

# ONLY HUMAN

LEGEND SPRINGS  
BOOK ONE

ALEX RAINE

*Only Human*

**Alex Raine**



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DEDICATION:

To my wife and children, remember, we are the storm.  
Those crazy enough to blow through the world and not give  
two shits about the destruction in our path.

## *Chapter 1*

Lost. Terrified. Alone.

Trapped in a place I don't recognize. A forest from the looks of it. Tall, canopied trees surround me. No sunlight seeps through their tops. It's dark, but somehow I can still see my surroundings. The forest floor is a lush, green moss. I'm barefoot.

*Where is everyone?*

My breath comes out in spurts, and my heart races. The sound echoes in my ears and beats against my chest like the thumping of a drum.

*Why am I all alone?*

*How did I get here?*



So many questions, so few answers. Answers I'm going to have to figure out for myself it seems.

There are no sounds. No birds. No wind. No scurries. Nothing. There's only me and silence. Standing here doing nothing isn't helping any, I have to move. The silence is torture, I have to find my way home.

I notice a break in the trees to my left, so I run for it. When I stop, I'm in a large clearing in the middle of the forest. No trees are growing here, but they surround it on all sides. There's tall grass and soft ground cover with wildflowers growing throughout. It looks so comfortable. I should stay here and rest. The clearing really does look cozy, I'll just lay down for a while.

*Someone will rescue me soon, right?*

*Snap.*

I've been lying here for what feels like hours when I hear a noise. Sticks and leaves crunch under someone's, or something's feet. It echoes through the clearing and it's quickly getting closer. I sit up to inspect my surroundings, calling out to see if someone is there. "Hello? Can you help me? Please." My voice comes out faint, almost timid. My eyes dart around the clearing, scanning the edge of the woods.

Suddenly, the cause of the sound appears in front of me. It's definitely someone. A very large, white wolf. His fur is so bright in the dimness, he appears silver. He's staring at me as though I've disturbed his home. His bright, cerulean eyes sparkle in the moonlight. Stalking toward me, saliva drips from his lower lip.

I try to speak, but no words come out. As the wolf nears me, I try to back away, but he continues pressing forward. Prowling toward me with his cold lupine gaze. As fast as lightning, he's on top of me. His mouth opens and I feel his hot breath on my neck. His jaws close over my shoulder, teeth scraping my skin.

I wake with a start. Sweat pours off my body. Looking around, I realize I'm in my bedroom. My lamp is still on from where I guess I fell asleep reading. It must've been a nightmare. A very vivid one. I've never had a dream that felt so real. Nor so scary. And the wolf? Even though I know I'm alone in my room, I can still feel his presence with me.

## *Chapter 2*

### **Kimble**

Twenty-four hours, thirty-seven minutes and fourteen seconds.

That's all that's left of our time in this backwoods little area buried in the depths of Pennsylvania.

“I can't believe that tomorrow is our last day in this town. Aren't any of you nervous? What happens if when we get to school, we grow distant, and aren't friends anymore?” Mila, the worrywart of our group, questions as she pulls her long, dark chestnut hair into a messy bun. Her deep hazel eyes twinkle in the sunlight that is shining through the windows of our usual hangout spot.

We're sitting in the corner booth of Chuck's, our favorite local diner. Every day since we were twelve, and found this place while out 'exploring', we have sat in the same sticky, vinyl booth staring at the same pictures of James Dean and other old movie stars. If you want us you can find us messing with Chuck's nerves, or in our booth sucking down strawberry milkshakes and eating our weight in crispy fries and juicy burgers. Everything, from the flashing neon sign out front, to Chuck's grease stained clothes and fatherly, yet broody, attitude makes this place feel like home.

"It's surreal, sure. But just think about it, Miles. No parents telling us what to do, no annoying teachers who see us outside of school and know everything about us, and no immature high school boys. Our friendship will always withstand the test of time. Stop worrying so much," Willow sighs.

"Exactly. We're forever, babe. All of us. Always." I tell Mila, knowing she just needs confirmation for her doubts. Turning to Willow, I stick my tongue out at her. "Yeah, now all the immature, high school boys will be immature, college freshmen," I tease, which earns me a hmp and an eye roll. Mila giggles and Piper goes back to her book, neither of them with anything to contribute to this particular conversation. Do we argue sometimes? Sure. Not that it does us any good. We're all too much alike to actually win an argument with each other. They end in a stalemate. Everytime.

We're best friends. Thicker than blood. And, even though our personalities and looks are different, everything about us is similar. From our birthday (yes it's on the same day), to the classes we choose, and even the guys we like to date. It's no surprise we're attached at the hip, considering our moms are best friends, too.

We even applied, and were accepted, to the same college, Legend Springs University. It may not sound like much, but it is the most elite college in the country. The application process is ridiculously hard and getting accepted is rare. No one we know has ever made it to the interview portion. We couldn't believe it when the four of us received our acceptance letters.

In our high school people thought our closeness was insane and they didn't understand us. They dubbed us 'Met-A-Four'. Meaning, when you meet one, you get the other three. We're a package deal.

The one thing that separates us from everyone else in this town? Our minds. We're smart. Not bragging or anything, we just like to study. To learn. No one else in this hick town is like that. We see it as the more we learn, the more we can accomplish. Our high school couldn't even pick a valedictorian between us because we all had the same GPA.

We're just your average, normal teens, though. We don't like to stand out. We're popular, but not the bitchy kind.

Things like shopping, parties, hanging out, cute boys, and being regular eighteen year old girls is how we roll.

“Can you guys imagine what college is going to be like when we get there?” Piper asks, effectively breaking the silence.

I take a bite of my burger, picturing the idea of it all perfectly. “It’s going to be exactly the same. Except, now, we’re adults and can do our own thing. And we get to live together all the time.” Smiling from ear to ear, I know that we’re about to embark on our greatest adventure yet. Yesterday, we got the keys for our apartment that’s close to the University and we’re moving our stuff in tomorrow.

“Yeah, but think of all the new people we’ll meet, the parties, and the hot guys. Plus, we’re going to explore Legend Springs first. We’ll have real life experience before we ever step foot in the school. Then, when we hit the scene, Legend Springs University won’t know what hit em’. Did I mention all the hot guys?” Willow, our boy-hound, chimes in. There’s not an attractive guy within five miles she can’t sniff out. And once she gets the scent, she’s like a dog with a bone. The guys love her, too. Who wouldn’t? She’s outgoing, doesn’t hold back her words, and is a blonde bombshell.

“College is not all about parties and sex, Lo. We’re going there for our education, too,” Piper protests. She’s the most

serious of us. Always pushes that extra mile; needing plans, lists, and order. Hates confrontation, unless the subject's a topic she's passionate about, and always calls us on our bullshit. She's our little, blackhaired, pixie doll. A total knockout, though you'll never get her to believe it.

“We're not doing this again,” Mila complains, rolling her eyes. “The last time, you two didn't talk for a whole day! And we can't have that right before we leave for a whole other place. Do you even realize the stress that puts on us?” Pointing between me and her, she slinks back in her seat and nibbles on a french fry looking up to the ceiling as if aliens are coming down to rescue her from the bickering of our two best friends. Mila is hedonistic and strong. She holds herself back a lot because she overthinks everything. Present her with a situation, give her thirty minutes, and she can come up with a hundred different scenarios on what can happen. From worst case to best, she has an answer for everything.

“Look, it's gonna be great. We have our own apartment within walking distance to the school. We'll be in Legend Springs, a town where no one knows anything about us. Plus, we're our own adult supervision. So we have plenty of time to make our mark. We can have and do it all. Party, date, *and* get our education on.” Looking at them, I try to communicate that we can have the best of both worlds.

We have two months to get our nerves in check and get to know the town that will be our new home.

I know it's going to be *magical*.



## *Chapter 3*

### **Riftyn**

Two months later..

“One week, boys,” Lucien says, coming out of the bathroom drying his hair. “Fresh meat on campus, ripe for the taking.”

“We’ll be the fresh meat on campus too, dipshit. I just hope there’s some new girls, not from this place. The ones we know aren’t worth the damn trouble,” Kerner groans from his perch on the counter, steadily flipping a gold coin between his fingers.

Zane swaggers in and plops down in a seat at the table. “Did you catch the four that moved into 2C a couple of months ago? I bet we’ll see them around campus. They look our age and they smell... delicious,” he says, taking a drink of his... we don’t discuss what’s in his cup.

Four hotties moved into our building and I haven't seen them yet? What the fuck is wrong with me?

“Z, why are you just telling us now? How long have you known?” I grab my soda can, chug it, and slam it down on the table. “Four of them, four of us. We could've called dibs, dude! What happens if they already met someone?”

Zane's voice lowers, “Trust me, they haven't yet. According to the conversation I heard them having with the landlord, they're just getting settled. They've been exploring the town, going to the museums, and learning where everything is. They asked about places for people to hang out, and I quote ‘meet hot guys’. He said for girls their age, Primordial Sins was the place to be. So...”

“So, maybe we happen to run into them?” I finish.

He smirks. “Exactly.”

“I'm in!” Lucien yells from the living room. Of course he is, the horny bastard. Refers to himself as the Silver Tongue Devil who is always down for anything involving the female form. We don't tell him that we make fun of him behind his back because of it. I mean c'mon, STD? It's too easy.

Kerner hops down from the counter, “You know I’m always looking for treasure. Maybe one of these girls has just what I’m searching for.” With that, he saunters out of the kitchen toward his ‘lair’ with a determined smile on his face.

I swear, I have no idea how I ended up best friends with three of the biggest clowns that were ever born, but that’s just how it is. We’ve been together since the very beginning. I’m supposed to be the next Alpha of the Wintercrest Pack, after my father, but that doesn’t matter because our parents still give us shit saying we’ve got our own little pack, and I guess, in a way, we do. We’re not blood, but they’re my brothers. I would die for them the same as they would for me. We’re tight knit. Nothing and no one can change that.

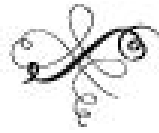
A smack to the back of the head brings me out of my thoughts.

“Hey, where’d you go, man?” Zane snaps his fingers in my face.

“Nowhere, dude. Just thinking about tonight. I still can’t believe you waited until now to tell us.”

He stands, and slaps me on the shoulder. “All about timing, brother. You’ll see. Now, let’s go get ready to woo some ladies.”

Fucking vampires. We both laugh as we head to our rooms.



Primordial Sins, a club downtown, is for the under twenty-one crowd. And it's the place to be on the weekends. Considering it's really all we have here, unless you count packlands or parks, that is just for people our age. It's filled with locals and tourists who know about our world. The rules are slack here because the owners know everyone is just looking for a good time, not trying to start trouble.

Bodies fill the space, standing room only, on both levels. From our spot by the dance floor, I can see the DJ booth surrounded by mirrors at the front and the bar where two bartenders are slinging drinks across the glossy oak surface to waiting patrons looking to spend their cash. Girls in silver sequined dresses serve customers at the tables. There's a VIP section on the upper level where the more... elite hang out. Those who don't care how much of daddy's money they spend or about anything other than themselves.

When I hear a laugh, I spin around and face the door. The sound, I swear, floats through the thumping of the music directly to my ears. My heartbeat races and sweat forms on my brow. Zane grabs my shoulder, eyeing me for a problem. But then I see her. Who she is, I don't know. But at this moment, I'm damn sure she's mine.

Beautiful. That one word is the only brain function I have right now. She looks shorter than me by a couple of inches, but still tall enough I wouldn't have to bend to reach her. She has red hair the color of a sunburst flowing down her back and landing just before the plumpest ass I've ever laid eyes on. She's fair complexioned, with a dotting of freckles across the bridge of her nose. Her legs look powerful, like a dancer's. And the rest of her? A man could get lost in those curves. She's the most perfect creature I've ever been in the presence of. Her eyes sparkle as she laughs again at something one of her friends says. The sound is a symphony composed only for me.

