Whatever that thing is, it really fucked with your powers too.”

“It didn't, I'm just out of sorts,” Lenna replied.

Since she had been taken down, she had felt it a little hard to use her powers to full effect afterward. “What are we doing for breakfast?”

“I was waiting for you to wake up before I came by to suggest something,” Aaron began, walking down the stairs behind her.

Lenna turned around to see the man. He was dressed in sweatpants and a loose shirt. His arms hung loosely at his sides, and the shirt did what it could to hide the impressive physique that was underneath. A small part of Lenna wanted to know what he looked like with the shirt off.

“I uh...I’ll have anything, thanks. I’ll pay you back once we have this sorted out,” Lenna replied.

“It’s alright. As much as we’re different races of paranormals, we’re still fighting for the same cause.” Aaron paused, doing his best to organize his hair behind his face.

He smiled at Lenna, causing her to blush for a moment. Lenna smiled back before looking away, raising an eyebrow at herself. Why had she smiled back? Was she subconsciously flirting with a werewolf while her daughter was kidnapped? She had to keep her head straight. There was no telling how things would go, and she had to focus on what mattered.

“Well, I just want my daughter back, and after that, I’ll be out of your hair,” Lenna replied.

Isaac, the youngest of the shifters, paused as he walked into the hallway, picking up on the conversation. He looked to Aaron, and then to Emma, before he shrugged and walked off to the side, not wanting to get caught in the crossfire.

Emma joined the conversation, quickly walking around to the other side with a frown on her face. “That’s quite selfish.”

“Sorry, but I really care about my daughter,” Lenna shot back.

“No one said you shouldn’t, but if there is a threat, especially the hunters, don’t you think we should be the ones doing something to deal with that threat?” Jackson asked, taking another crunchy bite of his cereal.

“I’m not a part of the problem,” Lenna replied. “I’ve stayed away from all of this, alongside my family, for years. I have no reason to join this fight now. I just want to get my daughter, and get as far away from the other paranormals as quickly as I can.”

Lenna watched as the beta turned to Aaron. He shook his head, and they sat down to eat. It was a funny dynamic that the werewolves had. It was rare to see a werewolf who would turn on their leader and challenge for the position of leader. In dragon packs, there was no ceremonial role. There was only the strongest, and once you could prove that, you were the leader.

She could tell that they were going to listen to Aaron, no matter what. Lenna chuckled to herself, glad that she had the pack leader in her good graces. That would give her some sort of leverage. She continued to sit in silence, but the air was fraught with dislike, and it was hard for her not to smirk.

“Look, we don’t flow well,” Lenna said as she looked up at them. “So cut me some slack for being selfish. What would you do if your child was held by hunters?”

She turned to Aaron for some support, and he shook his head. “We would do everything we could to save them. But in the process, we wouldn’t try to hurt the pack that’s actually going to help you out.”

Jackson put down his plate. “If you were such a badass, you should have taken them all down yourself. I’m going to say what we’re all thinking. We don’t like you; we don’t trust you. We’re only harboring you because we’re trying something new, and ‘cause Aaron wants this. But at the drop of a penny, we’re done with this.”

“He’s right,” Emma added. “So don’t give us more reason to not like you.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Lenna left the living room and began making her way around the house. If this was how it was within a pack that

was trying to like her, Lenna was certain a werewolf pack that hated dragons would have had her killed or worse. As hard as it was to get comfortable around a group she was naturally supposed to hate, Lenna had to come to terms with it. They were helping her, and right after breakfast, they had gone out again, continuing their search for the hunters.

If they found them, Lenna would be in no position to fight, and they would have to be the ones who rescued her daughter. For the sake of Lin, Lenna would have to work on her own issues with the werewolves. As she wandered through the house, trying to force the pain in her leg, she found a tall shelf of books.

Scanning through the titles, Lenna noticed they were just normal books, from *Harry Potter* to *Game of Thrones*, and a few self-help books. Nothing too out of the ordinary. Then she noticed that there were some books hidden behind those. She pulled one out and instantly realized it was a book from the old religion.

“Well, hello,” she said to herself as she put it down on the table. It dropped off the table. “Shit.”

As it fell open, Lenna saw herself staring at a picture on a page that looked eerily familiar for some reason. It was a picture of a necklace, one she had seen before. She wasn't sure where, but it was recent enough to be burned into her head. She ran her hand over the picture, and then she realized where she had seen it.

It had been on the neck of Caspian just before the hunters had vanished. The book was written in a language Lenna couldn't understand, but it was easy for her to tell that this was bad news.

Chapter 6 - Aaron

Aaron walked into the house with a box of donuts, listening to the sound of Lenna walking toward him quickly. He had bought the donuts in the hopes of getting her to talk to him more openly, and help her understand that they were not her enemies. It was hard for both sides to come to that agreement, and as much as Aaron wanted to deny it, the only reason it was easier for him to be comfortable with her was because he liked her.

There was a fierceness about her, one that seemed to complete him in a manner he couldn't fully understand. As he opened the door, he saw her waddling toward him, struggling to stay upright with the pain in her leg. His eyes shot up as he saw the look on her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“I need you to translate something I saw. I don’t know what it is, but it looks bad,” Lenna replied. “Can you read?”

“Well, yeah,” Aaron replied, a little embarrassed. He wasn’t sure what she was asking, or even why. But he followed her either way, making his way to the bookshelf where she had left a book open. “Oh, you want me to read this.” Aaron paused. “I’m not, uh...this is more Bingwen’s territory. Or maybe Orson, but he’s not home now.”

“I saw this on Caspian’s neck.” Lenna pointed at the necklace. “Do you think it’s a clue? Can it help us find my daughter?”

“I...” Aaron put his finger on the book, trailing the individual letters of the ancient language. He didn’t really understand much of it, as he had never really needed it for anything. But he read each letter slowly in his head and finished the word. He raised an eyebrow. “Moonstone.”

“Any idea what it is?” Lenna asked.

“No, but when I get to Bingwen next, I’ll talk to him about it.”

“Bingwen,” Lenna said, almost as though testing the name. “Your sorcerer, yeah? It’s crazy, I have never seen a pack like this. Isaac said your former beta has a child with a dragon pack’s alpha.”

“Yeah,” Aaron replied. “Honestly, we just do what we can to keep the world safe. We don’t care much about how it’s done, we just want to do it. I’m sure you can appreciate that, yeah?”

Lenna nodded, and turned to walk back toward the bedroom. “Any luck on finding them?”

“I finished my quadrant; we’re making good progress. If they’re in Ridgeshire, we’re going to find them, I promise,” Aaron replied, nodding at her. “Do you need help?”

Lenna hesitated for a moment, looking at him. It almost felt as though she was studying him, confused and intrigued. Aaron fought off a smile, and raised an eyebrow when he noticed her stare. She smiled at him. “Yeah, also I can’t find any bandages in my bedroom. I want to change this out.”

“I’ll help out with that, don’t worry,” Aaron replied, holding on to her hips as he helped her up the stairs.

As his hands touched her, Aaron was suddenly very aware of her sensuality. They both took a step forward at the same time, and Lenna wobbled, about to fall. Aaron grabbed onto her tightly, pulling her against him. For a moment they were face to face, their lips inches from each other. Aaron swallowed, not sure what to do. Lenna quickly pushed away, getting back on her feet.

“Does it hurt?” Aaron asked after several seconds of awkward silence.

“Yeah, but not as badly as I want to get my daughter back. I can take this; I just need it to heal and be gone.”

Aaron helped her down to the bed, and then brought all of the materials he needed to change out the bandage. As he worked, Lenna lay back, shutting her eyes. Aaron took his time to scan her body, marveling at just how great she looked. She had wide hips, and a slender midsection. Aaron pulled his eyes away and focused on what he was doing.

“What is she like?”

“What?” Lenna asked.

“Lin,” Aaron continued. “Your daughter. What is she like?”

Lenna smiled. “Well, she is the literal best thing. The only good thing I have left in this world. She’s nine, and you know how kids love to run?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, since she figured out how to use her ability to get faster, all she does is run. It’s one of the reasons we moved away from the city, to be honest. She’d go chasing after a squirrel, and she’d be gone.” Lenna laughed. “Carl and I would panic and start searching for her.”

“She sounds like a handful.” Aaron chuckled as he wrapped the bandage around her thigh, making sure the new one wasn’t too tight.

“Oh, she is a lot, but she is just perfect. I couldn’t have asked for anything else,” Lenna said, looking out the window. Aaron saw the tears coming to her eyes and he pulled himself up beside her, grabbing her shoulder.

“Lin is fine, I promise. We’re going to find her. We are going to find her, okay?”

Lenna leaned in, holding on to him as she cried. Aaron wrapped his arms around her, holding her close as she sobbed. He looked out the window, wondering where Caspian and the hunters could be hiding. The pack had already checked all of the major places they could be, and now they had cleared a

quarter of the houses in Ridgeshire. It still left a lot for them to check on.

But even if they could check all of the houses, there was a chance that the hunters could be holing up in the woods somewhere, and that would be even harder for Aaron's pack to find. But they had to try either way. Whatever the hunters had planned, Aaron wasn't going to wait for them to start acting. He wanted to get to Caspian first, and if he could settle things peacefully, he would go for that.

As Lenna pulled back, she looked up at Aaron. He watched as her eyes darted to his lips, and back to his eyes again. Aaron couldn't resist anymore. She looked amazing, and he had fallen head over heels for her. But there was no telling if she wanted him as well. He leaned forward for a moment, and then stopped himself. If he was reading things wrong, he would be trying to kiss a sad mother.

He began to pull away slowly, but he felt Lenna's hand grab him, stopping him from moving. Aaron let out a breath, stunned. Before either of them could act, his phone rang on the table, drawing them out of their tension-filled moment. Aaron rubbed his head, turning to the table. He tried to speak, but no words came.

"You should get that," Lenna started.

"I should," Aaron replied and picked up the phone. "Emma?"

"Jackson is closer to you, he said he thinks he's got a hunter. Spotted someone buying supplies who looks like they're planning to hunker down. Knowing Jackson, he's going to engage. I told him not to, but since you're closer..."

"Where is he?" Aaron asked, turning to nod at Lenna. He would call back to explain, he just had to find the hunter.

Aaron took off, heading out the back door of the house, charging straight for the woods. He cut through the city until he came out to the main roads, looking around to see if he would see Jackson. Aaron paused and sniffed, trying to pick

up his scent, but there was nothing. He knew he only had moments to act. If the hunter realized he was being followed, there was a chance he wouldn't lead them to wherever the hunters were holed up.

He would try to get away first. But Aaron needed to find where they were hiding. He was certain they would have Lin there as well. As long as the hunter was none the wiser, they would be able to keep a close eye on him and follow him. Aaron picked up on Jackson's scent and turned toward it. He walked down the road quickly, breaking into a small jog, trying to blend in.

The hunter had already left the supermarket and was heading toward a car. Aaron looked across the street to the parking lot to see Jackson walking up to the vehicle. His eyes went wide, and Aaron let out a high-pitched whistle. Jackson quickly looked up, able to trace the direction of the sound. The moment he saw Aaron, the leader of the pack ducked behind a dumpster so the hunter wouldn't notice him.

Jackson paused and then turned away. Aaron waited until he heard the sound of the car beginning to pull away. He had picked up on the hunter's scent, and now he had something to trace him by. Jackson walked up to him, raising an eyebrow.

“Why did you do that? I almost had him!”

“We're following him,” Aaron replied as he began walking toward the trees off to the side of the road. “These hunters are trying to help Ridgeshire, they're just going about it wrong. We can help them, and beating one of them into revealing the location of the others isn't really going to help.”

They quickly ran after the car, knowing that if they tailed him with a vehicle, there was a chance that he would see them. The hunters were incredibly well-trained, and Aaron was being as careful as he possibly could. He called ahead to Emma and Isaac, having them spread out to loosely follow the hunter. After five minutes of driving, Jackson made an observation that Aaron had missed.

“He knows we’re on to him,” Jackson blurted. “He’s been driving in circles. I thought he was trying to lose a tail, but he’s not even trying.”

Aaron let out a breath. The car was headed down a quiet stretch of road, and there wouldn’t be anyone for a few minutes. He had to act. “Everyone stand down, I got this.”

Aaron matched the speed of the car, and dropped from the canopy above into the path of the car. The hunter slowed the car down, and Aaron raised his hands. “Hey, you know who I am, what’s your name?”

“Why do you care? And where is she?”

“Who?” Aaron asked.

“The dragon. That’s the one I want. Why isn’t she out with you?” the hunter asked, obviously upset.

“Look, we have to talk. You and I are not enemies. But first, is Lin okay? Lenna’s daughter, is she okay?” Aaron asked.

The man chuckled and pulled out his custom bat from the car, “The little dragon girl? As much as I wanted to bash her head in, Caspian won’t let me. But I can come out here and do it to her mother. So lead me to her, or I’ll do the same to you. It’s your choice.”