Ignoring my friends, I get up from the table and head toward her. My body drives me of its own free will. I've no control. A need blares inside of me, telling me that I have to get to her. Have to talk to her. Have to get to know her. Have to have her. I vaguely sense the guys behind me, but I don't care.

As I get closer, her eyes find mine and something inside of me explodes. My heart, my brain, my whole chest. Fuck. I don't know what's happening, but before I've even learned her name I growl under my breath, "Mine."

She looks like a deer caught in headlights as I approach. Trying to control my inner beast, I sidle up next to her and stare into her eyes. It must last longer than normal, because her blonde friend speaks up. "Hey, Thor? Want to introduce yourself and stop eye-fucking my friend all creepy like that?" Red giggles, bringing me out of my stupor.

"Sorry," I start, clearing my throat. "Hi, Riftyn Brooks." I extend my hand to shake hers, needing to touch her in any way I can. "These asshats behind me are my brothers. Zane Lennox, Lucien Reign, and Kerner Nash." I point to each of the guys, giving my hands something to do other than snatch her up caveman style and run out of the club to be alone with her.

She speaks, and I'm positive my lungs fail. I can't breathe. "Hello. Kimble Sawyer, and these are my friends." She points to them. "Mila Winters, Willow Rivers, and Piper Adler. We just moved here a couple months ago and have been trying to get the hang of the place. Our landlord suggested this was a good spot to let loose. At the risk of sounding cliché, come here often?"

My whole body ignites at the sound of her voice. “Nice to meet you, and your landlord is right. This is the spot to be. And it just so happens that we’re the best at letting loose.” Giving her a megawatt smile and a wink, I take her hand to lead her to the dance floor. After nods and shoves from her friends, she accepts, following me.

Finally, I have her in my arms. Her body is pressed close to mine. Our groups merge together naturally and we all spend the night dancing, talking, and having fun.

Little does Kimble know that, after tonight, she’ll never be done with me.



Rolling out of bed the next day, I feel incomplete. Like an almost finished puzzle with the last middle piece missing. I’m going crazy trying to figure it out so I decide to take Cosa, my wolf, for a run. I reach out to him through our link as I head toward the woods.

*Good morning, sunshine! Ready to hit the grove?*

*Yes, after meeting our mate last night, I need to stretch my legs.*

***Back the hell up. What'd you just say? Mate? Our mate?***

*Yes, Riftyn, our mate. Kimble, the girl you spent all of last night with. I tried telling you but you were in that dreadful club with its loud people and even louder music that makes no sense. You can't even understand what half of them are talking about, much less hear me over it.*

I run until I reach the grove where I shift, letting Cosa take over. Mentally smacking myself for not realizing it sooner.

***That's why I feel the way I do. Why I was so possessive over her. Why I felt like something was missing this morning. Something is missing. Her. Holy shit, dude! We've found our true mate!***

*I know, dumbass. I just told you this. Finally, we can be whole. I still don't get how you didn't know. We dream-walked with her, didn't you recognize her?*

***She looks different in the dream space, plus I was seeing her from your vision. And it seemed as if she was afraid of us, so I didn't put two and two together. Man, I'm an idiot.***



You said it...

Asshole. We continue our run until Cosa is sweating and panting heavily; returning to the grove so we can shift and head home. We never thought the day would come when we'd find our mate. I wonder if she knows. Fear strikes me as I think about her rejecting me. That's a fate I wouldn't wish on anyone.

I walk into the apartment humming the song Kimble and I danced to last night. Lucien's in the kitchen standing with the fridge open like whatever's in there's going to change for him the longer he stares at it. Which, I guess for a demon, could be a reality. He turns his head, cocking it like a puppy hearing a noise. "What're you so fucking cheerful about this early in the morning?" he grumbles, turning back to stare into the abyss of the fridge again.

I ignore his attitude and yell for the others. "Zane! Kerner! Pack meeting. Pronto!" They come barreling down the hall, pushing and shoving each other like they're still kids. Sitting down at the table, Zane props his feet up and leans back in the chair. Kerner takes his usual place on the counter and Lucien sits backward in the chair next to me. All of them turn to me, ready to listen.

"What's up, Rift? It's too early for a pack meeting, unless we're discussing pancakes versus eggs." Lucien groans,

dropping his head down on the table. He's not a morning demon.

“No, not breakfast choices, Luce.” I take a deep breath, preparing myself for what I have to tell them. “I've found my mate. You know the girl I met last night? Kimble? It's her. Cosa, helped me realize. We've dream-walked, though it's weird because she was scared of Cosa. Doesn't matter, anyway. Guys, this is huge. I have a mate. My forever. The other part of my soul.” Looking up at the ceiling, I wait for their reactions.

There's a chorus of 'hell yeah, brother', before they tackle me to the floor. I knew they'd be happy for me. After last year, we need all the happiness we can get. Maybe this is the sign we've all been looking for.

## *Chapter 4*

### **Kimble**

The same forest surrounds me. Tall, canopied trees. No sunlight. It's identical. It's dark, but I can still see my surroundings, just as before. The forest floor is the same lush, green moss. Just like the other dream, I'm barefoot, lonely and afraid.

Still, there are no sounds. I can't find traces of an animal or person anywhere.

I find the clearing in the trees. Standing there, I try changing the narrative. I call out for my mom, my friends, even for Riftyn, the hot guy I met. No one answers. No one appears. Not one person comes to save me.

The wolf.

Oh, he never fails to show. He stalks toward me, hunger dancing in his eyes. Except, I'm not afraid of him this time. He's... familiar. As though I'm supposed to meet him. Talk to him. Find him. Something in my mind is telling me that he's important to me. That I can't live without him.

He sits before me, calm, as if he's waiting for me to understand his purpose. We lock eyes, I feel as if I've seen his somewhere and not just in my dreams. Holding his gaze, I reach out to see if his fur feels as soft as it looks.

*Damnit.*

I wake up at a pivotal moment. Again. It feels as though I'm missing something. Information I need or... someone I need. I don't know, but my heart is telling me I have to figure out these dreams.

The wolf represents something important, I just have to find out what that is.



*One week later...*

I'm in love with Legend Springs! The town is a beautiful expanse located in a chasmic valley that separates two massive mountains. Dense forests grow on either side of the town with luscious green tops and dark brown trunks that rival those of storybooks.

Legend Springs University campus is a world all its own. It's the most enchanting place I've ever seen. Large, dark windows are found on every building, and pointed arches separate the different spaces. The entrance gate has gargoyles on either side of it to welcome you. The whole place looks like something out of a fairytale. I've never felt more at home.

Orientation starts today and we're all nervous and excited. We have our schedules and our packets and we're supposed to meet someone named Claire Gardner on the grounds by the administration building at eight a.m. Finishing off my toast, I go over my schedule one more time.

A couple of morning classes and one in the evening once a week. That leaves enough time to hang with my girls, and spend more time with Riftyn.

The night we met was amazing. Dancing, talking, hanging out with our friends; it was perfect. His friends were awesome,

too. They never treated us like outsiders, were never disrespectful, and they were fun to hang out with.

We've been texting daily. Even been on a couple of dates. He's sweet, charming, and hilarious. Smart as well. Our conversations are never dull. He's just... perfect.

Plus, he's incredibly handsome. Tall, over six feet, muscular with golden blond hair that's cut short on the sides and longer on the top. Adonis doesn't have shit on this man. His deep, teal eyes captivate me the moment I look at him. And his smile? That's a thing of legends. He has straight, white teeth and ample lips that are perfect for kissing, nibbling, or whatever else comes to mind. And I have a lot that comes to mind.

Shaking my head, I start toward the bathroom. I can hear the girls chatting. "Oh my god. Zane is the hottest guy on the planet! I could eat him alive," Willow moans.

"The way he was looking at you the other night, I think he could eat you alive... *literally*," I interject as I squeeze into our shared bathroom. Four girls in one bathroom should be hell, but we make it work. "Seriously, Lo. Everytime he looks at you it's like you're his next meal, and that man is starving!"

Willow stops applying her mascara and gets a dreamy look on her face. “Well, I’ll gladly feed him... Any. Time. He. Wants,” she says, punctuating each word.

“What if they’re on campus? Do they go to the University? Did anyone think to even ask them?” Mila questions.

“I don’t know about you, but wondering where they go to school, if they do, is the last thing on my mind. I already know the important things. Like how Zane’s lips feel against mine, that he has no trouble lifting me and holding me up for long periods at a time. And the most important thing of all, how long he can hold his breath.” She waggles her brows teasing Mila. We all burst out laughing.

“You guys are incorrigible,” Piper groans, rolling her eyes and covering her face with her hands. She’s so easily embarrassed.

“Oh come on, Pipes, we all see the way you and Kerner are together. You hang on his every word and he yours,” Mila retorts.

“I bet she counts all of his muscles, too. Our own little Count Piper! One large muscle... ah ah ah, two large muscles... ah ah ah!” Willow does her best impression of the Count from Sesame Street.

My best friends... are idiots.

I jump to Piper's defense. "Lay off guys. We all drool over them. But don't you find them to be a little intense? Don't get me wrong, I've never felt comfortable around guys or felt like I could be myself like I do them, but they're just so... fierce. And I swear I heard Riftyn growl, actually growl, at the bartender the other night when he called me gorgeous."

*Everything was going perfectly. Riftyn and I head to the bar for another drink. We're standing there waiting our turn discussing our favorite music when the bartender finally makes his way to help us.*

*"What'll it be, gorgeous?" he asks, looking at me.*

*I go to respond and that's when I hear it. A subtle and low sound, definitely a growl, rumbles out of Riftyn. It sounded threatening and scary, but the knowledge that he's that possessive... turns me on. The bartender hears it too because he scrambles away like his ass is on fire.*

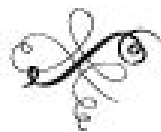
"Earth to Kimble." Mila waves her hand in my face, bringing me back to the present. She turns around, pulling her long hair into a ponytail. "Yeah, they're intense, but also smart, and hot, and funny, and did I mention hot? And they're so attentive. Lucien just gets me. We've never met anyone,



much less guys, like that, Kb. Not once have they acted intimidated or turned off by anything we say. Matter of fact, it seems the more we talk the more turned on they become,” she says, securing her hair in place with bobby pins.

“You’re right, Miles. I’m just not used to this and don’t know how I’m supposed to react or what to think. Any guy I’ve been with before was after one thing. Once they get what they want, they vanish.”

Willow places her arm over my shoulders. “I don’t think Riftyn is like that, KB. The boy is already head over heels for you. So, how about this time we try not to think, or to figure them out. Live in the moment. Hang out with them, enjoy them, and just be with them. What’s the worst that can happen?”



As soon as we arrive at campus my phone dings.

**Riftyn: Hey, Red! How’s your morning?**

**Me: Hi handsome, it’s great. Yours?**

**Riftyn: Better, now that I’ve talked to you.**

**Me: \*blushing emoji\***

**Riftyn: What're you up to today?**

**Me: Taking a tour, you?**

I don't know why but I refrain from telling him that we're starting at LSU today. Willow says it's because I'm nuts and should see a doctor about medication or as she put it, 'a pleasant vacation to a mental facility'. I'm just not comfortable sharing all my business with him yet. I smile seeing the three dots immediately pop up. If Riftyn is anything, it's attentive.

**Riftyn: Yeah, the boys and I have a big day today. Want to have dinner later?**

**Me: Love to. What time?**

**Riftyn: 7:00?**

**Me: Sounds good. See you then.**

**Riftyn: Later, Red. \*wink emoji\* Have a good day.**

I grin as I put my phone away. I've never met someone, besides Willow, who's so bold. Someone who knows exactly what they want. And what Riftyn wants... is me.



We reach the front of the admin building and see throngs of people scattered everywhere. Orientation leaders are bustling about trying to get their groups in order. It's utter chaos. I find someone wearing a nametag and ask if they know where we can find Claire. She points to a girl that's standing in front of a group of people, filing her nails. Great, this is going to be a wonderful day, I can already tell.