“Listen to me,” Aaron argued, “we don’t have to fight, we’re doing this for the same reason. You want Ridgeshire safe, and so do we. Just put down the bat, let’s talk.”

“No,” the hunter replied. He waved his hand, spraying the air with a black powder.

Aaron quickly stepped back, not sure what it was. If they were willing to poison Lenna’s leg, there was no telling what they would do to him. The dust began to float in the air toward Aaron, and he took another step back. Through the powder, Aaron heard the hunter flick a flint, creating a spark. The smell of the dust clicked in his head, and Aaron figured out exactly what it was.

Gunpowder.

The air in front of him ignited for a moment, flashing brightly. Before he could react, the hunter leaped through the flames and slammed him with the bat, sending Aaron backward. The hunter reared backward, ready to attack again, but he froze when he realized he was outnumbered.

Jackson cracked his knuckles as he stepped forward. “I got this.”

Chapter 7 - Aaron

Aaron felt dazed by the weapon, wondering just how strong the human was. But then it dawned on him. It was a weapon imbued with magic, and the hunter himself was just a user. Anyone who knew how it worked would be able to use it just like that. That was how this hunter, a normal human, could slam Aaron into a tree and leave him stunned.

He looked up to see Jackson rushing at the hunter. The man quickly began to fall back, looking to get away from Jackson. It was evident that he was not as fast as the werewolf, so it didn't make any sense for him to even try running. But then it dawned on Aaron. It was a trap. Once Jackson was far enough from the others, the man pulled out a handgun, aiming it right at Jackson.

“Get down!” Emma yelled.

The shot rang out in the air, missing Jackson by inches and searing through his jacket. He paused and turned to see the man reload. “I'm going to rip you in two.”

“Bring it on, you dog!”

Jackson charged, looking to slam his right hand into the man. The hunter countered with the bat, knocking the blow the other way. The force sent Jackson's arm backward, sending him off balance. The hunter followed through with a backhanded slam of the bat to Jackson's face, causing him to spin before falling to the ground.

He lifted the bat, revealing the sharp end, spinning it around to impale Jackson from behind. Isaac kicked the man, sending him flying into the woods. As he got to his feet, Emma dropped from a tree above him, slicing into his back. The man let out a yell, pulled out some smoke pellets and slammed them into the ground. Aaron lost visual of them, and rushed over to Jackson who was still unconscious on the ground.

“Are you okay?” Aaron asked, trying to help him to his feet. Jackson pushed him off before turning back to the hunter still fighting the other two in the woods. He growled deeply, looking to jump back into the fray. Aaron held him back. “Wait, watch and learn how he moves. You can’t just best him like this.”

Aaron and Jackson watched as Emma and Isaac made fast work of the hunter, quickly moving in and out. They worked together as a team, one person working as a distraction for the other. Isaac ran straight up at the hunter. Before he could reach the man, he stopped, sending a wave of leaves up in the air.

The hunter recoiled, waiting for Isaac to attack through the leaves which he had used as a distraction, but Emma leaped out from behind, knocking the man up and into a tree branch. He broke right through it and dropped to the ground, the bat falling away from him.

He looked up to see that he had been separated from his weapon, and Jackson zoomed off, rushing past Isaac and Emma and grabbing the hunter by the throat. He slammed him into a tree, knocking the air out of him. Aaron heard the man choking and could tell that Jackson wasn’t going to let go.

“Jackson, no!” Emma spoke loudly, reaching for Jackson’s arm to pull him off.

Aaron felt a disturbance in the air and he looked around them. Before he could speak, he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. As he turned around, Aaron saw a hole opened in the fabric of reality. It was the same type of portal that Caspian had opened, the one they had used to escape before.

The man in the long trench coat walked right through it, a cigarette on his smiling lips and his hands busy unfurling one of his sleeves. He almost looked like he was just walking off a movie set. Before Aaron could move, he realized that his power had left his body. He couldn’t feel his powers, and for

the first time in a long time, Aaron felt true fear shoot through him, so much that he was paralyzed.

“Hi,” Caspian began, shoving Aaron as hard as he could.

Aaron toppled to the floor, shaken. He watched as the hunter quickly moved behind the others. His feet made no noise as he was suddenly behind Isaac and Emma. He let out a high-pitched sound that caused them to drop to their knees, clutching their ears in pain.

Caspian coughed up blood and wiped his mouth, looking away. Once he reached the hunter, he opened another portal and they were gone. Aaron felt his strength return and he quickly made it over to the others, checking on Isaac first. “Isaac, can you hear me?”

“Just barely, it hurts. It really hurts.”

Aaron used a finger, tearing into Isaac’s forearm, but just barely. Once he did, he watched as the boy’s body instantly triggered its own healing mechanism. “It’ll stop soon, you’ll be fine. Try to get on your feet, we have to get back.”

“Do we?” Emma asked, “If we’re right, they’re long gone. Now that they know we’re looking, they won’t make it that easy for us to find them. They’ll probably even move.”

“We got nothing,” Isaac echoed.

“No,” Aaron replied. “We do have something. We know Lin’s alive, and Caspian isn’t letting anything happen to her. We just have to find them, somehow, or figure out what his plan is and intercept it.”

But even as he spoke, he could feel the pain in the bodies and the voices of his pack. Jackson was hurting, healing slowly, but not healing from the fact that a human had bested him in combat. There was no denying it. They were in for a wild ride, one which would take everything they had.

“Everyone head back, I need to talk to someone. But we are going to do this, I promise you all. Emma, talk to

Lenna for me. I'll be back soon."

Aaron walked back to the road and began the trek back into town. He needed the time to clear his head, as he found his self-doubt growing. He had seen the confidence on the face of the hunter as he entered the fight. Caspian wasn't afraid of them, not even a little bit. Aaron had to wonder—if the man didn't fear him as the leader of the pack, how was Aaron supposed to lead them?

He couldn't take down a simple hunter, and yet those who had come before him had managed to do even greater things. Orson had helped them stop the demons, and he had been in several battles against other werewolves who were of equal strength or more. But these humans, who they should be able to finish off easily, were proving to be quite the task.

Aaron stopped in the middle of town, taking a taxi and heading down to Orson's place. Levi and Lyra had moved in temporarily, to take care of Adam alone. But now that they were moving to the city, Orson had gone back there to pack up before he would join them in the city.

Aaron stopped by the door, looking at the window off to the side. It had been shattered by a demon during a fight against Lyra and Levi. He chuckled when he realized that Lyra had been able to take down several demons all by herself. He was having difficulty with a bunch of hunters.

"What are you doing here, sport?" Orson asked, yelling from the back of the house.

"Looking for you," Aaron yelled back, and began making his way around the building and heading toward the back of the house.

He found the man with his hands deep in the engine of his truck. Aaron smiled as he recalled all of the adventures they'd had with the truck. He had once fallen off the vehicle, and had to use his own body as the brakes. So many good times. The car had taken quite a beating when they had faced off against Garret, a dragon who had decided to take matters

into his own hands, while they were trying to stop the demon incursion.

“Thought you were done with the car,” Aaron began as he walked up to it.

“I’m done with the bodywork. The engine, on the other hand, still needs a lot of tuning and work,” Orson replied, flashing a smile. “Why are you looking for me? Doesn’t retired live in your book?”

“Yeah, I’m not asking you to come back, Orson,” Aaron replied, resting his hands on the engine. “I don’t know what I’m asking.”

“Talk to me,” said Orson as he worked with a wrench.

“You’re aware of the hunters, yeah?” Aaron began. “We’re trying to stop them, and...well, it’s all going to shit. I mean, they’re just regular humans, and we can barely touch them.”

“Hunters aren’t just regular humans, Aaron. You know that yourself. We fought side by side with the leader of the hunters, am I right?” Orson asked, using the wrench to scratch his face, which left an oil mark on his wrinkly skin. “About five years ago.”

“Yeah, I recall. We were trying to push back a Doilshe. Crazy to think that we have worked with them in the past,” Aaron said, as he recalled the event.

The monster had been born out of fear which humans in the area had poured into it. The Doilshe was a large seven-foot humanoid creature. It couldn’t physically attack those who didn’t try to attack it, and so it took down humans by imbuing their minds with so much fear that their hearts would stop.

Emma had just joined the pack, and they’d found Jackson shortly afterward. It was Orson, Lyra, Aaron and Emma who had gone to take on the creature. But when they arrived, they saw a single human taking it on all on his own. He didn’t seem the least bit affected by the fear given off by

the creature, and he was the one who delivered the final killing blow.

“If he could take it down all by himself, it’s hard to think why you would consider any hunter to be *normal*,” said Orson. “They’re incredible.”

“But they’re still human,” Aaron argued.

“Aren’t you?” Orson replied. “You fail to see yourself as human because you were bitten and now you’re different. You’re stronger, faster, have better senses. But you were human at some point, no?”

“Orson, I—”

“No, you were. And right now, you feel sadness, despair, fear that you can’t take them down. But, aren’t those human emotions? You’re still human, Aaron, don’t forget that.”

Aaron let out a breath and ran his hands over his face. As much as it was the truth, it wasn’t what he needed. He needed a way to win. “Orson, we still have no idea how we’re going to win this one. We rescued a dragon and—”

“Oh? Good to see things are changing around here,” Orson replied.

“Yeah, but the hunters have her daughter. I have no idea how to find them, and even if we do I have no way to get the little girl away from them.”

Orson paused for a moment. “Hunters are looking to keep the world safe.” He brought a hand up to his chin. “They only want to keep the world safe. Only the most dedicated of hunters would kill children back in the day, and I know for certain that they wouldn’t want to kill any children now.”

“Yeah, but it’s still someone’s daughter, and she’s been away from her mother for three days now. We have to get her back, somehow.”

“See if you can reach out to the hunters,” said Orson. “Whoever the leader is, he has to be a sensible man. Talk to

him, without the threat of the pack. Try to get him to listen to you.”

“Meeting him without the rest of the pack is risky,” Aaron countered. “I mean, one hunter can handle himself against the pack. I can’t fight off the entire group on my own.”

“Then you let them know you’re not there for a fight,” Orson replied. “If you save the girl, you win. We do what we can to keep her alive, so make sure you get her back. No matter what it takes.”

Chapter 8 - Lenna

Lenna stood by the front door, looking down the road as she waited for Aaron to return. She finally saw him walking back to the house with a somber look on his face. A small part of her had hoped that he would have Lin in his arms, carrying her back. Emma had told Lenna what had happened, and while it felt great to know that Lin was alive and safe, it still hurt to know that they had failed to find the hunters' hideout.

"Lenna," Aaron began from the driveway, "We didn't find their hideout. But we'll get her back."

"How?" Lenna asked as he got closer.

"I have a plan," Aaron replied, taking a look at her.

For a moment, Lenna saw a deadly look in his eyes. One which told her that Aaron was telling the truth. He was willing to throw caution to the wind to save her daughter. She tried her leg, seeing the pain had reduced enough for her to move a lot better. "I want in."

"I don't think so. I can do this, you'll just get in the way and get hurt," Aaron replied as he walked past her, heading into the house.

Lenna turned and walked after him, running her hand through her hair. Jackson had left the building shortly after Aaron had left, and Emma and Isaac had returned to their rooms, hunkering up for the night. Aaron walked over to the pantry which had a few drinks. She watched as he picked out a bottle and turned to her.

"You want some?"

"We don't get drunk."

"Trust me, this is going to do the trick," Aaron replied.

"What is it?" Lenna asked, walking over to him.

"Bit of magic," said Aaron. "Bingwen helped out."

Lenna sat next to him, cross-legged. If there was anything she needed, it was definitely alcohol. It had been so long since she could just wash down her sorrows with it. He took a long gulp and passed the bottle to her. She put it against her lips and realized just how sharp the taste was. As the dark brown liquid went down her throat, Lenna felt it burn.

“Wow, that’s good.”

“Yeah,” Aaron replied. They sat in silence for a while, nursing the bottle between them, passing it back and forth. “I’m going to get her back, but it’s going to be a bitch of a trade.”

“A trade?” Lenna raised an eyebrow.

“We have to get Lin back, no matter what. We can draw them out, and I’ll go after them myself. Trade myself for Lin,” Aaron finished.

Lenna looked at him in shock. “You’re joking.”

“I don’t see any other way to get to her.” He took another gulp and handed it back to her. “These hunters are no joke, and they want to win. Can’t let your daughter get hurt during this, so this is the plan.”

Lenna had always known Aaron was a little too righteous. She had watched him for a while to learn that he was eager to be a good leader. But with this offer he had just made, Lenna was stunned. The hunters weren’t going to hurt her daughter, but they would do whatever they could to hurt him, so they could figure out the best ways to hurt the other paranormals in Ridgeshire.

“That’s—” Lenna began.

“Let’s not make a big deal about it,” Aaron replied, taking another sip. He looked down at the bottle to see it was empty. Turning to her, he raised an eyebrow lazily. “Up for another?”