The girls and I share a look and head over. Our leader, Claire, sees us approaching and huffs out an audible breath. I never understood why girls who are so pretty on the surface are always so ugly underneath. If I couldn't already tell she's going to be a total bitch, I'd be in awe of her. She's tall, with long, flowing hair the color of pink sand. And, of course, her hair is blowing in the breeze as if someone has a fan directed at her. Her eyes are a magenta color, which can only be from contacts, and they twinkle. How the hell do her eyes actually fucking twinkle? Her skin is fair and smooth and it looks like she wears a ton of body glitter. She looks almost... inhuman.

From beside me Willow grumbles, "Fuck me with a cactus, we have the Bitch Barbies as our guides today. This should be

interesting.” Piper and Mila burst out in laughter and I cover my mouth to stifle my own.

Claire notices and rolls her eyes. Putting her file away, she finally addresses the group. “Welcome to Legend Springs University. I’m Claire Gardner. These are my girls, Fallon Cole and Tempest Hollingsworth.” She gestures toward the two girls standing beside her. Almost carbon copies of Claire, but where her hair and eyes are pinkish in color, Fallon’s are blue and Tempest’s are purple. What are they, triplets? A cult? Clones? “We’ll be your guides today. We’re freshmen, like you, but took early classes here so we know our way around and blah, blah... Save all your questions for... never. Follow us.”

“Are they serious? They can’t be, right? How are we going to get all the information we need if we can’t ask anything? Do I need to see the dean about this?” Piper’s rapid-fire questions flow out in one breath. Our sweet, and slightly nuts, little Pipes, can’t handle living on the edge. To her, order is everything and the Bitch Barbies are throwing that order right out the fucking window. I’ll be surprised if Piper’s head doesn’t explode by the end of the tour.

Mila takes Piper’s hand, trying to soothe her. “It’ll be okay, Pipes, they’re probably just joking. I’m sure the school wouldn’t have them as leaders of the freshmen if they didn’t

do their job. Right, Kb?” She turns to me, pleading with her eyes.

“Yeah, definitely, Pipes. They probably just want to get through the day without a million interruptions and will do the Q & A portion at the end of the tour. Breathe, babe, it’ll be alright.” I really hope we’re right, otherwise our best friend is gonna lose her shit.

“So,” Fallon starts. “As you can see this is the admin building. All the offices, including the professors, are there. Each professor has their own office hours, which you’ll learn when you get to their classes.” Bitch Barbies, the name we have adopted for them, all abruptly turn around and start speed walking without looking to see if everyone is following. There are only about ten of us in the group and we all scramble to keep up with the long legged she-devils.

“This is Eilonwy Hall, where the girls’ dorms are,” Tempest says. We’re standing in front of a three storey, deep red brick building. The brick color is complemented by dark oak window frames and massive pillars lining the entry. The windows, I’m guessing, are tinted so that anyone outside can’t see in, but the inhabitants can see out. “That building over there,” she points to the other side of us at another building that is the exact replica of the girls’ dorm, “Lochlan Hall, is obviously for the guys,” she huffs as if we should know this information already.

The only way you can tell the two buildings apart are the signs on the eaves that state the building's name. Turning around, she points to a much smaller building, still similar to the others, between the two large dormitories. "That there is the dining hall. You should have your dining card in the packets you were sent and your meal plan is laid out in your handbooks." With that said, they take off again.

This time we stop in front of a cluster of buildings that resemble miniature castles. They have stone walls, stained glass windows, towers on all the corners, and concrete walkways with large flower beds on either side. In the middle of the flower beds are decorative water fountains. The buildings are lined up in a crescent shape that I can imagine, from above, looks like a large stone moon.

"This is where the classrooms and library are located. The area is called Stonewall and maps have been provided to you. I suggest you learn them so you don't get lost. No one has time to babysit any of you," Claire announces.

The campus is exquisite and, even though I'm internally contemplating our leader's murders, I'm envious of those who got to come before us, and sorrowful for those who didn't make the cut. Mila puts her head on my shoulder and takes a deep breath.

“Ravishing isn’t it, Kb? I can’t believe we got in. Nothing can stop us now, we’ve truly made it.” Her eyes fill with emotion which causes me to tear up too. “Yeah, Miles. I’m not sure any of this is real yet. I should say pinch me or something, but even that doesn’t convey the feelings I have right now.” Mila and I smile at each other and then Bitch Barbie number one, Claire, clears her throat.

“Tour’s over!” She looks at us, disgust clearly written on her face. “I have better shit to do and the dean wants to see you four in her office.” She plasters on the fakest smile she can muster and in a singsong voice says, “Good luuuck!” With a waggle of her fingers, she and her posse stalk away from us. I have no idea what we’ve done to make an enemy of her, but it’s apparent our existence makes her unhappy.

We all turn toward Piper, waiting for the meltdown we know is coming. I picture her like one of those old cartoon characters. Her face red and puffed up and steam coming out of her ears. I have to bite my knuckle to keep from laughing at the image.

“Thosenogoodfuckingtwatwafflebitches!” Piper squeals. She rarely cusses, saying ‘it’s not in her nature’. Not that she doesn’t know how, because *clearly* she does, but when it happens the rest of us crack up.

I grab Piper by the hand and pull her along with me. With every step her face gets redder and her stomp louder. She's pissed. I get it, we are too, but there's nothing we can do about it at the moment. I would sort of feel sorry for the Bitch Barbies if they were to fall into Piper's line of sight right now. I mean, I'd save their lives should Piper attack. At least I think I would. Probably. Maybe.

Willow wraps her arm around Piper's waist. "We're going to the dean's office and I'm sure she can answer any of the questions you have. Besides, you have your orientation packet they sent us. That has a lot of information in it and later you can tell me everything I need to know about organizing my planner. Just take a breath and chill. Okay?"

Piper stops, bringing us all to a halt. Her face lights up and she lets out the breath that she's apparently been holding. "Really, Lo? You'll really sit through one of my lessons? Swear it!" Willow rolls her eyes, but holds out her pinky.

"I swear. I'll willingly sit through one of your boring lectures just to bring a smile to your adorable little face. Because I am obviously the greatest friend ever born, including the other two bitches we share a birthday with." She sticks her tongue out at us. She can have that title today since Mila nor I will ever willingly sit through one of Piper's talks on organization again. We learned that lesson the hard way.



We continue our trek, admiring the campus and the students that are milling around. As we reach the admin building, I pull out the map of the offices and search for the dean's. We stand there, sharing a look that says, *I wonder what the dean wants with just us?* We face the building toward what we can only hope is the welcome wagon.

## *Chapter 5*

### **Riftyn**

The guys and I are walking across campus heading toward Stonewall to get our textbooks for the year. We're pumped. We have been ready to get to this school since we were born. We had plans to dominate LSU and go through the girls here like paper towels. Only, things are different now. I've found my mate. She doesn't know it yet but she will soon.

Although, something is strange about her. She smells different, sort of human with something else that I can't pin down. What's weird is she doesn't act remotely supernatural at all. It feels as if she's hiding something from me which doesn't seem right. At times, it's as though she doesn't know anything about the supernatural world. Take dream-walking, for instance. We all know that's how we first meet our true mates, but she seemed scared of us. As if she had no idea what was happening. But that can't be right, either. If she's not one of

us, how does she know about Legend Springs? She and her friends moved here for a change of scenery, I guess, since none of them mention the school. We haven't really talked about it. I plan on it tonight at dinner.

“Yo, Rift, ain't that your girl over there? Hell, ain't that all of them?” Kerner smacks my arm pointing to the steps of the admin building.

I look to where he's pointing and suck in a deep breath. Shit. There she is. At my school. On my campus. What the hell? She hasn't told me a single thing about coming to LSU, yet here she is. I *knew* she was one of us. But why is she hiding it?

Fuck she's stunning. Her long red hair is up in a ponytail. The sun hits her face, making her glow. Her long legs and that plump ass in those jeans instantly turns my cock to stone. I'm not gonna be able to be in public around her if this shit keeps up. Looking at her, I can imagine all the things I want to do to her fantastic body. I can't wait to find out how she feels in my hands; kissing her, exploring every inch of her, tasting her. Cosa growls, *Mate. Claim her. Now!* I don't blame him, I want her as much as he does.

Zane glances my way, his eyes flicker with crimson. “I say we go over there and publicly stake our claim. Rift, you in?”

I can't speak and fantasize at the same time so I nod my head and start walking. I can tell the moment she catches me in her peripheral because her whole body tenses and she looks like she's seen a ghost. Even from this distance I can hear her gulp and her friend Piper asks, "What's wrong, Kb? Are you okay?" Kimble doesn't make a sound, just nods her head in our direction.

Willow looks our way and gives a low whistle, "Shit, the four horsemen of the pussy apocalypse are headed our way, and here I am without a saddle!" Zane barks out a laugh and speeds up. Yeah, I'm pretty sure he's in love. Hell, I'm pretty sure we all are.

As we get closer we hear Mila mumble, "Told y'all we should have asked them." *Asked us what*, I wonder. Kimble shoots her a look that would take down a lesser being. The guys and I chuckle as we approach. Zane scoops Willow up onto his back, Lucien throws his arm around Mila's shoulders, and Kerner and Piper stare at each other. I go up to my girl and give her a kiss on the cheek, "Hey Red, fancy meeting you here. You didn't tell me you were going to LSU."

She stutters and looks to her friends for help, of course, none of them offer assistance. "I'm sorry. I'm not used to sharing much about me with anyone other than the girls, and I don't know how to label you and me. Like what we are. A

couple? Just talking? I don't know how any of this works," she says in almost a whisper.

I grab her around the waist, pulling her to me. Her scent reaches my nose and I inhale deeply. "It's okay, Red. You don't have to tell me everything. Not yet. As far as what we are? That one's easy, you... are *mine*." I can feel her body tremble as I say the words and I know right then that she may not understand what being mine means, but, from her reaction, I can tell she wants it. She's all in.

"So, where're you ladies headed?" Lucien breaks the silence and Kimble, still staring at me intently, responds, "To see the dean. She told Bitch Barbie, I mean Claire Gardner, that she wants to see us in her office." I grimace. Fucking Claire Gardner. Mistakes from my past continue to haunt me. She is one fae I wouldn't if they disappeared. I shake my head, returning to the conversation.

"Oh good, we can show you the way," Kerner offers.

While the others head inside, I pull Kimble to the alley of the building and pin her against the brick. With my arms on either side of her head, I lean down placing my lips by her ear. "We still on for dinner? I'm starving." She sighs, placing her hands on my hips. "Yeah, can't wait." Her lips meet mine as I wrap my arms around her. Too soon, she breaks our kiss. "I'm

sorry I didn't tell you about going here. I'm very open outside of my circle."

She has trust issues. I can understand that. People aren't always what they're cracked up to be. A year ago, I was a piece of shit myself. I'll have to show her she can trust me. Forever. Because that's how long I plan to keep her.

*I like that idea. Cosa agrees.*

We meet the others inside, and drop the girls off at the dean's office. The guys and I head toward the bookstore with my thoughts scattered all over the place. I can't wait to be alone tonight with Kimble. I haven't figured out how to tell her we're mates yet, or even how to broach the subject. What am I supposed to say? *'Hey Kimble, glad we met. Been the best time of my existence, even if it has been short. I was wondering, what're you doing for the rest of your life? I ask because, well, you have to love me forever. That's the way of Fate and she's a fickle bitch. Anyway... you in?'*

Internally, I smack myself. One way or another, I'll figure it out.

## *Chapter 6*

### **Kimble**

The guys showing up on campus threw me. I didn't expect them here, although I didn't *not* expect them, either. Seeing Riftyn walking across campus toward me sent chills down my spine and heat to my lady bits. His muscular body looks as if he can bench press a truck, his muscles ripple as he walks. I can see the tip of a tattoo on his chest that peeks out from his collar. It looks tribal and probably badass. Every time I see him, my breath catches, chill bumps spread across my body, and my panties get instantly soaked. I've never had that with any other guy. Sure, they could get me off if they tried really hard, but never just by sharing the same space. Riftyn makes me feel... all the things.