“Sure,” Lenna replied. He brought another bottle and sat on the couch next to her. As he pulled open the cork, she

nudged him. “Where’s your mate?”

“Don’t have one yet,” Aaron replied, handing the bottle to her. “Yours?”

“Dead,” Lenna replied, instantly feeling flat from bringing it up.

“I’m sorry, how did he die?”

Lenna cocked her head to the side, surprised to see that the alcohol was actually working. She was feeling quite dizzy. “Werewolves. Got attacked, and they uh...they jumped him.”

“Yeah,” Aaron replied, “I understand. We don’t have the best track record.”

“Neither do we,” Lenna replied. “I hunted down my fair share of strays, trying to make my peace with it. Until I stopped, for Lin’s sake.”

Aaron put a hand on her shoulder. “You were grieving. It’s hard to explain how that feels to anyone who isn’t in your...your shoes. Sorry, I’m a little...”

“Buzzed?” Lenna asked, chuckling. She took another large gulp. “Yeah, this is actually really good.”

“Too good,” Aaron replied. “Only way I can get wasted.”

“We probably shouldn’t...” Lenna began. “But why not? I mean, if the trade works, you might never get a chance again.”

“You’re right,” Aaron replied, chuckling. “Bottoms up!”

Lenna laughed as he poured half the rest of the bottle into the spent one. They drank for a few more minutes and Lenna put her legs up on the chair, touching Aaron’s thigh. Their laughter drifted off and they stared at each other. Lenna wanted to believe it was the alcohol. It was the first time she had been drunk in so long, but more than anything, in that moment, she wanted to be with him.

“Aaron,” she said under her breath.

He reached over, stroking the inside of her thigh, before looking back at her. Lenna shuddered, watching as he began to pull his hand away. She quickly reached forward, grabbing his wrist and pulling it back to her body. Nothing else mattered to Lenna in that moment—she wanted Aaron, and she could see the desire in his eyes as well.

“Lenna, I—” Aaron began, but she shook her head, leaning in to kiss him across his lips.

The alpha of the pack froze for a moment, but he began to melt away under her touch. Lenna could tell that he was attracted to her, and as much as he fought it, there was no way he could keep his hands off of her. Aaron reached for her top, pulling at it.

It ripped right off, revealing her breasts. Aaron wrapped a hand behind her waist, supporting her frame upright as his tongue reached out to her warm and erect nipples. Lenna felt his tongue eagerly on her bosom, sucking and licking on her. She let out a strained breath as a shudder ran through her body. The softness of her own body stunned her, as she had craved to be touched for so long.

It had been so long, and it felt unreal. She hadn't been with anyone since her mate had passed, and now she was making love to a werewolf. Her brain told her that it was wrong, but her own body said otherwise. The feeling of his tongue as it danced circles around her nipples sent her body to nirvana. She felt every flick of his tongue travel from her nipples to her spine, and then across her body, all the way to her toes, leaving them curled in anticipation and pleasure.

Lenna ran a hand through Aaron's hair, holding his head right in position as he continued without needing any motivation. He stayed calmly in place, letting out silent moans as he continued to feast on her, his warm breath coating and kissing her breasts with gusto. Lenna's hands began to creep down slowly, reaching for his groin. Her hands reached for his button. Not bothering with undoing it, she pinched it clean off.

She heard Aaron moan as she wrapped her hand around him. She began working his member back and forth as he continued sucking on her. She kissed his head and neck, moaning louder and louder as Aaron kept up with her sexual fervor. Lenna allowed her hands to glide across his shaft, stroking him gingerly, making him hard. Aaron's hips began to buck slowly, reacting to her gestures.

Lenna wanted more, she wanted all that he could give, right there. She pulled back for a moment, staring at him. Aaron's eyes scanned her body and instantly figured out what she wanted. Lenna didn't care that there were others in the house, just a few feet away. Aaron didn't seem to care either as he lifted her and placed her back on the couch.

His lips trailed across her body, exploring her torso with each touch, his hands and tongue exploring. Lenna had never felt anything like it. She felt every single nerve on her body stand on end, waiting for his touch, anticipating the pleasure that would come. Nothing else mattered in that moment, and Aaron did not disappoint.

“Yes,” Lenna let out breathlessly. “Yes, Aaron...”

Aaron reached up and grabbed her shorts, pulling them off carefully around her injured thigh. Once they fell at her feet, Aaron began kissing up her thigh slowly. Lenna didn't want to be teased, she didn't want to wait. She grabbed his hair, pulling him between her legs.

Aaron's tongue acted quickly as his hands reached underneath her thighs, pulling her to the edge of the couch as he began feasting on her. Lenna felt several ripples of pleasure run through her and she grabbed the side of the couch, her claws ripping into the material.

Aaron began gently at first, his lips kissing her smooth pussy, gliding down to her most sensual of spots. Lenna felt every inch of his tongue as it rubbed against her, moving slowly, savoring her taste. Aaron let out a low guttural moan, deeply enjoying his oral ministrations. Aaron was gentle, allowing her to lead the mark, and only moving at her request.

Seeing that he only cared for her own pleasure drove Lenna wild.

“Yesss...just like that...juss...”

Aaron didn't need the motivation, Lenna could feel that he wanted her just as much as she wanted him in that moment, and he would give it his all. He worked his tongue on her most private regions, unrelenting, untiring. Lenna began to feel the pressure build. Her moistness demanded more, and Aaron gave all that he could. His tongue moved inhumanly fast, bringing Lenna to an orgasm.

Her body arched upward as she let out a low moan, followed by a growl. Aaron held on to her, kissing her stomach and chest as her body spasmed again and again, as the waves of pleasure hit her over and over again. Lenna's face contorted in pleasure, throwing her head back as she shuddered, her toes curling. For a moment, she looked like a blood-lusted werewolf. Lenna could barely breathe when she stopped and grabbed Aaron's dick.

“I want you inside me,” she said, out of breath.

Aaron didn't need to be asked twice. In a few seconds, Lenna felt the man enter her. She felt her eyes roll to the back of her head as he began slowly, breathing heavily. Lenna expected him to bring her to orgasm quickly, but it looked like Aaron had other plans.

Aaron stroked her slowly, kissing her neck and the side of her face, letting out silent moans of pleasure. Lenna had expected it to be fast and violent, but Aaron was different. As he stroked, his hands played with her body, pinching her nipples, and reaching down to rub her clit slowly.

Lenna had opened her mouth to speak, but the pleasure was just too much. It was different, sensual, and completely earthshaking. She reached up to him, kissing him across the lips. Soon he picked up speed, the couch creaking under their weight as Aaron continued fucking her.

“Yes, yes...faster,” Lenna moaned, not caring for the little pain she could feel in her leg.

None of it mattered. All she wanted was pleasure. Aaron knew just what to do. His hips moved quickly, unrelenting. His superhuman strength made it almost too much for Lenna to handle. Her lips quivered, as her speech jumbled into an incoherent mess, begging for him to carry on. She could feel a pressure building inside of her, an eruption waiting to happen.

It was almost too much for her, and soon she felt herself being brought back to the edge of the precipice once again. Her palm grabbed Aaron’s, egging him on. He held up her legs, latching them over his shoulders to get as much room as he could. He went deeper, his thrusts harder and harder, drawing whimpers from Lenna.

Lenna felt herself clench around him, and soon she felt his body begin to shudder and he grew harder inside of her. He parted her legs, collapsing onto her, just as she began orgasming again. Aaron undid himself inside her, and they both lay on the couch, clutching each other as they tried to regain their composure.

Lenna didn’t know what to say to him, or if she wanted to say anything. But her body told her one thing. She wanted him, she wanted more of Aaron. Her mate was dead, and while she didn’t see Aaron as a mate, there was a chance that her feelings would change with time.

But he was a werewolf, and there was no telling what he would want. He could have other plans that did not involve her. Regardless, Lenna loved every moment of what had just happened, and she wanted that for herself. Lenna turned around to him, looking Aaron in the eyes.

He had a smile on his face, one that made her heart feel a little warm inside. She pulled her shorts back on before kissing him on the cheek. Lenna got back to her feet and turned back to face him. “Goodnight, Aaron.”

“Good night, Lenna,” he replied, stunned.

She smiled at him before turning to go. If there was anyone who was going to save her daughter, it was certainly Aaron. As she shut her bedroom door, she realized that Aaron was going to sacrifice himself for Lin, and she felt her heart drop into her stomach.

“No...”

Chapter 9 - Aaron

Aaron woke up early the next morning. He got up on the roof of the building, watching as the sun rose over the top of the trees in the distance. He had made up his mind on what he was going to do, and while he was not looking forward to getting captured, he knew that he had to get Lin away from the hunters, no matter the cost. The cost, however, felt too much to bear.

The hunters would be able to hurt him, they would bleed him for every bit of information he could give to them. Aaron steeled his resolve, knowing that he was going to get what he wanted. If Lin was saved, and she and her mother could tell others that there was a pack of werewolves looking to die just so dragons could live, it could change the dynamic of things.

They would be able to end a decades-long war between the species. Aaron waited until he could hear that everyone was out of their rooms, and then he dropped from the roof into the house. Everyone turned to face the back door as he walked in, nodding at everyone. He was certain that at least one person had heard him and Lenna the night before, but it was unimportant.

From the snickering on Jackson and Isaac's faces, it was obvious who hadn't shut their doors all the way. He turned to Emma, who sat on the sofa, looking up at him with raised eyebrows. Once Aaron was certain he had the attention of the entire room, he turned to see Lenna behind him, a ghost of a smile on her face.

"We're getting her daughter back today," Aaron announced.

"Okay?" Jackson asked, waiting to hear his plan.

"No, that's it," Aaron replied. "We're not heading back home until we find her. We stay together, and we comb

through the woods. When Caspian appeared, I picked up on a smell from him.”

“A smell?” Emma asked.

“Pickerelweed,” Aaron continued. “That thing only grows around the swamp south of the woods. They’re around there somewhere, and that’s where we are going to get them.”

“Great, I’m in. Time we kicked some hunter ass,” Jackson said, almost licking his lips.

“Hang on, this isn’t an assault. It’s a rescue. We’re going to get Lin back.” Aaron looked around at everyone before settling his eyes on Jackson. “The objective is to save the girl, so you follow *my* lead. You understand?”

“Yeah,” Jackson replied, nodding his head.

“No matter what, we come back here with Lin today. I’ll try to talk to them and get them to bring the girl to us. Once we have her, whoever does get their hands on the girl first, take her back here to her mother,” Aaron continued. “And you stay with them.”

“Wait, back here?” Lenna asked. “I’m going with you.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Emma chimed in.

“It’s my daughter’s life that’s on the line,” Lenna shot back.

“Which is exactly why we can’t have you out there. Not only are you injured, you won’t be able to think clearly. Please, just stay back and let us do this. I promise, we’ll bring her back,” Aaron said, touching Lenna’s arm. He realized the others were looking at him and he pulled his hand off.

“I want to come with you,” Lenna argued. “She won’t go with you. You’re strangers.”

“You said her power is coming in, yeah?” Emma asked, walking up to Lenna and placing a hand on her shoulder. “There, now I have your scent. We can convince her, or just carry her back. Whatever the case, we can do it.”

Aaron and the pack left the house, leaving Lenna behind. As much as Aaron wanted her beside him, he was certain that it would be best for her in the house. The place was a fortress, and even if the hunters came for her there, they wouldn't be able to get in. Not unless they had military grade firepower and a lot of magic.

The pack moved through the woods, racing through the trees and rushing past branches. Aaron felt light, with a purpose. He had made love to a beautiful woman the night before, and while she hadn't said anything about it to him, he knew he could take on anything now.

They got out to a clearing as some of the trees began to give way to the swamp. Aaron let out a call, stopping the pack from moving forward. In the distance, he smelled smoke. He traced it to the left and quickly climbed up a tree to get a visual of the area around. As expected, there was a shed in the distance, and Aaron trained his eyes on the area to see figures moving inside of the window.

“Out over there, you guys follow, but stay above the swamp, and stay by the tree line until I give the order. I'm the only one going ahead, alright?” Aaron whispered.

The pack heard him and followed his instructions. They moved quietly through the trees, taking care to only jump and land on sturdy branches, stopping the trees from giving them away. Aaron leaped across the large swamp before dropping to the ground on the other side of the bank. It was a great spot, with the swamp working as a security system to slow down anyone who was coming to find them.

Aaron landed feet first in the sludge, then waded out to dry land where the hut stood. As he approached, Caspian walked out the front of the hut with the others behind him. Aaron saw the smile on his face, but instead he focused on the heartbeats. He could hear four human heartbeats and another a little way behind them, inside the hut.

Lin was there.

“You found us!” Caspian exclaimed. “I’m truly stunned, I took a lot of steps to make sure you couldn’t. Great work.”

“Thanks,” Aaron replied flatly.

“How’d you do it?” Caspian asked, pulling out a cigarette.

“I sniffed.”

“Why didn’t you bring your pack? You could have attacked without us knowing, in the dead of night, when our guards are down. You could have ended this,” Caspian continued, lighting the cigarette.

“Because I want something different.” Aaron took a step forward, seeing the other hunters readying for a fight. He raised his hands. “I’m not here to fight, I’m here for the girl.”

Caspian shook his head. “No.”

“She’s a child.”

“Yeah, they all were at some point.”

“But she is innocent. She hasn’t hurt anyone, and she isn’t going to. Are you going to kill her?” Aaron asked, almost yelling.

“No, but we’re going to make sure she never uses her powers,” Caspian replied.

Aaron took a step forward. “I know you. I know you’re not going to hurt the girl, but I know you want to prove yourself. So let me make you an offer you can’t refuse.”

“Listening…” said Caspian, blowing smoke.

“An alpha for the cub.”

Aaron saw the smile on the hunter’s lips, and he could hear bits of the hushed conversation coming from his own pack behind him. He hadn’t told them about the plan, and from what he heard they were not willing to go through with it either. Caspian raised an eyebrow.

“You’d willingly give yourself up, for a dragon?”

“Yes,” Aaron replied, firmly.

“But werewolves and dragons are enemies. What do you stand to gain from this?”

“The life and freedom of the little girl. Maybe I can prove to you hunters that we are not the savages you think we are,” Aaron argued. “So, this is my offer. Take me, and let the girl go.”

Caspian took in a deep breath, pulling on the cigarette and holding in the smoke. “Or, I could just take all of you, as I planned to.”

“What?”

“Well,” Caspian continued, “the plan was to kill all the paranormals, regardless of who they are. So eventually, I will have to kill you, and your pack. So why not do it now?”

“But I’m alone,” Aaron lied.

“I’m not stupid, darling,” Caspian replied, blowing the smoke from his mouth.

Soon, the air was filled with smoke, and Aaron looked back to see the outline of his pack hiding in the trees. The smoke had revealed them to the hunters. Aaron turned back to Caspian, seeing the man smile as he tapped his cigarette. He was one step ahead of them, as always.

“Get them,” said Caspian.

The hunters quickly rushed at the werewolves. Aaron let out a war cry, signaling for the werewolves to attack. He rushed right at Caspian, trying to take the man down in one hit. He knew that if he allowed the man to start with his tricks, there was no stopping him. Aaron slammed right into him, but as his palm hit the man’s chest, Caspian disintegrated to smoke.

“Did you think I wouldn’t plan for that?”

As Aaron turned around, he saw the barrel of a gun being swung right for his head. He got out of the way at the last second, just as the weapon went off. He smacked it out of Caspian's grip, hearing the man's finger crack from the force of his blow. Caspian took a step back before shooting out a palm that struck Aaron right in the chest.

Aaron froze, bracing for impact. But he realized it was nothing when he looked up to see the smile on the face of the hunter. Before he could move, the man waved his trench coat in his face, releasing a small low-level demon. The small creature leaped up on Aaron's face, trying to bite and claw into him. Aaron grabbed it with a single hand and then ripped it in two.

Just as he turned to face Caspian, he saw the man pull out a necklace which had been hidden inside of his shirt. He smiled as his hand touched it. Caspian shut his eyes and rushed right at Aaron. Not looking to back down, Aaron threw a punch, swinging as hard as he could at the hunter.

But as he got closer, Aaron felt his strength leave him again and he dropped to the ground instantly, feeling an overwhelming sense of pain, uneasiness, and weakness. He dropped to the ground before he reached his target, and Caspian drove a knee into the side of his face, knocking him backward. Aaron raised a hand to defend himself, but Caspian struck again, using a blade that had been hidden in his sleeve, slicing across Aaron's cheek.

Aaron fell to the ground, looking across to see one of the hunters slam Isaac across the swamp with his bat. As Aaron landed hard on the ground, he picked up on Caspian's scent. Aaron watched as Isaac turned around, instantly hit with the same feeling. Isaac tried to take a step forward, but Caspian struck him across the face, sending him into a tree.

"Bring them to me," Caspian said to the other hunters, watching as Emma and Jackson tried to fight off the hunters.

Jackson tossed Emma across the swamp, helping her get over the thick slush of swamp water and mud. She

slammed into the chest of one of the hunters, sending the woman into a tree branch. She broke right through it, before falling face-first into the mud. As Emma turned around, she felt a whip come around her body.

Before she could react, the hunter with the bat slammed into her, knocking her toward Caspian. That was when Aaron put it together. The necklace Caspian wore was the same one Lenna had shown him in the book. It was doing something to their powers, making them weak and unable to move. In a matter of moments, the same fate had fallen on Emma, leaving her writhing on the ground next to Aaron and Isaac.

Jackson was left standing, with four hunters surrounding him. Aaron watched as Jackson shifted further, his claws getting longer and his jaw growing wider as he let out a deathly growl. Jackson was going berserk, and he was going to rip through the hunters.

Chapter 10 - Lenna

Lenna had let them think she was going to stay home. It was the logical thing to do, if they were not going to let her come. Once they were far enough, she rushed out of the house, following Aaron's scent. She rushed after them, getting to the swamp just as the fighting started. She looked around, trying to see if she could find her daughter, and she picked up on a heartbeat in the shed.

As the fight continued, Lenna moved as quickly as she could on her injured leg, sneaking into the house. She moved quietly, following the heartbeat until she was inside of the shed. She pushed open the door, a smile on her face as she knew she would find her daughter behind the last door. As she pushed it open, Lenna felt her heart stop as she found herself face to face with a pig.

The creature sat lazily in the mud, looking up at her as she entered. Lenna stood for a few seconds, trying to make sense of what she was seeing. It didn't make any sense at first. It was supposed to be Lin, it was supposed to be her daughter. Why was there a pig there? Had they used it as a distraction? If they had, then where were they keeping Lin? Where was Lin?

Lenna felt her heart rate spike as she began to have a panic attack. She heard the sound of the fighting outside, the werewolves dropping to the ground. Lenna rushed to the door and looked outside, seeing all of the pack laid out at Caspian's feet. Jackson was the only one still standing, and he looked ready for a fight.

"Nelson, Naomi, get him," said Caspian.

The two hunters rushed at Jackson. Nelson pulled his whip back and flung it at Jackson. The werewolf caught the end of the whip in his palm and pulled Nelson, throwing the man off-balance and sending him to the ground. Jackson pulled on the whip, looking to drag the man toward him, but

the hunter opened a palm and put it at the end of the whip, sending a wave of blue light through it.

It ran through Jackson, shocking him badly. Jackson danced back, dazed from the attack. Naomi came from behind, pulling open a bottle of some liquid. She threw it over Jackson, who blocked the attack with a hand. The liquid spilled on him, and Jackson let out a groan as the acid began eating at his skin.

Nelson reached to attack him from behind, but Jackson swiped at him, slashing the man across the face with his claws just in time as he tried dodging the blow. Blood dripped down the werewolf's face as he let out a deathly growl. He chased after Nelson, quickly catching up to the man. He grabbed him from behind, wrapping his hands around Nelson's neck.

A dart hit Jackson in the forearm, and he turned to see Naomi with a blowgun. Before he could react, his hand went limp from whatever was in the dart. He was looking to snap Nelson's neck, but his hand was gone. Nelson used the whip, the sharp end hitting Jackson across the face and cutting his forehead open. As he staggered backward, Lenna saw the hunter with the bat taking a step forward.

If he struck Jackson into the range of Caspian, the fight would be over, and they would have taken out all of the werewolves. Lenna knew she had to act. Jackson could handle himself, as long as he had his powers. He would be able to fend off the hunters.

Lenna leaped out of the shed, rushing right at Caspian. If there was anyone who was going to know where Lin was, it had to be him. He was the leader of the group, and if she could get it out of him, she could win. He wouldn't see her coming. Lenna shut out everything else and rushed at him, barely feeling her legs against the ground as she rushed at him.

In a few seconds, Lenna was face to face with Caspian, her hands wrapped around his body. She propelled them both forward, feeling the pain in her leg. Before any of the hunters would realize what had happened, it would be over. She

rushed through the woods, heading as far as she could until she got to a large oak tree.

Lenna slammed Caspian against the tree, shaking the entire tree. She punched him flush across the face, pulling back on her own strength. She followed with another blow, cracking a rib on impact. Then she reached for the cigarette in his lips and pulled it out, before finishing it off by tossing the man against a fallen log.

Caspian looked around slowly, groaning in pain as his brain was still trying to figure out what was going on. Lenna walked up to him, grabbing his throat and squeezing. Caspian chuckled as Lenna began squeezing, slowly. She brought the man up to her face, growling as the fire inside her began to surge. The poison in her system had stopped her from using her fire-based abilities, but she was so amped up that she was certain she could roast the man then and there.

“Where...is my...daughter?” Lenna demanded.

Caspian chuckled. “I knew dragons were strong...but god damn, you’re quite a handful.” He began to cough as Lenna squeezed her hands, slowly crushing his throat.

“I’m going to ask only one more time, and then I’ll take it that my Lin is dead. Once I do that, I’ll rip your head off your body,” Lenna spat. “Where is my daughter?”

“Still alive, still with me. But...I won’t let you get to her,” said Caspian. “I have a job to do.”

“What?”

Caspian brought up a hand and snapped his fingers next to her face, instantly causing a wall of sparks to fall right toward her eyes. Lenna quickly let go, trying to shut her eyes and shield them with her hand. Then she realized that they were not real sparks, and Caspian had cast an illusion to get away.

“Caspian!” Lenna yelled as she looked around, spotting the hunter as he dragged himself off to a corner.

He smiled at her. "I'll have your head, dragon, I know I will."

With a wave, he opened a portal. Lenna rushed at him, looking to grab him. But before she could reach, he was gone. Lenna quickly made her way back to the others, seeing that the rest of the hunters were gone as well, leaving Jackson and the rest of the werewolves alive.

Jackson looked at Lenna, surprise filling his eyes. "What the hell are you doing here?"

She ignored him and made her way for Aaron, who seemed to be getting back on his feet. She reached out to help him, but he shot her a look telling her that he was very upset. With Caspian gone, they were able to get their powers working again, and Jackson began healing from his wounds.

In half an hour the pack was back at the house. Lenna had reached the house first and was waiting for them. Aaron shoved the door open, seeing her seated on the couch they had made love on just a few hours before. Lenna looked up at him, seeing the grimace on his face.

"What did you do?" Aaron growled.

"I came for my daughter," Lenna shot back.

"You disobeyed me!"

"I'm not a member of your pack, and I don't have to listen to you for any reason. My daughter was in danger, and I would be crazy to just sit back and do nothing."

"Did you find her?" Emma asked.

Lenna shot a glance at her. "No, she wasn't there."

"What do you mean she wasn't there? I picked up on her heartbeat. She was right there in the shed. We just had to distract the hunters long enough for us to grab her," Aaron retorted, running a hand through his hair in frustration.

"No, no...it was a damn pig, they played you!" Lenna shot back.

“And how do we know they didn’t switch her out for the pig when they saw you come in?” Jackson sneered. “You had one job. You just had to stay home and let us handle it.”

Lenna turned to look at all of them in shock. They wanted to pin their loss on her. They were the ones who had lost to the hunters, and yet they believed they would have won and gotten Lin back. But Lin wasn’t even there, and they were going to lose either way. If she hadn’t joined the fight, the werewolves would all be down.

“I saved all of your fucking lives,” Lenna spat.

“Not mine,” Jackson shot.

“Yours too, motherfucker! You were about to get rocked from behind! If I hadn’t taken Caspian away, you’d all be dead right now. Your entire pack would have been laid out if it wasn’t for me!” Lenna screamed.

“She’s right,” Isaac said quietly. “If she hadn’t gotten Caspian away from us, we wouldn’t have been able to move.”

“We would have found a way,” Aaron snapped at him, before turning back to Lenna. “They might have moved Lin when they saw you coming. I told you we had a plan.”

“We?” Emma asked. “You didn’t tell us anything about an exchange, Aaron.”

“This isn’t the time,” Aaron replied, looking distraught.

“Isn’t it? You don’t tell your own pack what you’re going to do, and you lead them to the jaws of death. You think that makes you a good leader?” Lenna replied. “Lin wasn’t there, you were just going to hurt yourself for nothing. I saved you, and if you don’t believe me, that’s on you. I need a breather.”

Lenna turned and began walking out of the house. Aaron grabbed her arm, stopping her. She looked up at him, growling. She could feel the heat inside of her, and now Lenna was sure that she was back at her full strength. Her body had

finished with the poison, and she could go after her daughter on her own.

“Where are you going?” Aaron asked.

“Away from you,” Lenna replied, pulling her arm out of his grip.

She turned and left the house. Lenna took a taxi, heading into town. She stopped at a small bakery where she got herself some coffee and a few cake slices. She wasn't hungry, but she needed to do something to get her mind off of the fact that they had lost. As she ate, she felt tears coming to her eyes as she wondered what was going to happen to Lin.