After we're dropped off at the dean's office, I have to take a moment to catch my breath. The girls look at me like I've lost my mind. I probably have, he does that to me. Makes me feel

crazy. I shake my head, refocusing. We need to find out why the dean wants to see us today. Maybe something happened with our schedules. Seems feasible. I take a deep breath and lead us into the dean's office lobby to speak with the secretary.

“Hello. We were told that Dean Anais wants to see us?” The secretary, Pam, according to her desk plate, looks us over, then a bright smile lights up her face. “Absolutely. If you girls will just sit right over there, I'll let her know you're here.” Her voice has a twang to it that reminds me of those country songs my mom likes to listen to.

Dean Anais opens her door and greets us within minutes. “Ladies, I'm glad you could make it. Please, come in. How was orientation?” This woman doesn't even look like she belongs in this office, she looks more like a student. She can't be older than twenty-five with long curly brown hair. Her jade green eyes almost glow in contrast to her caramel colored skin. She's wearing the cutest pair of boyfriend jeans and a polo with the school emblem on the breast. And why is everyone in this school so damn tall? I thought the girls and I were giants. Not here. Here we are normal. I also thought the dean of a university was supposed to be stuffy and stodgy? Not this lady.

“About that,” Piper starts. “Bi... um, Claire, our tour guide and her friends, didn't allow for questions and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind helping me out with some



things?” Dean Anais smiles, as if she’s sympathetic to Piper’s pain.

“Certainly, Miss Adler. As soon as we’re finished here, I can help you with anything you need.”

Piper lets out an audible breath, “Thank you, Dean Anais.”

She moves to the front of her desk and props against it. “Now, if you ladies would please sit. We can get down to business.” She gestures to some chairs a couple of feet away from her. “You four are the first students we have accepted into the school, who aren’t local, in a long time. You scored amazingly on all of your exams, your application essays were phenomenal and your entrance interviews were exceptional. But we’re missing some information from each of you, and that’s why I called you in here today.”

*Oh. Information. That I can handle, but what information could they possibly be missing?* We always make sure we cover everything, Piper wouldn’t have it any other way, which she vocalizes immediately.

“Excuse me, Dean? I went over our applications myself and made sure we left nothing off.”

“Yes, Miss Adler, none of you missed a thing. These are more personal questions, only two really, that we usually know the answers to because our students are from Legend Springs.”

Mila raises her hand. “What do you need to know, Dean Anais?”

“Oof, let’s stop the formalities. Please, call me Gwen. Dean Anais makes me feel older than I already am.” I scoff at that, earning me a look from everyone in the room. She continues, “We have all of the information on your mothers, but none of you have a father listed. Which is part of the information I need today.”

This tends to be a touchy subject for us as we don’t know shit about our sperm donors. Our mothers don’t talk about them and they just joke that we were immaculately conceived.

“Yeah, we don’t know our dads, Gwen. Not their names, what they look like. Nothing. Our mothers won’t tell us anything, either. So, I’m afraid we can’t help you out there.” Willow waves her hand dismissively, while Gwen just looks at her with what I assume is sadness. Pity, maybe? Out of all of us, Willow’s the one who wants to know *anything* about her father the most. The rest of us couldn’t give a shit. It’s their loss, they’re the ones missing out on us. Not the other way around.

The only thing they've ever done for us is provide our mothers with the sperm to reproduce. Our moms have done really well by us. They handle our quirks, our brattiness, and everything in between. We've never wanted for a thing. Not even our fathers.

Well, except for Willow.

Besides DNA, the only piece we have of our sperm donors are these necklaces. Some kind of orb looking pendants that are silver and have no moving parts. A symbol, that no one knows what it stands for, is imprinted on the front part of the orb. The fact that they're elegant and shiny is all they have going for them.

"What was the other question?" I ask.

"I'm sorry?" Gwen clears her throat. *Yeah, definitely pity.*  
"Oh yes, the other question is about your classes. We can't seem to figure them out."

"Our classes? We have our schedules, so you should know our classes already," Mila says, looking as confused as the rest of us feel.

"No, I mean your species. Your classification."

We all turn our heads to look at each other. *Our classification? Species? The fuck does she mean by that?*

Piper looks personally offended as she stands, placing a hand on her hip. “We’re female, humans. What would make you think otherwise?” she grits out. People used to pick on her in grade school because she was smaller and had short hair. They called her a boy and made fun of her. She finally learned that a swift punch to the throat tends to make everyone shut up.

Gwen straightens in front of us, her eyes widen and she starts stammering. “No... I... um, that’s not what I mean ladies. I think I may have gotten my information wrong. Please, go back to enjoying your day and touring the campus. I’m sorry if I disturbed you. Miss Adler? Would you mind if we rescheduled? I just remembered I have a meeting.” With that she goes and sits down at her desk, clearly dismissing us. *Well, she’s not acting strange at all.*

“Sure,” Piper says as we stand to leave.

“Have a great day, and welcome to Legend Springs,” we hear as we walk out the door.

Nothing about that meeting was normal. Is everyone at this school nuts?

## *Chapter 7*

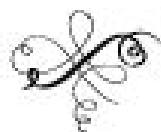
### **Riftyn**

Classes are brutal. Knowing that Kimble is somewhere on campus drives me insane. I can't wait to see her tonight, spend time with her. I have the perfect plan for alone time with her, because being in public can get messy. Whenever I'm around her, my Alpha instinct kicks in and I want to rip the head off of any other man that dares to look at her.

A bartender one night while we were out, probably pissed himself at my warning. But he knew the deal. I'm going to be the next Alpha and having her in my presence should've been a clue that she's mine. An Alpha doesn't publicly date just anyone. We have to be... selective. There's people we call pack chasers. They only want to be with higher-ranking wolves to set their status in the community. We can't sully our ranks with them. Can we sleep with them? Sure. But we're

destined for our true mate. Any Alpha worth their title knows this is the rule.

The day goes by slowly. I'm ready to get home, change, and go get my girl.



I'm getting dressed when Zane walks in. "Hey, buddy." He clasps my shoulder. "You ready for tonight? Got it all planned out what you're going to say?"

I nod. "I know exactly how I'm gonna wine and dine my girl. As long as you can get it set up while I go get her, by the end of the night she won't be able to refuse being mine anymore. She'll just know it." I turn to him and give him the most confident smirk I can.

This makes him chuckle. "Just try not to shed, man. You know how girls can be."

Out of all my friends, Zane and I are closest. He understands me better than anyone else in the world. Plus, he's

saved my ass a few times and, for that, I'll always owe him.

“I'm out! Wish me luck!” My departure is returned with hoots and hollers. While I may be closest to Zane, you can't find better dudes than those other two.

I take the elevator down to the second floor and walk to her door. I don't know why I'm so nervous. Yes I do. I'm scared she'll reject me. If she does, I'll be an outcast, a lone wolf. In the history of my family not a single ancestor, living or dead, has been rejected. Being a rejected mate brings dishonor to your family.

The stories that my parents tell, claim a rejected wolf is cast out of their family. Set to be a Renegade. They're turned away from other packs, by their own families, and any other wolf they meet. As a Renegade, you have no life and it starts to take a toll on you. It changes you. I've never met one, but the legends are horrifying.

I take a deep breath and knock on Kimble's door. I hear shrieks and footsteps from the girls scrambling like ants to get Kimble to the door. When it opens, I lose my breath. A vision stands before me. She left her long hair flowing down her back in waves, and she has on a tight, black dress that sticks to her curves like glue. There's a v cut into the front showing her cleavage, not enough to make her look wanton, but enough to make me want... her. When I finally decide to stop being a

jackass and quit staring at her tits, I look up into her eyes. She has these little, bright green flecks in them that I've never noticed before. As I stare into them, I swear I see a flash.

**What is she? I know she's not a wolf, or a vamp. Dragon or fae possibly? I don't know, but I'm not imagining things. Am I?**

No. You're not. I can't figure her out, either. I don't care. I just want her.

Cosa always gives it to me straight. No chaser.

I clear my throat and work up the balls to finally speak, "Kimble, you look... breathtaking."

My girl blushes. "Thank you. You look amazing, too."

I take her hand in mine and we walk quietly together toward the elevator. As she steps in front of me I lose my shit. The back of the dress is, well, gone almost. It stops right above her ass and I'm pretty sure I just drooled on myself. I don't know how I'm supposed to make it through this date without Cosa taking over and mounting her wherever we are.

*You think so little of me? Shake it off, dumbass. You can't mess this up.* Cosa grumbles.



I place my hand on the small of her back and we get in the elevator heading down to the garage. When we exit, I lead her over to my 1970 Chevelle SS 454. My pride and joy. Four hundred and fifty horsepower, matte black with matching wheels and interior. This machine is a thing of beauty. I open the passenger door for her and help her inside. Running around to the driver's side, I check myself before I get in. This is the most important date I will ever go on.

I start the engine, appreciating my view once more before I put the car in reverse. "Ready?"

She looks over at me, her alluring eyes gleaming, and nods. "Yes, but you haven't said where we're going yet. I don't even know if I am dressed okay or not."

I scan her body, involuntarily licking my lips. "Where we're going is a surprise, you'll love it. You look perfect, Red. Let's get out of here."

I back out of the parking spot and head toward our destination. It's not very far, considering we're just going to the University. There's an area on top of Stonewall for the astronomy students to use the telescopes and study. It has to be booked in advance, and I just happened to get a timeslot. Setting it up while I got Kimble was Zane's job. I really hope she likes it.

We get to the parking lot of LSU and her eyes widen. “School? Why? Did you forget something?” She looks around like we’re gonna get busted for breaking and entering. Her nervous expression makes me chuckle.

“No. This is where our date is taking place. I have something special to show you that I thought you’d love. Plus, I know how private you are and thought it was best that we spend tonight alone.” This seems to placate her because she smiles and goes to reach for the door handle. “Don’t you dare touch that, Red,” I growl. “What kind of man would I be if I didn’t open the door for you?” She pulls her hand back, smirking.

“Well, excuse me, kind sir.” She waves her hand in front of us in true princess fashion to allow me my chilvaristic tendencies. I bark out a laugh.

“Thank you, my lady. Sit tight.”

I run around to her side, open the door, and extend my hand to help her out of the car. As soon as she stands, she stumbles and falls into my arms against my chest. I look down into her eyes and my inner beast takes over. I kiss her, gently at first, but when I feel her body melting further into mine I deepen the kiss. My tongue pushes at her lips seeking entrance. When she opens her mouth and our tongues tangle together, I growl.

Her hands fist in my shirt and I take my left hand and place it on the back of her head. My right hand snakes around her waist, pulling her even closer.

She comes willingly and a light moan escapes her. I lose all sense of myself and back her against the car door. She gasps into our kiss, and I press tighter against her. My hands circle around her waist and glide down to her ass, picking her up in one swift movement. Her legs wrap around me instantly and I can feel the heat of her through our clothes. I can smell her arousal, she's as turned on as I am.

*Mmmm. Our mate smells titillating. She wants us. This is good, DON'T FUCK IT UP!*

If your inner wolf screaming at you inside your head isn't enough to kill the mood, I don't know what is. I pull back from her, set her on the ground and search her face for any sign that I screwed things up. There's not an ounce of anger written there but a small amount of... hurt?

Her lipstick is smudged so I take my thumb and glide it across the bottom of her lip, trying to clean it away. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... you just look so enticing, and you literally fell into my arms. I couldn't help myself. Please, forgive me?"

She shakes her head and looks down at the ground. “You did nothing wrong, RIFTYN. That was... amazing. I shouldn’t have just thrown myself at you. If anyone was wrong it’s me. I can only imagine the impression you have of me now.”

I take her chin, pulling her face up toward mine. “The only impression I have, Kimble Sawyer, is that you’re perfect for me. You’re smart, gorgeous, kind and amazing. Never think *anything* else. Understood?”