The hunters were bloodthirsty, and she just couldn't take Caspian's word that Lin was okay. Lenna knew she couldn't, there had to be something else she could do. Once she finished eating, she paid the bill and took another taxi, heading out to a motel on the far reaches of the town. Then she headed off into the woods, going back to the house where she had lived with Lin and her mate.

“Where are you...?” Lenna whispered to herself as she walked into the house.

The door had been left open, allowing a few curious animals to make their way into her home. As she walked in, a few squirrels rushed out quickly. Lenna looked around, seeing a picture of Lin on the wall, her smile beaming through the cluttered mess that had become her home.

Lenna walked over to the picture and pulled it off the wall. She stared at it, wiping some of the dust off of the glass frame, before a tear from her cheek dropped onto the picture. Lenna held it to her chest, sobbing quietly as the day turned to night.

Chapter 11 - Aaron

Aaron walked into the garage, flipping a table as he looked around, feeling an intense rage running through him. Everything had gone badly. They had failed to get Lin, the hunters had beaten them again, and now Lenna was out to god knows where. Aaron tried to control his breathing, but then he spotted a picture of the pack when Orson was still the leader, and he felt a wave of disappointment come over him.

“Goddamn it!” he said to himself.

“Yeah, well, that’s how we all feel, Aaron,” Emma said, walking into the garage.

“What is it?” Aaron asked, looking away.

“We have to talk. What the hell was that about you giving yourself up for a dragon?” Emma asked, fuming.

“I made a decision as the alpha. I was willing to do what needed to be done to bring that girl home.”

Emma shook her head. “Bullshit, you were taking the easy way out. You think we didn’t want to bring her home?”

“That’s not what I said, and what makes you think it’s the fucking easy way out?” Aaron yelled.

“Because it is! You know they’re going to kill you if you offer yourself to them, and you decide to do it anyway? Is that how we do things? Is that what Orson would do?”

“Well, Orson isn’t here dammit!” Aaron shot back. “He’s not here, and I’m the damn alpha, and we are doing things my way. There is a little girl out there scared shitless, taken away from her mother by these hunters. We can’t lay a finger on them, and you’re telling me I’m taking the easy way out?”

Emma shook her head. “Aaron, if we lose you, what happens to the pack? We can’t deal with that. We can’t.”

Aaron looked away, not sure what to do. As much as he wanted to be upset, he had thought that far ahead. He guessed the pack would move on without him. Maybe Orson would return, or someone else would step up to fill the vacuum left by him. Aaron hated being the alpha so much, he was willing to kill himself just to get the weight of the responsibility off of him.

“Aaron, I know it’s hard, but we can’t afford to lose you right now. There are demons running everywhere in this world, and as much as I hate to say it, something else is at play. We need as many hands as we can to make this work.”

“Yeah,” Aaron replied. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t...I wasn’t thinking right. We can’t afford to be divided now. Come on.”

Aaron rushed back into the building, checking the shelf where Lenna had first shown him the book that had the image of the necklace that Caspian wore. He pulled it open and placed it down on the table as the rest of the pack came up beside Aaron to look at it.

“What is that?” Isaac asked.

“Moonstone,” Aaron replied. “Someone get the phone, we got to talk to a wizard.”

They stared at the phone as it buzzed on the table, the speaker repeating the monotone sounds as it tried to connect with the receiver on the other side. Ten seconds in, the call finally connected. Bingwen grunted on the other side, as though he was running.

“What is it?” the sorcerer asked in his normally upsetting tone.

“It’s Aaron, what do you know about the Moonstone?”

“What?” Bingwen asked, grunting as the sound of footsteps filled the audio.

“Are you okay?” Emma asked.

“Kind of in the middle of something here, what did you...say?”

The sound of electricity crackling reached their ears, and Aaron figured that the sorcerer was in the middle of a fight. Bingwen was a powerful man, and the fact that he could take a call while facing off whatever obstacle he had just made Aaron smile. He was one hell of a force to be reckoned with.

“The Moonstone, what do you know about it? We saw it in one of the books you left here,” Aaron repeated, speaking loudly and clearly for the man to hear.

“It’s a myth, don’t waste my time with that,” Bingwen replied, ending the call.

Isaac looked to Aaron, raising an eyebrow. “Is he always like that?”

“This is him in a good mood,” Emma stated as she hit redial. The call was picked up faster than the first time.

“Jesus, what is it?” Bingwen asked. The sound of something squealing over the phone reached their ears. “I’m busy.”

“Yeah, we can tell. But the thing is, we saw the Moonstone. We faced off someone who had it, and it did something to us,” said Emma.

“What?” Bingwen asked in disbelief. “Did you see it? With your own eyes?”

“We all did,” Aaron replied. “A hunter has it, and he used it on us.”

Bingwen let out a breath before he took a few steps. “Aaron, where’s Orson?”

“He’s moving, I’m the leader of the pack now.”

Bingwen sighed. “Of course. Do you know the name of the hunter?”

“Caspian,” Aaron replied.

“As I feared. I thought I’d have time before he got to Ridgeshire, but he’s moving fast. You have to stay away from Caspian and his hunters. There’s only one other person more

dangerous than he is, and that's the leader of the hunters. You don't stand a chance if you go up against him."

Aaron felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. It wasn't what he was looking to hear. He wanted to take down the hunters and rescue the girl, not get told that they were not enough to get the job done. He cleared his throat and leaned in closer to the phone.

"Bingwen, there's a life on the line. A little girl, the hunters have taken her."

"Werewolf?" Bingwen asked.

"Dragon, but what does it matter? There is a life on the line, and we can't just sit back and let them have at it," Aaron argued.

Bingwen sighed again, obviously considering things. "I admire your stupidity, and I wish life was as clear-cut as you're trying to make it seem, but here's what you don't understand. Caspian and his hunters are a group of cutthroats. They have no mercy for any paranormals. They're unhinged, and they'll do anything to kill."

"Yeah, we've faced off against them twice already," Jackson added. "And we're fine. We just need to know how to deal with them."

"They're human, but they have a lot of tricks and spells which they've perfected. Now, normally, the best way to defeat a hunter is to wear him out. Tank, dodge and evade everything he throws at you until he has nothing left, and then you can go in for the finisher."

"We can—" Jackson continued.

Bingwen cut in, "Shut up, you can't do anything, not as long as they have the Moonstone in their possession. The reason some of you felt powerless around it is because that's what it does. The Moonstone has a special aura to it that allows it to draw in all of the magical properties of the moon into it."

That was when it clicked for Aaron. “Oh no.”

“Yeah, so he can just take away your powers at will. Just like that. As long as he has it, he can draw out any power you have, and make you a weak piece of shit that he can finish off in a single hit.”

The entire pack fell silent, not sure of what to say. Not only was Caspian a formidable target, he also had their kryptonite.

“Well, there has to be a way to turn it off, to stop it?” Emma asked.

“No, the only way to stop it is to get it away from...oh no—” Bingwen cut out, drifting off.

“What?” Aaron asked, feeling a sense of dread forming. “What is it?”

“There’s a lunar eclipse coming in a few days.”

“Well that means a buff for us,” Jackson stated. “We know that.”

“But it also means a massive buff for the Moonstone. During the eclipse, its range drastically increases, and I bet it’s going to cover all of Ridgeshire. Right now, you have to be right next to Caspian to get hit by the effects. But if he activates it during the eclipse, everyone single werewolf in Ridgeshire is going to be powerless,” Bingwen said with a sense of finality.

“Which is their chance to kill all of us,” Isaac said, breathlessly.

“I can’t come to Ridgeshire now, I have something I’m working on. But for your own sake, and for the sake of everyone in the pack, Aaron, do not take on the hunters. You won’t win, and if he’s coming after your pack, I think its best you leave Ridgeshire for now, at least till after the eclipse,” Bingwen warned. “I have to go.”

The call clicked off, leaving the pack in silence. Emma looked to Aaron, expecting him to make the call. He had to

decide what they were going to do, and Aaron had no idea what to do or say. Jackson growled silently, and Isaac looked shaken, scared that they were about to be attacked. He could feel the fear and uneasiness of his pack, and Aaron felt crippled by all of the emotions.

“We can’t leave Ridgeshire for these fuckers,” said Jackson.

“If we stay, they’re going to kill us,” Isaac argued.

“Whatever we decide, we have to do it as a pack,” Emma cut in, turning to Aaron.

“I don’t know...” Aaron began, “I need to think.”

He picked up his phone and walked out of the room, heading out through the front door. Aaron wasn’t sure what the right move was. They could stay and fight, but at the rate they were going, Aaron was certain that someone, if not all of them, was going to die. He looked at his phone, looking to reach out to Orson again.

As he called, it was redirected to the phone at Levi and Lyra’s house. Someone picked up. “Hey, Aaron. Orson’s not yet settled, but he moved the phone here. How’s it going?”

Aaron paused for a moment before he recognized the voice as Levi. He was the leader of the dragon pack that resided in the south end of Ridgeshire. He had fallen for Lyra, Orson’s daughter, and together they had moved to the city with their hybrid son, Adam.

“It’s uh...well, alpha to alpha, it’s going badly,” Aaron began.

“Yeah? I know the feeling. Half the time, you have no idea what you’re going to do next, and you have all of this responsibility on your shoulders,” Levi replied.

“I have no idea what to do. I have to lead the pack, and...we have to face off against these hunters, and I can’t take them on alone. I don’t know what to do.”

“Hunters? They’re a problematic bunch,” said Levi.

“Yeah, and we lost to them once already, so I know if we lose again, it’s over. I have to do something to even the odds, but after talking to Bingwen...if we face them again we’re going to lose, and I don’t know what to do.”

Levi cleared his throat. “I noticed you said a lot of I’s in there.”

“What?” Aaron asked.

“You were referring to yourself a lot,” said Levi.

“I am the alpha.”

“Yeah, but there’s a reason they are *your* pack, Aaron,” said Levi. “As crippling as it is, your pack is there to support you, to make sure that you can stand strong, regardless. Listen to them, but also make sure that you lead with certainty. You don’t have to carry the bulk of the load all alone, alright?”

The sound of Adam running in the background reached Aaron’s ears, and he smiled. “How’s Adam doing?”

“Great,” Levi replied. “Getting used to the new place.”

Aaron nodded, knowing Levi was right. He was too busy focusing on not messing up, he had forgotten that Orson made mistakes. No alpha was perfect, and no pack was perfect. But they had gone through it, moved past their mistakes, and the only way they moved forward was together.

“Thanks, Levi. I needed that.”

“Sure, I’ll say hi to Lyra for you, and ask Orson to call you back.”

“No need for Orson, I think I got what I needed.”

Chapter 12 - Lenna

Lenna woke up to the sound of birds chirping excitedly in the distance. She looked around to see that she was in her house, and all of the chaos of the struggle that had happened inside of the place was gone. Everything was just the way it had been, and she smiled, realizing that it hadn't been real.

She listened to hear the breathing of Lin in her room. Lenna tried to get to her feet, but she realized her leg still hurt. She looked down to see a whip wrapped around her legs. Lenna felt her heartbeat pick up, and she followed the whip to the hunter right outside her window, a smile on his face as he walked toward the front door.

“No...” Lenna began to speak, but she felt the poison in her body shut down her voice. “No!”

All she could do was watch as Caspian walked around the house, making his way inside to where Lin was sleeping. He reached down and rubbed her hair gingerly, before locking eyes with Lenna. With a wave, he opened a portal as he always did, and he shoved Lin through the tear in reality.

Lenna screamed as she watched her child fall into the darkness. She let out a shriek that vanished as the portal disappeared. Caspian walked over to Lenna, standing over her with a smile on his lips, his signature cigarette resting between his fingers.

“I want my daughter!” Lenna cried.

“No, she's mine now. Soon, I'll kill you, and make sure you never see her again. But before that, I'll make you suffer,” Caspian said with a smile, before he pulled a rock from his pocket and drove it into the back of Lenna's head, bashing her skull in and forcing her awake from her nightmare.

“Fuck!” Lenna exclaimed as she realized she was still in the messed-up house, and in front of her was a possum,

frozen in place. “Get out of my house,” she growled, and the creature turned and fled. “God damn.”

Lenna looked around, stunned that she had fallen asleep. The photograph was still in her hands, and she felt a chill run through her spine as she recalled the dream, knowing that her little girl was gone, and she was unable to do anything about it. Lenna got to her feet, walking out to the front of the building as she thought of what the next move would be.

She considered heading back to the werewolves, but they hadn't done anything she couldn't have done on her own, and with the Moonstone, they wouldn't be able to put up much of a fight against Caspian either way. Lenna knew she had to do something. She had to make a move, since the werewolves weren't going to.

Lenna had seen the shed the hunters had been hiding in. They had a number of resources in the building, and it was hard for her to believe that they would just abandon all that they had stocked there. Even if they would, at least she would be able to find some sort of clue that would help her track them down.

She got out of her house and broke into a run, driven by a desire to find Lin. It was all that mattered, all that could matter. She pushed herself, taking the twenty-minute run all the way to the location. As she arrived, she leaped over the swamp, landing on the other side where the shed was. The place was still a mess, evident from the fight that had occurred just a few hours before.

Lenna quickly moved toward the building again, sniffing as she moved. If she could catch a scent on the breeze, she could track down whoever was close by. But then she remembered that the hunters were very good at masking their scents. Some were even known to be able to slow their heartbeats and pulses, making it impossible for them to be found when hiding.

“Where are you hiding?” Lenna said to herself as she pushed the door open.

She looked in to see a few packets of crackers, some bottled water, and a few chemicals which Lenna knew that Naomi used to mix her poisons. Lenna sniffed them before walking through the shed gingerly. She realized that she could not pick up on her daughter's scent, proof that the girl had never been in the room.

As she moved through the room, she heard a twig snap outside. Lenna rushed right through the wooden walls of the building, jumping out and heading straight for the target. Right there, behind a tree, she heard the unmistakable heartbeat of a man on the other side. Just as she turned the corner to attack, she saw Caspian, his signature smile on his face.

Lenna's claws shot out and heat traveled through her body, ready to burn the man into nothing. But she froze as she spotted him holding Lin in his arms. Her body went limp as she noticed he had a syringe to Lin's neck, a smile on his face. Lenna fought back the scream that filled her throat.

"Mom!"

"Lin, baby...Lin, it's okay...It's okay," Lenna began, fumbling over the words.

"Is it?" Caspian asked her. "Your mom doesn't do much listening. I asked her to do me a favor, and she refused. So uh...how about this? Lenna, let's start with those claws. Draw them in."

Lenna didn't need to be told twice. "I'll do whatever you want, just leave her alone."

"Sure," Caspian replied, letting go of Lin. He opened his hand, and the girl fell into a portal, vanishing out of sight. Lenna reacted instantly, rushing after her, but Caspian held a hand up. "I still have control of the syringe. Touch me, and I'll end her life."

"You said you'd let go of her," Lenna growled.

"Yeah, and I have. She's free right now. Probably lost somewhere in Ridgeshire, but I'm sure someone is going to

find her. But they won't be able to take the syringe out of her neck, not until I say so," Caspian replied.

He walked up to her and slapped Lenna across the face. Lenna barely bucked from impact, staring him down. Caspian looked at his wrist, shaking his head as he laughed. He pulled the cigarette from his lips before putting out the burning end of it in his fist.

"You know what I love about magic?" Caspian asked. "It helps us even the playing ground. Check this out."

He showed her his fist, and before Lenna could react he punched her across the face again. This time, the impact of the blow knocked her back several feet, drawing blood from her mouth. She looked up, stunned from the attack but managing to stay on her feet.

As she turned back to him Caspian hit her again, this time using his forearm across her chest, knocking her to the ground. Caspian chuckled, looking to his hand where he had burned himself. He pulled out another cigarette and put it to his lips. Just before he could light it, Lenna rushed at him, grabbing his neck and squeezing.

She opened her mouth to breathe fire, looking to burn him to a crisp, but she stopped as he raised his hand. "Go ahead, kill me. But I'll kill Lin with a thought."

"Why are you doing this?" Lenna asked, crying.

"Because I'm a hunter, love. I want to play with my quarry before I finish it off. I wasn't sure you would be the one here, I thought the werewolf would be the one to return, but you work perfectly either way," Caspian said with a finality. "Now put me down."

Lenna tossed him to the side, and Caspian brought up his trench coat, slowing his fall. He turned around and slammed his palms together, sending a powerful and direct sound wave directly at Lenna. She saw it coming, but Lenna knew that if she tried to fight back, Lin would be the one who would suffer.

She turned away, allowing the attack to slam right into her. Lenna felt blood rush up to her mouth as she dropped to one knee. The Moonstone had no effect on her, as she wasn't a werewolf. It was easy for her to deduce, considering it had moon in the name. But either way, the hunter had found a way to get to her. He was going to have his way with her, and Lenna was going to let him. For the sake of her daughter.

"You're a tough nut," Caspian said, chuckling.

"If you're going to kill me, just end it now, and let my daughter go. Just do it, please," Lenna begged, tears dropping from her eyes. "Just get it over with."

"You're right, I don't want something to change, like one of your werewolf buddies coming to help and fucking this shit up," said the hunter. "Plus, I'm almost out of juice."

As he walked up to her, he pulled out a dagger with a few magical inscriptions on the hilt and blade. It was the same one he had used to fight her earlier, the one that had cut through her skin. The metal glinted in the sunlight that shone through the canopy as he approached her with a fiendish smile.

"Any last words?" Caspian asked.

"Keep yours," Lenna replied. "Let Lin go."

"Sure," Caspian snickered, raising the blade to bring it down on her.

"Wait!" Lenna yelled. "Wait. You don't have to kill me, I can help you."

"Help me?" Caspian raised an eyebrow, "No, I don't ___"

"You said you wanted me so I can help you find other paranormals," Lenna spat. "Well, I can do that. I can do exactly that. I can lead you to the werewolves and a lot more. All I want is for you to let me be with my daughter. We won't hurt anyone, we'll live alone in the middle of the woods and stay away from everyone else. I give you my word, just let us go, please."

“No,” Caspian replied, bringing down the blade.

Lenna held up a hand, stopping it from reaching her heart. The blade went through her forearm with ease and she let out a growl, pushing back against it. She felt Caspian’s strength leave him, and she knew she could take him down in that moment. He would need to use his cigarette again to amp up.

“Please, I just want to be with my daughter, that’s all I want,” Lenna begged, the tears coming more freely now.

“I have no reason to trust you. And I assure you, I can find the creatures all on my own. I could turn around, and you’ll rip my head off,” said Caspian.

“You have my daughter,” Lenna replied.

The man stared at her for a while, considering the offer while he pushed on the blade, hoping to stab her. Once he saw that he couldn’t win, he yanked it out in one move, slicing across her forearm. Lenna cried out, and Caspian got off of her, wiping the blade on the grass.

“Don’t whine about it, when you return to the werewolves you’re going to need proof that you did face off against a hunter, so there’s your mark,” Caspian said with a chuckle. He sheathed the weapon and turned around to face her. “Now, I do have your daughter, and you’ve given me permission over her life. You keep up your end of the bargain, and I give you my word, you will be reunited with your daughter.”

“Thank you,” Lenna sobbed.

“But cross me, for one second, and I will kill her right in front of your eyes.”

Chapter 13 - Aaron

Aaron and the pack stood over the book in the garage, trying to figure out what they were going to do. Aaron knew they had to take a stand—running wasn't an option. But again, Isaac's fears were very correct. If they stayed to fight, they would lose, especially with the Moonstone being amped up. There was no way to win the fight.

"I think there is something we can do," Isaac began. "The stone needs to be activated, right? Like he has to use his magic to turn it on?"

Aaron recalled when he had fought Caspian, and figured that Isaac was right. He hadn't felt the effects, not until the man had actually put in the effort to start the damn thing. "Yeah, he does."

"So we just have to get it away from him before he can turn it on. If we can sneak up on him, grab the stone and move it somewhere he can't get it, then we can even the playing field, and it'll just be us versus them," Isaac finished.

Everyone froze as they picked up on the smell of blood. They turned to see Lenna walking back toward the house, holding her hand as it healed slowly, blood dripping down from it. Aaron quickly rushed out of the house, wrapping his hand around her as he helped her into the building.

He helped her down into a chair before squatting beside her. "What happened?"

"Caspian," Lenna said, breathing heavily. "I went back to the shed, and he was waiting."

"What? Why did you go back alone?" Emma asked.

"To see if I can find a clue that will help me find my damn daughter! I haven't seen her in so long, and god help him when I see him again, I don't care what's happened to her, I will rip him in two."

Aaron shook his head. “Are you poisoned?”

“No, I’m fine,” Lenna replied. “I just need time to heal.”

“Jackson, take her to the guest room. Emma, if you could get her some water to clean—”

“I’m not doing that,” said Jackson, causing everyone to look to him. He raised an eyebrow. “I am not going to help her. She didn’t listen to you, Aaron, and then she goes on her own and almost gets killed again, and we have to help her? Why?”

“Jackson is right. If she isn’t going to listen to us, then why should we help her? We are doing what we can, and Lenna doesn’t want to work with us,” Emma added.

“We’re werewolves,” Aaron began.

“And she isn’t welcome in the pack,” Jackson finished, walking away.

Aaron turned to Emma who walked away as well, with Isaac loosely following behind her. He turned to Lenna who sat in the couch, her body struggling to heal from the wounds. Dragons healed a lot slower than werewolves, but there didn’t seem to be any broken bones or major injuries, so she would be fine in a few hours.

“Let me help you,” Aaron began, reaching for her.

“What’s wrong with you?” Lenna asked.

Aaron pulled away. “What are you—”

“Your pack just left you, and yet here you are trying to help me, a dragon. I am your enemy, Aaron,” Lenna spat. “If things were any different, I would be trying to rip your throat out. That is who we are, and look at what you’re doing, all because of me. What is wrong with you?”

“I don’t know,” Aaron replied. “But I know you are a part of my pack now, like it or not. The others will learn to

accept you, as I have, and we will do whatever we can to get Lin back. But first, we have to take care of you.”

Lenna stared at him with burning eyes. For a moment, Aaron felt a shudder of fear, as he thought Lenna would attack him. He wasn't scared of fighting her, but was scared of how far she would go to prove her point. But the angry glare turned into a sob, and Lenna turned away.

“I'm sorry.”

“Don't touch me, just leave me alone, I'll be fine!” Lenna yelled.

Aaron got to his feet and walked off. He reached the door and paused, turning to give one last look at her. “I'll be right outside, and when you're ready, we're working on a plan to deal with Caspian and the hunters, and get your daughter back. I'm sorry for not bringing you in the first time. It is your daughter that's on the line, so we want you fighting alongside us.”

“We?” Lenna asked.

“I know I do, and I'm sure they will too. They're just hurt that we've lost so many times, but we can do this. I know we can,” Aaron finished and walked out of the garage, into the rest of the building.

As he shut the door, he saw Jackson, Isaac, and Emma waiting. They had somber expressions on their faces, but they had heard everything. Jackson got to his feet, clearing his throat as though it was hard for him to speak. He crossed his hands and looked down at his feet.

“Look, Aaron, I respect you. You're cool, you're the alpha and all. So as much as I hate your guts, and I don't want to do this, I know you want what's best for everyone. So we'll agree with you, as long as you agree to take all of the blame when this goes tits up.”

Emma grabbed Jackson's shoulder and shoved him back, chuckling. “What Jackson is trying to say in his very

unique way, is that we stand with you, no matter what decisions you make. We're with you."

Aaron nodded. "But these decisions aren't just mine to make. We're a pack, and I think I haven't understood that till now. So, what do you guys think?"

Isaac piped up, "Between running for our lives, or risking them to save a dragon who would have tried to kill us under other circumstances?" He let out a nervous laugh. "YOLO."

Jackson laughed. "Yeah, I'm with the kid. We should help out."

Emma nodded. "I'm your beta, you know where I stand."

Aaron smiled. "Thank you."

Lenna sat silently, listening to the pack behind her. It was crazy to believe that werewolves were going to put their lives on the line for her. Werewolves she barely knew. She didn't understand it, but they were going to do what they could to get her daughter back.

But each time they had tried, they had failed, and they were only lucky to escape. With the eclipse approaching, their luck was going to run out. The hunters would be able to finish them off with so much ease. Lenna was the only one who could stand up to the hunters, as the effect of the Moonstone wouldn't get to her. But she still couldn't face off against the hunters all on her own.

"Fuck," Lenna said to herself as she got to her feet and walked past the werewolves, heading into the bedroom.

She made her way into the shower and washed the blood off of her body, watching as her injuries healed. Her

mind drifted back to the offer she had made to Caspian, and she felt a surge of heartbreak. As much as she didn't care for the werewolves, it didn't make betraying them any easier. Caspian had her daughter, and she wasn't willing to wager Lin's life on the success rate of the plan the werewolves would come up with.

Lenna fell asleep, her body taking the time to heal the injuries. By the time she woke up later in the evening, they were nothing but red blemishes on her skin which would be gone by the next morning. She listened to the sounds of the house and realized that it was empty. Save for the smell of Aaron, who was working on the air-conditioning.

Lenna walked out and saw him, and then she moved over to the fridge and got some water to drink. If she was able to ignore them until it was time, she would be able to pull this off without breaking. As she made her way back to the room, she heard Aaron walking behind her. She turned around to stop him, seeing the look on his face.

“Lenna, I know you're hurting, but this is not the time. For the sake of your daughter, we have to work together.”

Lenna shook her head. “Have you considered the fact that you have the odds stacked against you? You'd be leading your pack to the mouth of death on the fringe idea that you're going to pull off some miracle. Your wizard isn't available, and there is literally nothing you can do to stop all of this.”