Her eyes glisten with unshed tears. Taking her bottom lip between her teeth, she nods. “Good, let’s get to your surprise then, yeah?” I take her hand and lead her toward Stonewall.

## Chapter 8

### Kimble

Holy shit! That kiss was... it was... fuck, I can't even think! That's what his kiss was, a melter. Brain, panties, it doesn't matter. He's an assassin and taking them all out. I've never been kissed like that. Hell, I have never felt like that. The way he picked me up so easily and attacked my mouth with such passion, it was almost animalistic. And hot. *Alright, Kimble get your shit together.*

I repeat his words in my head. I'm sorry. *I didn't mean to... you just look so enticing, and you literally fell into my arms. I couldn't help myself. Please, forgive me?*

Didn't mean to? Does he regret kissing me now? *Oh, God. I bet he thinks I'm such a slut.*

He's saying all these sweet things about me and I hear him grumble something about me being perfect for him and asking me if I understand.

For some reason I want to say, Yes, Sir. But I refrain and my teary eyes meet his. I'm not sure what I did to deserve him, but I'm damn sure glad I did it.

As we're walking to wherever we're going, I wonder what we're doing here. What kind of date can you have on a college campus?

Near the science building he stops and pulls a black cloth from his pocket. "I need to put this on you. Trust me?" he asks. The crazy thing is, I do. Something in my gut tells me that he'd never do anything to hurt me or let anyone else bring me harm.

"Yes. Completely." A huge smile stretches across his face. Not once in my life did I think something so simple as a boy smiling at me could make me so happy, but with Riftyn, everything does.

He steps behind me, placing the blindfold across my eyes. Then, he takes my hand in his and places his other at the small of my back. We go through a door and climb way too many stairs for my liking. Suddenly, I know we're not in the

building anymore. I can feel the breeze across my skin, and there's a chill here that wasn't there before we entered.

He pauses beside me, removes the blindfold and with his deep, sexy voice, says, "I wanted to give you the stars."

The scene before me takes my breath away. We're on the top of the science building where they have the telescopes and the huge bean bag looking chairs. Right in the middle of the space, is a blanket spread out with a picnic basket sitting on the edge. There are candles and lanterns placed everywhere that give off a campfire type light. It's the sweetest, most remarkable thing anyone has ever done for me and my emotions get the better of me.

"Riftyn, this is gorgeous! When did you even have time to do this? How? Why?" I don't even know what I'm saying at this point because my happiness is flowing freely. He leads me over to the blanket and we sit. Pouring us each a drink he hits a button on a little remote he pulls from his pocket. Ed Sheeran's 'Perfect' plays from the speakers around the roof.

"Well, I had a little help setting up. We can thank Zane later. Do you remember the night we met?"

I nod, urging him to continue. "We spent half of that night talking about astrology, horoscopes, and stars."

“Right,” he continues, “I remembered, so I thought this would make a perfect date. Plus, I have something I need to talk to you about, so privacy helps us both.”

I take a sip of my still chilled drink. “You nailed it. It’s perfect. Thank you.”

He smiles. “Before we continue, would you like to see what we’re having for dinner?” He opens the basket and once again I’m floored. He starts laying out a bunch of my favorite foods. There’s chocolate covered strawberries, little cheese crackers, PB&J sandwiches, pasta salad, and these cute, perfect, turkey and cheese pinwheels.

“How did you know?” There’s no way he could’ve guessed all of this. One of the girls had to tell him.

“I pay attention, Red.” He winks. When he does little things like that, they set my core on fire and melt away the walls I’ve built up around my heart.

“Obviously.” I murmur. We go to reach for a strawberry at the same time and he bats my hand away, picking it up and offering me a bite. I take the offering as seductively as I can but fail miserably. Something about his intense look as I bite down is almost comical. And then, the strawberry explodes! Juice and chocolate go everywhere. I burst out laughing which



sends more mess running down my chin. *Great job, Kimble! You should've been the star in that movie How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days.*

I roll my eyes at myself and catch a glimpse of Riftyn. His shoulders are shaking and he's hiding behind his hand. I'm mortified, but he just looks at me with humor in his eyes and taps his finger on his chin. "You, um, got a little something right there." He takes a napkin and gently wipes at my face. He must see the horror in my eyes and finds it funny because he breaks, not able to contain his laughter. I can't help but start laughing again, too.

"Leave it to me. If something weird can happen, it'll happen in my presence," I do a seated bow as I bury my face in my hands. He tips my face up to meet his.

Closing his eyes, he takes a visible breath. He's shaking as if he's afraid of something. Opening his eyes again, he regains his composure. "I have to tell you something. Something you might not understand, but need to know. You may hate me after, but I have to say it now or I'll lose my courage."

I gulp, staring into his piercing, teal eyes. "Nothing you say could make me hate you. Whatever it is, I'm sure we can work it out."

He takes a deep breath, obviously struggling with how to begin again. “Have you ever heard of fated mates?” He’s waiting for a response so I nod my head yes, since I’ve read that in books, and urge him to continue. “You’re mine, Red. I knew it from the moment I saw you at the club. I feel it in my heart, my soul, my bones. Everything about me knows that you’re the one for me. My destiny. My world. My forever. My end and beginning.” He releases the breath he was holding and looks at me like a lost kitten wanting to be loved. Somehow, deep down, I know what he says is true. Somewhere inside of me, I feel the same way. Like I can’t breathe without him. He’s my air and support. My past. My future. My everything.

“I don’t know how, and I don’t know why, but I feel what you feel. I have never had feelings for someone like I do for you. It’s scary for a person like me, but with you, Riftyn, I don’t feel so afraid. I know you’ll always protect me. You’ll always be by my side.”

“Until the end of time, Kimble. You’re mine and I’m yours.” His smile is mesmerizing, I could stare at it for hours. And his face, and his muscles, and his hands. Oh my God, his hands. The way they roamed my body earlier, makes me want to find out what they feel like on my skin. Touching, grabbing, exploring... everywhere.

*Alright there, Slutty McSlutterson. Time to slow it down!*

But I don't, I can't. I have this magnet pulling me toward him so I lean forward and kiss him. Hard. Like if he doesn't share his next breath with me, I'll die. Our mouths part and our tongues war together. It's as if we're both fighting for dominance.

Gently, he lays me back on the blanket and braces himself above me with his elbows. One hand roams the outer part of my thigh while the thumb of his other hand strokes the side of my face. He deepens the kiss, both of us struggling to get closer to each other. I close my eyes, breathing him in.

I already know I'm in love with this man.

## *Chapter 9*

### **Riftyn**

She accepted. I couldn't imagine a better outcome. She's in my arms and holding onto me like I'm her lifeline. I am and she's mine.

Bracing myself on my elbow, I take my other hand and stroke down her inner thigh. Her skin is so soft and smells sweet like lavender, which is quickly becoming my favorite scent.

I slide my fingers under her panties and feel her shudder. Her whole body trembles in anticipation for what's to come.

*Her. Hopefully.*

***Shut up! Now's not the time for your inner commentary, dude.***

*Well, when is the time? When do I get to come out and play?*

***This is our first time together.***

*Ugh, fine. But you better not be a two pump chump or I will find a way to kill you myself.*

***Seriously? Go the fuck away!***

I focus back on Kimble. She's staring at me as if I've grown another head. Technically, I have. I know she can feel how impossibly hard I am pushing up against her. Bringing us back to the moment, I lean down and plant kisses on her neck. Nibbling and sucking on the spot behind her ear and the soft part of shoulder. She moans loudly, and then covers her mouth as if she's never made the sound before.

"Red, can I ask you something?" I mutter between nibbling on her earlobe and kissing her neck.

"Yes," she replies breathily. Whether that's from the sensations she's feeling or an answer to my question I don't know. So, I go for the latter.

“Do you want this? Me? If you say no, that’s perfectly fine. I’ll stop. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable or regret anything that happens. Especially with me.”

She wiggles out from under me so she can fully sit up, takes my face in her hands and looks me right in the eyes. “I’m just nervous. I’ve never felt this way about someone before. I know you won’t hurt me and I know this’ll be perfect. So, yes, RIFTYN. I want you.”

*Why’s it so hot when women say things like that?*

It’s all I need to hear, so I pull her closer, and run my hands down her body. Lifting her up to her knees and starting at the hem, I shimmy her dress over her head. Fuck me, she’s gorgeous. Her alabaster skin is soft and supple. There are a few freckles that splatter her chest right above her perfect breasts. They’re plump cantaloupes I can’t wait to savor. So I don’t. I guide her onto her back and take one into my mouth. I gently suck and tease with my tongue while caressing her breast. Her back arches and the sounds she makes has my dick straining against my zipper.

Taking my other hand, I trail it down her body, feeling her every curve and valley. Reaching her panties, I slide my hand under the waistband. In one swift movement, I tear them off of her enjoying the view before me.

“You’re so ready for me,” I groan, kissing down her stomach. I take my time exploring, kissing, and tasting every inch of her body. She’s a trembling, panting mess and she’s never looked hotter. I want to bury my face in her just to hear her scream my name.

I plant kisses on her inner thigh, traveling up to where I truly want to be. Trailing my nose through her wetness, I inhale deeply. Her scent makes my mouth water. I’m a starving man; her arousal, her sounds; all fuel me and I know I can’t wait any longer. Leaning down, I get my first taste of Kimble, and her delectable essence explodes across my tongue.

“Oh,” she gasps, and the breathy sound drives me higher. I want nothing but to draw more and more sounds out of her.

I flatten my tongue, dragging it to her entrance where I insert the tip, softly teasing her. She moans, her entire body shudders. Gasps and little whimpers of ‘please’ come out with each breath. Inserting two fingers, I thrust them into her. Curling them, I graze the spot that makes her legs shake and toes curl while I massage her sensitive nub with my tongue. I put my hand on her abdomen to keep her in place, she’s grinding against my face. Grabbing fistfuls of my hair, she pulls me further into her, pushing my head closer. Her moans are so loud, I’m surprised the people in the dorms can’t hear her.

She tries again to wiggle away from me so I wrap my hands around her thighs, holding her in place.

“Fuck, Riftyn!” she cries out, her back arching off the blanket. She grabs onto my hair with both hands, pulling it as her whole body tenses. Her legs tremble and her orgasm erupts all over my face. I lap up all her succulent juices. Standing, I look down at her naked body before me, my dick twitches and I know she’s all mine. Taking off my shirt and undoing my belt and pants, I slide them down to my ankles and my erection springs free as I step out. She whimpers. I dig the condom out of my wallet and her hand reaches out.

“Wait. Can I...?” She looks up at me with pleading eyes.

“Red, you can do anything you want. It’s yours.”

She crawls over to me, takes one finger and slides it down my length.

*Yes, let her touch you. Show her how much we appreciate her and her touch. Don’t blow your load with this, though. Be a man. Think of baseball stats or naked grannys or... something.*



***Naked grannys? You're making it very hard to concentrate, will you please just fuck off?***

*Dude, that's what I'm trying to do. Help you fuck off. C'mon do something, because right now you're just sitting here watching her explore your dick like this is a 5th grade Sex-Ed study. Growl or do something dude, like, you're gonna lose your man card at this point.*

I'm so fucking done with him today. I can't take anymore of his bullshit so I tune him out and focus back on Kimble. She's wrapping her hand around my shaft and then she does the hottest thing I've ever seen.

She kisses the tip and I desperately try to hold on...

## Chapter 10

### Kimble

I'm sitting here looking up at Riftyn totally naked with his dick in my hand; flustered, out of breath, and completely turned on. His body is fucking phenomenal, ripped muscles and a golden tan. I can finally see all of the tattoo that peeks from under his shirt. It's this huge tribal wolf covering half his chest and goes down his stomach around his right hip. And oh my god, he has that V that leads down to... *well, where I'm currently holding. Heaven.*

He's really big there too. I don't know how that's even going to fit! *Just shut up and go with it.* Lost in thoughts of him, I do the first thing that pops into my head, I kiss the tip.