Aaron doubled down. “No matter what, we're still going to try.”

Lenna turned and made her way into the room. As she got to the door, she reached out and grabbed Aaron's shirt, pulling him with her. Lenna was going to hate herself for what she was about to do, but the least she could do was enjoy herself one more time. She pushed him against the wall beside the door, planting a kiss on his lips. Aaron struggled for a bit, pulling away from her.

“What are you doing?” Aaron asked.

“What I want to,” Lenna replied. “Please, don’t fight me. Just let me have this.”

She got down on her knees and reached for his belt, quickly undoing it and pulling out his throbbing shaft. Lenna looked up at him, kissing his dick gingerly before taking it in her mouth. Her eyes looked up at him, unblinking, on the verge of tears. She watched him as he began moaning deeply.

Lenna worked faster, bringing him to the edge and making him thrust his hips. Aaron couldn’t take it anymore. He lifted her up and spun around, placing her on the bed as she quickly took off her clothes. Aaron kissed her neck as he entered her quickly, causing Lenna to let out a deep moan.

Her fingers pulled on his hair and her legs wrapped around his hips, locking him in place as Aaron began bucking, moving back and forth at a steady rhythm. The heat from her body caused them both to sweat, and Lenna felt her body tighten and release as pleasure caused every nerve in her body to be on edge. It felt wrong, but Lenna couldn’t stop herself. She was going to have it all, she wanted to have it all.

She began whispering obscenities into his ears, causing Aaron to go faster and faster, not stopping until she began to orgasm. He pinned her down, not allowing her body to buck uncontrollably, as he reached his own climax, emptying himself into her. They both clung to each other, Aaron drifting off to sleep beside her.

Lenna could hear his heart beating intensely, and a smile tugged at her lips. It was obvious, he was her mate. She could feel it, no matter how much she had tried to deny it. The feelings were there, and Lenna could see a life with him. But if she chose that life, she would have to throw away what she had with Lin, and leave her daughter to the hands of the hunters.

Lenna watched as Aaron woke, blinking through the tears, and staring off into the distance. Aaron lifted his hand, touching the side of her face gingerly. He ran a hand through

her hair. “Lenna, I know you’re worried about Lin, but we are going to do it. You have to put your trust in us.”

“That’s not it,” Lenna replied. She was going to betray them to the hunters.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Lenna replied. “Nothing at all.”

Chapter 14 - Aaron

Of all of the things Aaron had ever had to do, leading the pack into the fight against the hunters felt like the most difficult. But they had his support, and Lenna was fighting side by side with them, and so they were going to win. They had to win. The pack gathered in the study, with Aaron standing in the center of the room.

“The eclipse is today, and if I’m right they’re going to make their move today,” Aaron announced. “From what we can tell, Caspian’s portals have a long range, which is about a mile wide, so we know they’re going to be within a mile of the house. I’m certain they’d be keeping tabs on us, so this time they’ll be the ones attacking.”

“The eclipse is going to last for a few hours, but from further readings of the book, the Moonstone is only going to work during the totality,” Isaac chimed in. “Which is going to last for eight minutes and six seconds.”

“That’s the window of time we have to survive for,” Aaron continued. “If we can outlast the totality, we can get back to full strength, and then we get to the main plan.”

“But the Moonstone gets a wide range during the totality, so how are we going to survive anything?” Jackson asked. “We drop like pins when we’re near the thing, so with the wider range...”

“Just ‘cause it has a wider range doesn’t mean its effectiveness isn’t the same at every point. The closer we are to the Moonstone, the stronger the effects,” Isaac replied.

“So we play a game of keep-away,” Aaron continued. “We get as far as we can from the Moonstone. Lenna, you have one job—get to Caspian, and get his as far away from us as you can.”

“Lenna?” Jackson asked.

“Yeah, she can move perfectly well, and she doesn’t get affected by the Moonstone, so if she can get Caspian away from us we have a stronger chance of winning,” Aaron finished. “So, when we see them, Lenna takes Caspian as far as she can, just like before.”

“While the rest of us try to hold our own against the rest of the hunters. By the time Caspian can get back to us, the eclipse will be over,” Emma finished.

“Wait, why can’t he just use a portal to get back to us?” Jackson asked.

“We’re going to need Lenna to get him out of range,” Emma finished, turning to her. “Can you do that?”

“Sure,” Lenna replied, monotonously.

“You’re not taking him on,” Aaron replied. “Please. He’s shown that you can’t beat him on your own, so just wait for the eclipse to finish, and we’ll join you. Just keep pushing him as far as you can.”

“Sure, I can do that. I’ll get him away.”

“So what do we do now?” Jackson asked.

“Now we head out and try to find him. But just before the thing starts, everyone needs to hurry back to the woods behind the house, and we’ll move from there. But if we find them before the eclipse starts, we call out to the others, and we stick to the plan. Lenna takes Caspian, and the rest of us take down the remaining hunters. Are we clear?”

Everyone nodded and quickly left the building, looking to cover their stretch of town as quickly as they could, hoping to find the hunters. Emma nodded to Aaron before she left, leaving him alone with Lenna. Aaron turned to her, putting his hands on her shoulders.

“If this fails, my daughter dies, Aaron,” said Lenna.

“She’s not going to, I swear it,” Aaron remarked, pulling her in for a hug.

Aaron and Lenna left, and Aaron moved through the streets at a full jog. He knew that there was a high chance that the hunters would be in the town, hiding in plain sight. He had marked the scent of Caspian and would be able to find the man with relative ease, he just had to get close enough to him.

They searched for four hours, getting closer and closer to the eclipse. Aaron looked to his phone to see that they were only a few minutes away from the eclipse. It would start in twenty minutes. Just before he could make the call to the others, asking them to fall back, he got a call from Lenna.

“I found them,” Lenna said, whispering. “They’re out south, you’ll pick up on my scent. They have Lin with them. You have five minutes, or I’m going for my daughter.”

Aaron didn’t think, he just ran straight for them. If Lenna attacked and she got taken down before the eclipse, they would lose. But she was going to attack, and so the entire pack quickly made their way to the spot. It took ten minutes for them to reach the area she had given them, but as they arrived they saw Lenna out in the open. Aaron rushed down to meet her, confused.

“I can’t sense him, what happened? What did you see?” he asked her.

Lenna turned to Aaron as the others moved closer. Aaron began to speak, but he felt his jaw crack from the power behind the blow Lenna landed on his chin, sending him up into the air and to the floor. Emma reacted instantly, snapping a branch off a tree and hurling it at Lenna.

The dragon let out a breath of fire, incinerating the branch before slamming it into two halves and rushing right into Emma. Emma moved faster, shifting her fingers into claws. She moved fluidly, ducking under Lenna’s blows and slashing across her back. Lenna threw a kick backward, but Emma caught her leg before sweeping her off her feet.

As Lenna hit the ground, Jackson rushed over, grabbing her hand and keeping her pinned down. Isaac

reached over and grabbed her other hand, locking her in place as Aaron got back to his feet. Lenna struggled for a moment, but when she realized that she was outnumbered and unable to move, she stopped struggling.

“Lenna, what is this?” Aaron asked in disbelief.

“It’s a betrayal,” Caspian said as a portal opened behind them. “Plain and simple.”

Aaron turned around, picking up on the scent and recognizing the voice. His first reaction was to run, seeing as he was furthest away from Caspian. But the rest of the pack was right beside him, and Caspian’s hand was reaching for the Moonstone which hung on his neck.

In a few seconds, the entire pack was laid out on the ground, with Lenna making quick work of them, knocking them to the ground at Caspian’s feet, even Aaron was laid out flat. Jackson fought the effects of the Moonstone, pulling himself back to his feet and bringing up his fists. “Come on, bitch!”

“Lenna, deal with him please,” Caspian said, opening another portal behind Aaron and allowing the other three hunters to make their way through. “This is going to be fun.”

Aaron’s forearm instantly grew hairy, his mouth shifted into a large snout with rows of serrated teeth, he grew powerful clawed hands and a body that ripped through his shirt. He let out a growl that shook the earth, his eyes turning a bloody red as the hunters rushed right at him.

Aaron knew he had to fight smart. One missed step in Caspian’s direction, and he would lose his powers. Then it occurred to him—the eclipse was going to occur in a few minutes, and it wouldn’t matter how far away he was. Nelson swung at him, using a whip. Aaron moved before the whip could finish unfurling.

Aaron slashed at the man’s midsection, slicing through his shirt. The man jumped back, revealing the armor he wore underneath. Aaron’s attack had torn through his clothes and

the armor and cut his flesh, but it was a very shallow cut. He swung his whip again and Aaron ducked low, realizing that Naomi had come up behind him.

He sniffed the air and noticed that she was using a poisoned weapon that had Wolfsbane on it. It swung right at his calf and Aaron hopped forward, trying to get out of reach of the blade. But the whip stuck right across his nose, stunning him. Aaron dropped to the ground, landing wrong. He turned around just to get hit square in the chest with Max's bat.

Aaron tasted blood in his mouth and looked back at his pack to see Jackson being beaten to a pulp by Lenna. Caspian stood with the entire pack at his feet, watching the fights with glee on his face, his cigarette smoking at his lips. Lenna had betrayed them, but Aaron couldn't understand. Why would she?

For Lin? It was the only explanation. She had made a deal with Caspian. Aaron let out an angry howl, feeling the hairs on his back stand up as he rushed at Max. The man swung his bat and Aaron lifted a hand, blocking the attack. The impact instantly broke Aaron's wrist, but he carried through, taking the pain and punching Max square in the chest.

Before the man could fly off, Aaron ripped the bat from his grip and turned around just in time to attack Nelson who had snuck up behind him, looking to attack with the whip. The bat slammed across his face, sending him face-first to the ground. The sound of a heartbeat behind him told him that Naomi had made it close enough. Just as he turned around, the smell of gunpowder reached him and the air exploded, blinding Aaron.

As he opened his eyes, the whip wrapped around his neck and Max grabbed the bat from where it had fallen on the floor, slamming it into the side of Aaron's face, knocking him to the ground. Aaron tried to get up, summoning all of his strength. But at that moment, the sky began to go darker as the totality began. Caspian let out a loud whistle.

“Oh boy, here it is,” he said with a smile. “How’s that feel, Alpha?”

Aaron instantly lost all of his strength, and realized he couldn’t even pull against Nelson’s whip. He felt it begin to choke him, cutting off his airflow. He looked back at them, only to get the bat to his gut once again, causing him to cough up blood while wheezing.

“In all honesty,” Caspian began as he walked toward Aaron on the ground, punching Jackson casually as he walked, “I think your plan would have worked. But you didn’t consider something that was ultimately the most important factor.”

“Yeah?” Aaron grunted, his voice cracking and deep. “What’s that?”

“Dragons can never be part of your pack, and a mother will always do what she can for her own.”

“Yeah,” Aaron said, smiling, “I’m sure she will.”

In a blur of movement, Aaron watched as the necklace on Caspian’s neck vanished from view, even before Caspian could notice. Lenna had swiped it, running as far as she could, getting away from them. The further she got, the more powerful Aaron and the werewolves began to feel, knowing that they would regain their powers soon.

Caspian looked down at his neck and saw that the necklace was gone. He turned to see Jackson, Emma, and Isaac weakly getting to their feet, raising their hands to fight. His eyes went wide. “They’re still weak, kill them now!”

Caspian turned and pulled out a dagger. He swung back and brought it down on Aaron, looking to drive it into his heart. Aaron put up his hand, using his own body to stop the attack before it reached him. Aaron began pushing backward, his own blood dripping back to his face. Caspian yelled in defiance, looking to finish him off once and for all.

“There’s something you didn’t consider too, Caspian,” Aaron said with a smile. “We can use the Moonstone.”

Chapter 15 - Lenna

Lenna stopped at the base of a tree a few kilometers from the scene of the battle and reached down into her pocket for the instructions which she had gotten from Bingwen. It was a crazy plan, but one which had worked so far. She had told Aaron of her offer to Caspian, and how he had bought it.

It had taken everything she had to decide to turn on Caspian, knowing that she could lose Lin. But Lenna had to do what was right. She wouldn't stop fighting for her daughter, but she wasn't going to let others die just so she could have her own family. She inverted the Moonstone and chanted the spell she had been taught over the phone.

“Lemniak nu tshnielk man-gu konmik.”

Nothing seemed to happen, and she stared at the Moonstone, but there was no visible feedback. The only way to know was by heading back to the scene. Lenna rushed back, just in time to see Aaron launch Caspian in the air off of him. Lenna launched herself at the man, grabbing him by the throat and slamming him into the ground.

“Where is my daughter, you son of a bitch!”

“You beat me, and I'll tell you,” Caspian replied, blowing smoke at her face and instantly vanishing into the smoke. Lenna quickly searched through the smoke, trying to find him, but Caspian was gone.

Aaron quickly got beside her, yelling to the others, “Everyone fine with the plan?”