As I do, Riftyn sucks in a deep breath and leans his head back, biting on his bottom lip. *Alright, he likes it. Shit, I got this!*

I swirl my tongue around his head and glide it down the length of him. I slide my other hand up and down, keeping a constant rhythm with my mouth. He groans as I rake my nails across his thighs. I drag him to me, drawing him further down my throat. *You're killin it, Kimble.* I cheer myself on.

Suddenly, he fists my hair. With his head thrown back, he growls in pleasure. That growl is quickly becoming my favorite sound. He pulls away from me, looks down, and trails his thumb across my bottom lip.

“Red, you gotta stop. I need to be inside you.”

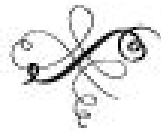
Before I can respond, he has me on my back, the condom on and his tip pressed to my center.

Slowly, he eases into me, going deeper than I thought possible. The mix between pain and pleasure is almost more than I can handle. I scream out his name and he wipes away the little tear that's falling from my eye. If I thought what he was doing to me earlier was amazing, it's nothing compared to what he's doing now. I can feel him... everywhere. My heart, my soul, throughout my entire being.

My whole body is on fire and I meet him thrust for thrust. He's pistoning, hitting that perfect spot that amps my pleasure

up higher and higher. I'm writhing beneath him, knowing that after this I'm ruined. There's no going back for me. He's it. I'm done for. We find our release together and crumple in a mass of limbs and sweat.

As we lay there, he kisses me gently and tucks me into his side with my head resting on his chest. I've never felt so satisfied and safe as I do right now. "I love you," he whispers, and it takes mere seconds before I'm fast asleep, feeling nothing but love for the man who's changed my whole world.



I start moving around and I swear my bed has never been more comfortable... or hot. Jesus, Piper must have turned on the damn heat. I reach to throw my blankets off me and find there are none. But there is this very fuzzy thing encircling me.

Wait... fuzzy thing? I don't have a fuzzy blanket and I sure as shit don't have a pet! I roll over and come face to face with the snarling wolf from my dreams. Except, it's a lot bigger, a lot scarier, and a whole lot closer to me than in dreamland!

I don't know what to do. I'm so screwed. This is it, the end, this is why I never committed before. One wonderful night and the next morning I'm gonna get taken out. Great, just when life was getting good.

The massive white wolf laying next to me grumbles and snorts. I think it even farts, I'm not sure as it's just making all kinds of noises now. Hot air releases from its nose and I can't do anything but lay here. Frozen in time, watching my life flash before my eyes. I didn't get to say goodbye to my mom, the girls... Riftyn.

Oh my god, Riftyn! Did the big fucker kill him already? Maybe he's too full to eat me... ah, who am I kidding? This massive thing could use me as a toothpick. I'm so fucked.

The beast starts to stir. I close my eyes and just scream. If this bastard is taking me out, well I'll just annoy the hell out of him on my journey to the light. I feel his hot breath as it blows my hair back off my face. Then, I hear Riftyn calling my name.

*Oh good, he went to wherever I am, meaning I can have him in death too. That's so nice.*

I open one eye to peek around at the heaven or hell I know I've succumbed to and see Riftyn, naked as he was last night,

his hands on my shoulders saying my name.

“I’m not happy we died but I’m glad we went to the same place, Rift. I was afraid I was going to lose you.” I break down into sobs. Angel Riftyn, or ghost Riftyn, I’m not sure at this point, grabs me into a hug and smooths my hair.

“What in the world do you mean by we died and went to the same place? Kimble, we’re very much alive and still on top of the science building.”

*Oh this is so sad, he can’t accept it. Or maybe he just doesn’t know. Either way, I have to help him.*

“It’s okay, Riftyn. That giant, white wolf killed us for his dinner and now we’re, I’m just guessing here, in limbo... maybe? I’m not sure myself as I’ve never been murdered before, but at least we’re together. That’s what matters.” Just then he falls over, cackling as if I’ve just told the world’s best joke.

“What about this is funny? We had a romantic and wonderful night together and then WE DIED... how in the hell can you find any of that funny?”

“You are the cutest ever. Are you still nervous from last night? You wake up and see my wolf and make a joke about us

dying and I'm not supposed to find it funny?"

I give him my best 'go to hell' stare. Also, what the fuck did he just say? His wolf?

"Wait, you're serious? You really think we're dead? What kind of shifters have you been around?"

"First off, what do you mean by your wolf? Secondly, shifters? Like in books? Did you hit your head or something? There was a very large, very scary looking wolf here when I woke up and you, well you were missing, so are you saying that wolf is your... pet? I'm glad we're not really dead, though. I was just starting to like my life."

"This isn't something from a book, Kimble. This is real life. I'm a shifter. A few minutes ago, you met Cosa, my wolf. We share our minds, bodies, souls and spirits. We are one. He wanted to meet you, since you're our mate and all, in hopes that you'll fall for him, too. We learn about all of this from the start of our supernatural lives. Didn't your parents teach you?"

Okay, clearly sex really does cause men to lose brain cells because he is absolutely off his rocker.

"Supernatural is a TV show, Riftyn. There's no such thing as vampires or werewolves and all that. Are you okay? Do we

need to go to the hospital? I'm worried about you. Seriously."

"Wait. What? You can't be serious? You are supernatural, except I can't figure out what kind since you smell different. Did you think you were..." he pauses, looking at me as if I'm the crazy one here. *Nice try buddy, you're talking about fairy tales like they really exist.*

"I'm *not* supernatural! What the hell are you talking about? Did you take drugs or something while I slept? This is all crazy talk. I'm only human."

At my last words, Riftyn gets this strange look on his face and then his body shimmers and the next thing I see is that huge, white wolf standing in front of me. I take two steps back and he steps toward me. I move, he moves, and before I know it, I'm backed up against a pillar with nowhere to go. The wolf stalks closer, I reach my hands out to stop his assault and he... buries his muzzle in my hands. The hell? He wants me to pet him? This day can't get any crazier. So fuck it, I pet the big, danger puppy.

I stroke the fur on the top of his head, and his neck. He's so soft. Not wiry like you'd expect. He feels like a big ball of cotton, my hand tingles as I stroke him. I could bury my face in his fur and cuddle all day. He'd be better than any teddy bear that ever existed. Also, I'm pretty sure I'm currently



going out of my mind because Riftyn has again disappeared and this wolf has replaced him. Oh well, when in Rome.

*Hello, mate. I'm Cosa. It's an honor to feel your touch and to be in your presence. And to have you not screaming at me.*

“Huh? Who said that?” I whisper into the air.

*Me, Cosa. Since you're our mate, we can speak into your mind now. A link, through our bond. Riftyn wasn't lying. We do share all to become one. I have all of his memories and thoughts, just like he has mine. I'm his wolf, he's my human. And now, we're yours.*

“Yep, I've lost it. I actually believe this gargantuan wolf is talking in my head. I thought I was dead. Turns out I'm wrong and there must be amazing drugs in the looney bin because I'm pretty sure that's where I am now. My whole life has been a dream. Annnnd... now I'm talking to myself. Way to tack on the extra crazy, Kb.”

*You're not crazy, Mo grá (my love). You just choose not to accept it. Place both of your hands on either side of my face, then look me in the eyes. You'll see. I'm real, I'm both Cosa and your Riftyn, we're the same and you, Mo grá, are our true mate.*

I mean, why not do what the huge wolf who's talking in my head says to do? Nothing else can go wrong, right?

## *Chapter 11*

### **Riftyn**

I'm so confused. Kimble acts as though she knows nothing of the supernatural world and I'm, or Cosa rather, is explaining these things to her as if she's a newbie. I can't wrap my brain around this. I don't understand how she could act like this and still come to LSU. None of it makes any sense.

Finally, she gives in, doing as Cosa says and places both hands on either side of his head. There's a burst of energy, like static electricity and I feel our bond with her snap into place. She only had to accept it to secure it. She looks him right in the eyes, and hers flash. Like the television set from the movie where the little girl gets taken by the ghost or whatever. Except, hers are flashing in a green hue. She inhales deeply and closes her eyes.

Instantly, our memories start to mesh. Our pasts, our thoughts, our dreams all collide and jumble into one. She can see mine and I hers. Now I understand why she doesn't know anything. She hasn't been pretending not to know. She really didn't. I imagine that I did sound crazy to her before. Her mother has never told her anything. Raised her as a human. Until today, she thought all of this was made up stories for books or movies. I can feel the moment she releases us.

Her hands drop to her side and she faints. Cosa catches her in his muzzle gently and lays her on the ground. A bright, green light expels from her body as she begins to levitate.

She rises slowly into the air and her body turns, pointing her feet toward the floor. Her head falls back and her arms extend. It looks like something out of a horror movie. I quickly shift back to human form and prepare to... fuck, I don't know, catch her? The light emitting from her body is so bright I can barely see. Honestly, I'm afraid to touch her. But I will. I'll do anything she needs me to do. Even if I have no idea what's happening right now. She's okay. She has to be.

*She'll be fine. Our mate is strong, even in her weakest moments. You saw it for yourself, Riftyn. Have a little faith.*

He may drive me nuts sometimes, but honestly I wouldn't make it without Cosa in my life.

Suddenly, the whole building starts shaking as though there's an earthquake and Kimble crashes to her knees. I rush toward her, but her head snaps up, freezing me in place. Her eyes glow with that bright green color and something protrudes out of her back. Whatever it is starts growing longer and... holy shit, are those... wings?

The most astonishing wings extend to a frightening length. They're pearlescent, with almost a blue tint to them, making them appear transparent. Green tips on the end of them sparkle in the sunlight. She stands to her full height and the glow surrounding her dims. Her wings retract and I jump into action, taking the final steps to her side. She looks at me, smiles, then collapses. This time, I catch her in my arms.

As her eyes begin to close, I can hear her in my head.

*Riftyn, it's true. It's all true.*

## *Chapter 12*

### **Kimble**

My head, my face, my... everything hurts. I've no idea what happened or what's going on but I do know that I'm somewhere in RIFTYN's arms. I can hear him calling out to me, saying my name over and over. The sunlight is too bright to open my eyes, but I reach for him. I can hear his breath catch. Good, he knows I'm awake.

“Kimble? Oh my god. I've got you, Red. Are you okay?”

I try to speak, but my voice comes out hoarse and weak.  
“Yes. I'm fine, just tired and sore. What happened?”

“I have no idea what just happened to be honest. I just know you scared the shit out of me.”

Just then, my memories start flooding back to me. I jump up like I've been bitten, and glance around the rooftop that we're still on... How are we still here?

“Where is he? Your wolf. Cosa. Where'd he go? He showed me, Riftyn. He showed me *everything*. My mother has lied to me from the start. My whole life! I'm... I'm not human. How can this be? I don't have powers or anything that I know of. What if I'm dangerous? You should get away from me. I could hurt you.” He laughs, because he obviously thinks I'm crazy. “Red, we're not afraid of you. You won't hurt us. Not intentionally, at least. You just need a little time to process, that's all.”

I break down. It's too much, this information overload. Riftyn wraps me in his arms and carries me back over to our pallet. “I don't have all the answers. Not yet, anyway. But I swear, I'll stop at nothing to help you find them.”

We stay there a little longer, wrapped in each other's arms as we talk about, and process, everything that's happened. After a while, we help each other get dressed and gather our things so we can head home. I check my phone and have forty-seven unread text messages, and six missed calls from my mom. I hit send to call her back. She only says, “We need to talk, I'll be there soon. I love you, Bumblebee,” and hangs up. She's coming here. Good. I have lots of questions I need answered.

We arrive back at the apartment building, and Riftyn walks me to my door. Taking my key out, I turn to look at him. My hands shake and I feel the tears gathering in my eyes. “Will you...” I begin - I don’t even know what I’m going to say to anyone at this point. “Will you come in and stay with me while I tell the girls? I don’t fully understand all of this myself and I don’t think I can face this alone,” I whisper.

He nods and smiles. “Of course, I have you now and always, Red. You never have to face anything alone. Ever again.”

We step inside my apartment, and just as I thought, I’m bombarded with questions. All the girls are talking at once. My head is pounding so I can’t understand anything anyone is saying.

I take a deep breath and move to the couch so I can sit and relax. All of this has been a lot. Holding up my hand, I put a stop to all of the questions.

“Look, I’m sorry I didn’t check in. Riftyn and I had a wonderful night, and then, something I don’t even know how to explain happened. My mom is on her way here, so I assume all of yours are, too. I can do my best to answer your questions, and Riftyn is here to help. He can definitely explain more than I can.”



All of their faces look stunned. Willow is the first to speak.

“Okay, you look different, so I assume a *lot* happened. And this morning your mom was blowing up all our phones because she couldn’t get ahold of you. Which is unusual. She sounded really panicked, Kb. So, I’ll start with the easiest question. Why is your mom, and possibly ours, coming here?”

“I’m not entirely sure. But after I... woke up, I saw all the missed calls and texts. I called her back and all she said was, ‘We need to talk. I’m on my way’. That was an hour ago. So, I expect them soon.”

“That’s not ominous at all,” Piper mumbles. “Can you try to fill us in on the thing you can’t explain?”

This is where I get nervous. What if they don’t believe me? Or my mom has me locked up somewhere with padded walls? Pushing past my fear, I take another deep breath.

“Remember the dream I told you all about?” A round of ‘yeahs’ echo through the living room. “Well, after falling asleep in each other’s arms last night, I woke this morning to the same wolf from my dream. I couldn’t find Riftyn and I honestly thought we were both dead. Turns out, I couldn’t

have been more wrong. Although, what I know now makes me feel crazier than before, so I'm not sure which is better."

Everyone turns to look at each other and shrugs their shoulders. Mila waves her hand in a go on gesture.

"Um," I clear my throat. "Riftyn is that big, white wolf."

One after the other they exclaim, "What?!"

"You mean loverboy here is a canine? No offense, pal. Pal is okay, right? Or do you prefer Buddy? Want a treat?" Willow teases.

To his credit, he just laughs with her, and rolls his eyes. "I am going to assume you're all some sort of supernatural being since you were accepted to LSU. So, what if you turn out to be a shifter, Willow? Like a feline of sorts?"

"You calling me a pussy, dog boy?"

"If the litter box fits, Tabby," he retorts with a playful shrug.

They break out in laughter, easing the tension in the room. You'd think they've known each other forever. It makes me happy that two of the people I love most in this world... just get each other.

“As I was saying, you all have to be some sort of supernatural being, which means that not only have your powers been blocked but you’ve not been taught anything about your heritage or where you come from. I also assume that you thought the supernatural was for books and TV like Kimble did, correct?”

They all start nodding. He continues, “Everyone on this campus, including your professors, is supernatural. It’s the only way to get on the campus. The humans know about the school but during the interview the administration can smell them and determine whether they are fully human or not. We can all smell that you four are... something. We just don’t know what that something is. I have a guess, after seeing Kimble change, but it’s a mix I’m not sure of. It smells familiar, yet different. Maybe your moms can shed some light on it. I hope, anyway.”

For the first time in our entire eighteen years of life, everyone is speechless. Even Willow. I feel as if I should be documenting this somehow.

“Back up,” Willow starts. *That didn’t last long.* “What do you mean ‘after seeing Kimble change’? Change into what?”

“That’s what I don’t know. She fell unconscious, and this bright light surrounded her. It was blinding until my eyes

finally adjusted. Then these gorgeous pearlescent, transparent almost, green tipped wings sprouted from her back. She's captivating, whatever she is."

"Wings?" Mila whispers. "Like fairy wings or something?"

Why is no one tripping out about this? You'd think that we just told them we had tickets to Friday night's game or something. Not that my whole fucking life has changed. To top it off, I don't even know what I am. How's that for complete bullshit?

"They almost resemble fae wings, but not really, so I'm not sure about anything right now." He's answering their questions as best as he can and I love him even more for it. "I think it's best if we wait for your parents to get here. Surely they have more answers than I can give."

We all agree and the girls come over to me on the couch. They hug me and we cuddle, waiting for my mom, or our moms, to arrive. Hopefully they can help because I have way more questions than answers.

## *Chapter 13*

### **UNKNOWN**

I sat around all night watching them. I waited, invisible, in the trees while the redheaded bitch had her hands all over my Riftyn and then he fucked her. How could he? How could he do that to me? To us? He knows we're meant to be together. She must have him under some kind of spell. I knew she was something different when I smelled the bitch. Probably some kind of witch and just hiding it or something. I hate her. I hate them all.

These bitches came here thinking they could take over and have whatever they want. They'll soon learn that they can't. Especially Riftyn; he's mine. That's okay, though. Eventually, he will be right where he belongs. With me. I'm the only one good enough for him. It's definitely not that whore he's with now. Her family isn't even predominant in the community. No one knows her, or her little slut friends. I bet her mother was a

servant or something and got knocked up while trying to steal some other woman's family.

No worries. I'll make sure all of their lives are miserable here and Kimble Sawyer will go running back to her whore mother. And when my father finds out about them, he'll help me destroy them. He'd do anything for his little princess.

If it's the last thing I do, they'll regret the day they came to Legend Springs.

## *Chapter 14*

### **Riftyn**

“Anyone want some coffee or anything while we wait for the parents?” I ask the bundle of girls piled on the couch. They all say ‘yes’, never moving from their position.

I make my way to the kitchen, set up the coffee pot and turn it on. While it’s brewing, I pull my phone out and call Zane.

“Good to know you’re still alive. I thought Willow was going to call the cops and report you both missing,” he says in greeting.

“I’m alive, but man, this morning has been crazy as hell. Somehow, Kimble’s powers unblocked, or opened fully, or whatever the fuck happened. She has wings, Zane. A kind I’ve never seen before, but they’re fascinating.”

“Wings, really? So, she’s fae then?”

“Maybe. I’m not sure. Like I said, they’re unusual. Kind of resembles fae, but also... something else.”

“Maybe we can ask your dad? He’s well versed in all things supernatural. Plus, being the current Alpha he has access to the elders. They could know something more.”

“Yeah, I’ll give him a call when we’re done here. Right now, we’re waiting for her mom to show up. Maybe all of their moms. Hopefully, someone will have some answers.”

“All of their moms might come? Does Willow need me? Hell man, do you? Maybe we should come over and just get it all out in the open?”

“I’m okay. I’m just here to support Kimble. I can ask about you all coming, though. It might help for the girls to see and hear everything.”

I walk back into the living room with the coffee tray and hear Kimble laughing. That sound heals my heart some as watching her go through all that turmoil today has broken it.

“Hey ladies, the guys want to know if they can join the *‘everyone finds out the truth’ party?*”



Kimble looks at the other girls and they nod. Piper asks the one question I've been waiting for. "Are they like you? Wolf shifters or whatever?"

"No, they are all... something else."

"Well, what are they?" she questions.

"Can we wait until they get here? I think it's best if they tell you themselves."

Everyone nods as there's a knock at the door. I know it's the guys because of my senses. All of them are eager and nervous for this conversation.

All supernaturals have one true mate. Sure we can mess around with other people but there is only one person that shares the other half of our soul. When the mate bond occurs, the mates share everything. Their thoughts, fears, hopes, dreams, their past and memories. They can even communicate telepathically. They become one, and live together for as long as their life force lasts. Which, for supernaturals, is thousands of years longer than a human.

I go to the door and let the guys in. The girls all jump up and wrap their arms around the guys. At least I know the

women that my brothers' souls have chosen, at minimum, like them back.

Kimble looks at me with a worried expression and speaks through our link.

*Do you think everything is going to be okay? Should I offer them something? I don't know what to do.*

*Everything will be fine, Red. Your mom will get here and answer all your questions, and the girls seem to have handled everything just fine.*

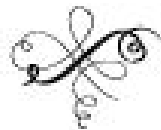
*Yeah, way better than I did. But I'm okay now. I just want to know what I am. After so many years of thinking I knew myself, this happens, and now I feel as though I don't know who I am anymore.*

*That's understandable. We all went through that phase when we were younger. And we had way more time to adjust than you've had. It'll all work out, you'll see. Trust me, I know that you're something really badass.*

*How do you know that?*

*Because my soul chose yours.*

I give her a wink as I sit beside her on the couch. She, in turn, gifts me with the brightest smile I've seen from her all day. I'd do anything she ever wanted just to see that smile on her face. I'd do even more to keep it there.



The discussion with the guys went better than I thought it would. The girls are all excited about the possibility of what class they are and their powers. All but Piper; she looks like a nervous wreck and is afraid that her abilities probably have something to do with time management and that would, and I quote, 'completely mess up her schedule'. I can see exactly why these girls are best friends. Like the guys and me, they compliment each other in ways that you just can't make up.

Everyone is in deep conversation when we hear another knock at the door. I look to Kimble to see if she wants me to answer it, but Willow beats us to it. She flings it open and there stands a woman, who doesn't look much older than us, with fiery red hair and large sparkling blue eyes. I don't have to be introduced to know this is Kimble's mom. I stand, so do all the guys, as she walks into the room. You can feel the power radiating off of her and that makes me beyond

incredulous at how the girls have never felt it before. Behind her walks three more women into the room. All of them, almost carbon copies of their daughters. All of them, powerful as hell.

They survey the living room, which is packed full, and then each smiles at her daughter. I guess the circle of truth is about to begin.

## *Chapter 15*

### **Kimble**

I jump off the couch and throw myself into my mom's arms. "I've missed you so much," I say, squeezing her tight. Everything within me settles from being in her arms, and the comfort of knowing my mom is here. Her familiarity helps make today that much better. But something has changed. Something is... different about her.

"You smell different. New perfume?" I ask, sniffing around her like a dog. She chuckles and holds me at arms length.

"No, Bumblebee, your powers are unblocked now. What you smell is me. My class. My power. You'll soon be able to recognize the difference in all supernaturals, especially those closest to you. You'll be able to locate them by using your senses."

“So, you know what’s going on? You’ve always known? And you kept all this shit from me, from us, this whole time!” My anger starts to grow and a bright light emits from my palms. Riftyn comes up beside me, taking my hand and rubbing circles on my skin with his thumb. Instantly, I’m calmer, but I need explanations and I need them right fucking now.

“I’ve known, yes. But, honey, you must understand that we,” she points to the other moms, “only kept it from you girls to protect you. What you are, and yes we’ll get to that in a moment, is rare and very powerful. Especially when you’re together. If the wrong people find out about you, your lives will be in constant danger. We, and your fathers, have extremely evil and power hungry enemies. We wanted you girls to have as normal of a life as you could, as normal as we could give you. Once you turned eighteen, we knew it was time to let you free. All supernaturals come to this school to learn, to explore, and to grow. And now, you’re here to do the same. But you must be vigilant and careful.” Mom reaches out her hand to wipe the tears that are falling from my eyes. “I know you’re upset, Bumblebee, but I promise we’ll answer any questions you girls have.”

I dry my eyes quickly and offer them a seat. Zane clears his throat and motions for the other guys to leave the room. Riftyn looks like he would rather die than leave my side, but I nod to him and they head to the kitchen. It’s not as though their

supernatural hearing, or my mind link with Rifty, won't let them eavesdrop on the conversation, anyway.

Willow's mom, Poppy, leans to her daughter and whispers loudly. "Damn, Will, I take it you're banging the hot little bloodsucker?" Willow's eyes widen and she asks her, "Not yet, but how did you know?" Poppy just laughs, "I can tell because he looks at you like you're expensive chocolate. That's love, girl." Willow and her mom giggle loudly together. Why aren't the girls more pissed off? For over eighteen years, this has all been kept a secret from us. My mom clears her throat and they both snap to attention. "Sorry, Fiona, please continue," Poppy says, a smile still lingering on her lips.