“Yeah!” Isaac yelled, and Emma and Jackson growled in agreement as their powers returned, amped up by the power of the Moonstone which hung around Lenna's neck.

“Let's kick some ass,” Aaron said with a bloody smile.

He rushed at Max, knocking the man up into the air before Jackson leaped at him, slicing into the man's arms with

his claws. As he fell to the ground, Lenna kicked so hard that a rib broke instantly. Emma chased after Naomi, who instantly turned to run away. She threw smoke bombs, looking to put some distance between herself and Emma.

But Isaac doubled around her, knocking her to the ground with a clothesline. Before she could move, Isaac grabbed the bags at her hips and chest, ripping them off and throwing them into the woods, then breaking her fingers by taking her hands in his own. She cried out in pain and Isaac smiled at her. “I don’t think you’ll be needing these for a while.”

Emma ducked left and right as Nelson worked the whip quickly, looking to catch her. But Emma moved gracefully, using the motion of his hands to tell which direction he would attack. Once close enough, she grabbed the end of the whip and pulled Nelson right at her. Emma grabbed him by the throat and landed a headbutt across his face.

“You bitch, you broke my fucking nose!” he screamed.

“Come on,” Emma said, raising her hands. He swung the whip, using the end which had a blade on it. He tried to stab her, but Emma moved quickly, getting out of the way as the weapon moved past her eyes. Lenna watched as She spun his hand around, driving the blade into his own leg, leaving him paralyzed.

He tried to punch her, but she headbutted him again, harder than the first time, knocking him out cold. The pack brought the hunters together, laying all three of them on the ground at their feet, waiting for Caspian. The man chuckled and walked out from behind a tree, running a hand through his hair.

“You guys really did it, didn’t you?”

Lenna rushed at him, spitting fire as she ran. Caspian quickly opened a portal, allowing the flames to go right through it. As Lenna got close enough to him, he opened a smaller one between his hands, sending the flames right

through it. Compressed, the blast hit Lenna hard, sending her backward. Jackson launched a large branch at him, but Caspian quickly leaped over them, moving faster than the average human.

He pulled on his cigarette, and turned. But before he could react, he saw Isaac perched on one of the branches. The werewolf tackled Caspian from behind, sending them both to the floor. He waved his trench coat, releasing two small demons to rush at Isaac. As he turned around, a branch came right for him, and Caspian let out the smoke in his lungs.

The branch went right through him as he brought his hands up to protect his face. He turned around to see Lenna throwing a blow at him. He used his trench coat to block the attack, bringing it up and sweeping her fist out of the way before he brought his hands together, rubbing them quickly to create a charge. As he brought his palm to Lenna's chest, Aaron got in the path, taking the blow.

Jackson ripped through one of the demons attacking Isaac and rushed straight at Caspian, throwing a blow to the side of his head. Caspian bent low, rolling out of the way in the nick of time. He brought his hands together and quietly murmured a spell. As Jackson got close enough to the hunter, he froze in place for a second, allowing Caspian to get out of the way of the attack.

Emma slashed into Caspian's back from behind, leaping out from behind a tree. He turned around to face her, but Jackson came up from behind, kicking his legs out from under him, breaking one of his ankles in the attack. Caspian hit the ground hard and began rolling away, but Lenna caught him, driving her clawed hands into his shoulder and pinning him to the ground.

"Argh...ugh, dammit," Caspian groaned in pain. He looked up at her, chuckling. "I guess you win, yeah?"

He brought out a cigarette, moving it gingerly to his lips. Aaron walked over and grabbed it from his fingers,

tossing it off to the side. “Where is Lin? Or the next blow is going to your heart.”

“I’m a man of my word. I’ll let you have her on one condition,” said Caspian.

Lenna twisted her fingers. “No conditions! Give her back!”

Caspian groaned in pain, waving a hand as a portal opened beside them. “She’s through there.”

Before they could speak, a bright light hit the floor behind them, and they turned around to see a familiar face. Aaron jolted up at the sight of Garret, a dragon they had fought a few months ago. He was supposedly dead, after a fight he’d had with Levi. Garret raised a hand, pointing at the other hunters who were left on the ground.

He fired a powerful blast of energy from some bracelet that he wore on his wrist. The hunters were blasted into nothing, dying instantly. Lenna took one look at him and quickly pulled her hand out of Caspian, rushing into the portal. She came out on the other side to see Lin sitting in a small cabin, with a smartphone in her hand. She was watching videos on the internet.

Lenna felt her eyes tear up. “Baby...”

“Mom?” Lin asked, her voice breaking into tears as the phone fell off her thigh. “Mom!”

Lin rushed to hug Lenna, and once Lenna had her daughter in her hands she turned and rushed out of the portal just in time to see Garret place a hand on Caspian’s shoulder. In a brilliant flash of light, they both vanished. Lenna looked around to see the rest of the pack scattered all around. They had all been knocked out, but they were fine.

Aaron got back to his feet first, looking at her confused. “What just happened?”

Lenna wasn’t sure either. She didn’t know who the dragon was, or what he was doing there. She looked at Lin,

who stayed on her shoulder, sobbing quietly. “I don’t care, I got my baby back.”

Epilogue - Aaron

Four days after the eclipse, the pack gathered at the bakery, with Lyra and Levi coming down for the meeting. Adebayo, a dragon from Levi's pack, had come as well. Orson had driven down to the bakery with Bingwen, where the group waited for him to arrive.

Aaron narrated the whole ordeal and handed the Moonstone to him. Bingwen took a look at it and handed it back to him. "Give it to the dragon, you guys keep it."

"But you're certain it was him?" Adebayo asked. "You're certain you saw Garret?"

"Yeah, we all did," Isaac chimed in.

"We never saw a body," said Levi. "The last blow was definitely going to kill him. And even if it didn't, the fall from the top of the cliff. His body was too badly mangled for any form of healing to work. He couldn't have survived on his own."

"Considering what Aaron just narrated," Axle, Levi's brother, cut in, "he did have help. The bracelet you talked about—he stole that from us."

Bingwen put his hand to his chin. "Garret is alive, and he survived something that should have killed him. Someone, he was strong enough to one shot Kanai on his own, and steal the bracelet from him. Yet he hid himself from me, and now he's taken Caspian."

"Yeah, that's about it," said Aaron.

"It's obvious," Bingwen concluded. "Whoever helped Garret survive the fall is the one orchestrating all of this. Now they've recruited Garret, and they've gotten Caspian. It's only fair to assume that they have other powerful beings in their ranks. Something terrible is coming to the paranormal world, and we have to be ready."

Lenna

Lenna hadn't let Lin out of her sight the entire time she'd been back. Apparently, the girl was unharmed, and seemed to be fine except for the fact that she'd missed her mother. Considering how badly the house had been broken, Aaron had offered to let them stay with the pack until they were able to move back in.

"You know, I never thought I'd be in a pack," Lenna said, kissing Aaron slowly as she lay on top of him.

"Much less a pack of werewolves, no?" Aaron asked with a smile.

"No," Lenna replied. "But I want this, I know I do. You're good for me."

"As you are for me," Aaron finished, pulling her back in for a kiss.

He rubbed his hands against her chest as she rode him, taking him inside of her. Lenna looked down at the werewolf who had given everything just to give her what she loved the most. She swallowed as she ground on him slowly, feeling every inch of the man.

"Let's make a life together," Aaron said suddenly. "You're my mate, and I didn't want to believe it, but it's true. I had to say it."

Lenna stared at him, not sure what to say. She felt the same, and she knew that he would make a great father for Lin, and a great husband for her. Aaron was perfect. She shut her eyes, allowing the future to flash through her head. More children, a place of their own, growing old together. Lenna opened her eyes and leaned over to his ear, licking it gently before she responded.

"That's all I desire."

Aaron smiled from ear to ear, kissing her passionately, their tongues dancing in each other's mouths, looking for supremacy. Nothing else mattered in the world at that moment. They all had heard the warnings of the great threats coming, but all of that was in the future. Lenna bit her lip as Aaron bucked his hips, holding her firmly against his body as he plowed through her, moving in and out quickly, drawing moans from her heart.

Lenna felt Aaron's hands rise up, grabbing on to her hips from behind as he lifted her body up, giving him just enough room to thrust himself into her. Her breasts hung above the werewolf, and he leaned upwards, licking and sucking on her sensitive and pink nipples, as he fucked her hard and fast.

Her body bounced with each thrust, and Lenna felt herself clutching around his dick. Aaron reached up, smacking her ass hard. Lenna let out a chuckle, stunned by just how much she liked it. She moved her legs over his thighs, and sat back, giving herself control over him.

"What are you..." Aaron began, breathlessly.

"My turn," Lenna replied. She felt amazing, but she wanted to make him feel the same.

Lenna began to ride him, moving up and down slowly at first, pausing every few moments to grind against his rock hard member. But soon, she picked up speed, enthralled by the feeling of his cock inside of her. Lenna reached over and touched her clit, rubbing gently as she rode him.

She felt Aaron begin to tense up, knowing he would soon come to an orgasm. But Lenna wasn't ready yet. She could tell that she was getting closer, but she wasn't there yet. Lenna slowed down, stopping Aaron from orgasming. She smiled and looked down at him, showing her teeth in a toothy grin.

"Lenna," Aaron said, his voice coming in a whisper.

“Not yet,” She replied, leaning in to kiss the side of his face.

Aaron began to object, but Lenna put a finger to his lips, and she continued to ride him, throwing her head back as she allowed herself to feel him deep inside her. She ran a hand through her hair, feeling her body shudder with each stroke. She looked down at him, smiling as she got off, turning around, so she had her back turned to him.

Aaron sat up, holding her from behind as she sat on his dick again. Aaron moaned deeply, staying put for a moment as he kissed her neck. Lenna turned to face him, kissing him passionately as she bucked her hips, fucking him slowly. Lenna didn't want to give him the reins, and so she continued to guide the pace.

“I can't...” Aaron whispered, “Lenna.”

“Just a little more,” Lenna continued, pushing him back.

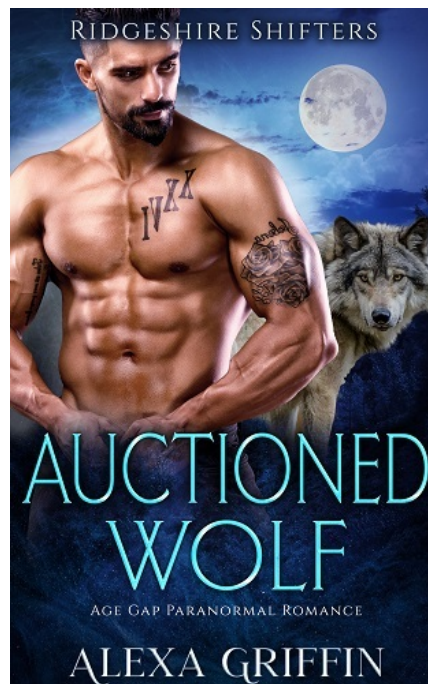
Aaron laid back on the bed, and Lenna bent backward, giving him a view of her ass. Aaron wasn't having any more patience. He reached up and grabbed her hips, holding her steady. Lenna could hear his labored breathing, knowing that he wasn't going to last much longer. The thrill got to Lenna, and she felt her orgasm building. Aaron took the cue and began to plow into her at his top speed.

Lenna shut her eyes and allowed her body to rise steadily to an orgasm, knowing that no matter what would come, Aaron would be there for her. As her body exploded with the natural forces of pleasure, Lenna shut her eyes, riding the werewolf into oblivion.

THE END

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I was sold off for my virginity to a much older bidder.

I hate being claimed like I'm a piece of property. I hate it even more that I'm now trapped with him in this labyrinth. It's dark here, and humid. And there's no way to escape his eyes on my curves...

I thought that being auctioned was the most humiliating experience I'd ever have. But now I'm here, all alone with him...and I know that I was wrong. Because the most humiliating thing in the world...is wanting to give myself to the guy I'm supposed to hate.

For some reason, being in his arms makes me feel safe. For some reason, kissing his lips opens up something inside of me. Something I've never given to a man before. Something that is sacred, real, and sweet.

Should I give my innocence to the man who has claimed me?

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About the Author

Alexa was born and raised in New Orleans, and enjoys living in the “Big Easy” so much, she never left. The rich cultural heritage, the vibrant lifestyle...everything about Alexa’s hometown feeds her soul and creativity. In fact, she attributes her fascination with the mysterious and supernatural to her long and frequent walks in the French Quarter, which she defines as her “muse.” Losing herself often in the engrossing history and tales, before long she decided to put pen to paper and bring her own stories to life.

Alexa is married to Derrick who encouraged her to dedicate her time and energy to her writing, and whom she describes as her Number One Fan. Alexa loves letting her imagination run wild creating dark and complex characters only to send them through the whirlwinds and twists of steamy romantic suspense. So come join her on an exciting journey into a world full of fantasy...mystery...and the paranormal.

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* * *

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