"Maybe it would be easier if we let them ask questions instead, Fi." This from Jazmine, Mila's mom.

"I have about a thousand questions, are you sure you're ready for them all? Are you prepared to actually answer them?" Piper questions from her spot next to her mom, Raven, who responds, "We figured you would, dear, but let's allow Kimble to go first since her powers are manifesting. Okay?" Piper slinks back into her seat, pouting, but she quiets and waves her hand in permission for me to take my turn.

"The most important question I have right now is, what am I? Or rather, what are we?"

They all turn to look at each other and nod. Standing in a line, they look at us one by one then snap their fingers and a shimmer of light surrounds them. Suddenly, our mother's are gone, well not gone really, but different versions of the ones that were just standing there. They're way taller than before, and their eyes have that same sparkle and glow to them I saw in Claire and her posse's, with the colors ranging from ice blue to a violet purple. Their skin shimmers like they're wearing too much body glitter and their hair, which is still the same color, is shiny and bright. Almost as bright as their skin. We sit there in awe, staring. No one says anything for what feels like forever.

I swallow the lump in my throat. "Mom, you... you're... amazing. What are you?"

She smiles the biggest smile. "We're fae, Bumblebee. Just like you are. Sort of."

"Sort of? What do you mean, sort of?"

"While we're full-blooded fae, your fathers are... something else entirely. A very rare coupling. Not many have heard of such. Which is why you're considered so powerful and why your rarity puts your lives in danger. Unless, you can somehow hide that side of you. But by the feeling I had when you... awakened... I'm afraid it might not be possible."



“Okay, so part fae and part... what else?” I ask, afraid I may not like the answer. What if it’s something awful like a porcupine shifter or some shit?

*Yeah, babe, a porcupine with wings? Sounds feasible.* RIFTYN laughs through our link. Shit, I forgot he can hear my thoughts too. I have to find a way to close those off, if that’s even possible. I wonder if he can tell I’m flipping him off in my mind right now?

Yes, *he can*. I hear his laughter from the kitchen.

I let out a very loud sigh, complete with rolling my eyes as far back in my head as they can go, and turn back to my mother. She smiles like she can read my thoughts, which I hope she can’t, and continues. “Your fathers are angels.” Four pairs of feet come barreling out of the kitchen, and Willow jumps up with her arms in the air.

“Hold the front door! You’re fucking with us, right? Angels? Like white fluffy clouds, halos and harps, let me talk to God for a minute, angels?” Willow exclaims.

Poppy just laughs. “No, Will, more like Castiel type angels. Four of the most powerful ones to be exact.”

Stunned silence echoes throughout the living room. None of us speak or move or do anything. We just sit there in awe. *Holy shit, we're part angel? Wait, can I say shit being an angel? Shit. Fuck. Okay, I'm already bad at this.*

Riftyn barks out a laugh, making all heads in the room turn to him. He just shrugs and smiles at me. Yep, learning how to turn that link off first thing.

Finally, Lucien speaks up. “Wait, I thought angels only reproduced with humans to make Nephilims? But you're fae. Why haven't we heard of this before?”

“Our children are the first Cranirians since 1459 BCE. Only the elders of each species know and only because their seers have spoken of them. They were all destroyed in that era because of their great power. The light elders believed they could use them to save all of humanity, and the supernatural world. The dark elders wanted to use them to overthrow the light elders, and infect humanity. So, the council got together and made the decision to destroy all of the Cranirians, to keep the balance of power intact. If anyone were to find out what our daughters are, it would be a race to see who could kill or corrupt them fastest,” Jazmine says as a lone tear falls down her cheek.

“So how do we keep what we are a secret, and who are our fathers?”

My mom sighs, comes over and takes my hand, looking directly into my eyes. “Do you still have your necklace?”

I nod knowing she means the one with the little orb on it, but I ask her anyway to make sure. “The one that my father supposedly left me?”

“Yes. Will you please go get it?”

I hurry to my room and open my jewelry box, grabbing the necklace from its place and rush back into the living room. Excitement fills me as I wait to see what secrets it holds. I look at the tiny emblem made up of a pair of wings and a compass star, a little arrow pointing to the north.

“If you open the necklace a lot of your questions about your father will be answered,” my mother gently says.

“But there’s no opening, I’ve tried. We all have. It’s just a little globe. There are no lines, locks or anything.”

“Show it your light,” she says. Taking the necklace and putting it in my left hand she brings my right to hover over it. “Just breathe and let the light come out. The globe responds only to you.”

Closing my eyes, I try to think of ways I can get my light to work. It came out earlier when I was upset, and Riftyn says I was surrounded by it before at the science building so I'm assuming it works with my emotions. Maybe a happier one this time will get the light to come out. I start thinking of my night with Riftyn. The smiles we shared, the laughs, the kisses, the way he worshiped my bo... I start to smile as a light breeze ruffles my hair, then I hear a voice I've never heard before.

"Hello, my darling daughter. I'm so happy to finally see you after all this time." The deep, soothing voice echoes through the room. I open my eyes to see the necklace laying open in my hand, an image of a man with reddish, sandy brown hair is there.

"Who are you?" My voice quivers at the sight of the handsome man before me.

"I am your father, Uriel. You summoned me here with your light."

"You're *my* dad?" The spectral image, hologram, or whatever this is of the... angel before me is breathtaking. Everyone stares at the projection of my father coming out of the necklace, there's not a single sound in the room until... "Daaaamn, Kb. Your dad's a DILF!" Willow whisper yells. I glare at her and if looks could kill...

Uriel chuckles and clears his throat. “Yes, my child. It’s good to see you again.” He turns to look at my mother with longing in his eyes. “You too, Fiona.” There’s tears pooling in Mom’s eyes. This must be hard for her, too. She smiles and nods her head toward me. My father presses his lips together in a knowing smile and turns back to me. “I’m sure you have lots of questions, Kimble, and I want to guide you as much as I can. But I want you to know that I’ve watched you grow. I’ve seen the amazing woman you’ve become and I know that you will make us proud in whatever you face. But there are dangers out there, ones not even your mother or I know of. A prophecy brought the four of you into being, but it’s that same prophecy which we all fear.”

“So, you meant for us to be Cranirians? We were... planned?”

“Yes. You four will either save the world as we know it, or be its demise. Free will and pure determination will be the deciding factors in whatever the outcome. You each represent an element, like the warrior angels that fathered you. You, Kimble, represent Earth. Much like your mate, the wolf.”

I quickly lock eyes with Rifty, his Adam’s apple bobs in his throat as he swallows. He smiles and takes my hand, once again showing me that he’ll be here for me. Always. I fall in love with him a little more at this moment.

“So, Mom said that I should try to hide my angel side. Any suggestions on how to do that?”

“Your angel powers are still growing and soon will be stronger than any other power you possess. For now, no one knows that this coupling still exists. It’ll make it easier to hide. They’ll sense your fae side, especially as your powers continue to grow. My only real suggestion is not to let them see your wings. You never know who’s watching, who’s listening. Stay on guard, your mate will also help protect you, naturally. His scent will help mask yours the more time you spend together. And, Daughter?”

“Yes, fa.. um Uriel?” I can’t call him Dad just yet. He hasn’t been around my whole life and even now he’s only a projection.

“Do try to keep your light at bay as well. Meditate, or whatever it is you need to do to stay calm. Your light is triggered by your emotions. The stronger the emotion, the more powerful the light. It’s a weapon as much as any other power you have.”

I look over to Riftyn, conveying, hopefully, how fucked up this whole situation is, when Cosa speaks through our link.

*No, worries, Mo grá. You’re ours. We got you.*

Hearing Cosa's words eases me more. I can feel his love for me, along with Riftyn's, and I wrap my arms around myself in comfort. I can't believe this is my life now.

## *Chapter 16*

### **Riftyn**

Hours after Uriel's projection ended and everyone got their fill of talking, we finally settle in for the night. I held off on calling my dad, as we have to keep this a secret and it's not my story to tell.

After everyone else has gone to bed, Kimble turns to me. "Will you stay with me tonight?" she asks, a little smirk on her lips. Fuck. How can I say no to that, to her?

I can't, so I scoop her into my arms. "Always." She smiles and directs me to her room. It's not what I expected a girl's room to look like. There's pictures of her and friends and family scattered over the plain white walls. Clothes are everywhere. Literally. It looks like either a bomb went off in her closet and dresser or she was robbed. I look around. "Red, you're a slob," I chuckle.



“I know. It’s a thing.” She shrugs. “Consider it my only flaw.” With a wink she spins and heads into her closet. Stepping up behind her, I move her hair to the side, and kiss her neck. “I’m really proud of you. The way you handled all that information tonight and meeting your father for the first time, that’s a lot.” She shivers, her body melts into mine and I wrap my arms around her waist splaying my fingers over her stomach.

“I know I flipped out before, Rift. I’m sorry for all that... crazy, but you have to understand where I’m coming from. I didn’t know any of this existed. And then I find out I’m part of this world. It’s nuts. But I feel it, Rift. I can feel the power coursing through me now. All of my senses are heightened. I can smell everything. Hear everything. My body tingles all the time. It’s an amazing feeling.”

“I know. I can feel what you feel, remember?” I pull her closer to me and run my hands down her sides.

She grinds her ass into my quickly growing hard-on. “Hmmm. Seems you can feel what I feel.” The flirtation in her tone is clear and confident.

Spinning her around to face me, I start kissing her neck. The quiet, little moans that come out of her affect me in the most primal way. Walking us backward to her bed, I push her down.

She flops with a tiny giggle and shimmies up to the top. I crawl up from the foot of the bed and, starting at her ankles, begin planting kisses up her leg to her inner thigh. She wiggles and moans, trying to close her legs.

“Nu uh, Red. Keep still or I’ll stop.” Her legs fall open again and she sighs. I reach the apex of her thighs, pressing my nose into her center, reveling in the sweet, lavender scent of her arousal. Knowing the wet spot in her panties is only for me.

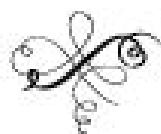
Pushing her panties to the side, I glide my tongue over her, savoring her flavor. I growl as I push my mouth closer, sucking and nibbling on her clit. Straightening my tongue, I push it into her, making her moan and lose control. After I’ve drained every drop from her I can, I make my way up her body, getting rid of our clothes in the process, and kissing and licking as I go. When I get to her breasts, I take one of her pert nipples into my mouth and gently bite down. She hisses out a breath and her wetness soaks my knee that’s between her thighs.

Running my nose up her neck, I nip her chin. I’m rock solid against her. Teasing her, I run my fingers through her wetness. “Please, Rifty. Please, I need you,” she begs.

I lean down and whisper in her ear, “Not yet. Tonight, I’m taking my time with you.” I can feel her shiver and she

whimpers. That adorable pout of hers protrudes off her bottom lip.

Looking into her eyes, I know that no amount of magic or danger could tear me away from her. And I keep my promise, I spend the next several hours indulging in her body.



Waking up the next morning with her in my arms is breathtaking. The sunlight streams in through the windows highlighting her gorgeous red hair and brightening her already angelic face.

***Morning, C. You slept well for the first time in a long time.***

*Because we had our mate with us. I'm at peace. But she is a bed hog and I could use a good run.*

***Yeah, me too, bro. Should we wake her and ask her to come with us?***

*Most definitely! May I have the honor?*

***Sure. Go for it.***

I shake her a little until she begins to stir. *Mo grá, wake up, please. We'd like to take you somewhere special. Wake, my love.* Cosa is ever so patient with her, gentle. Wish the fucker would be nice to me like that. She mumbles something sleepily, but moves to get out of bed. She stretches her long legs, and yawns. Even her sleepy, not quite awake form, causes a stir inside of me. I'll never get enough of her. I just hope she can handle that.

Letting her do whatever it is that women do when they're waking, I head to the kitchen to make us breakfast before we head out.

*Hey, Rift? Cosa said we're goin someplace special, wanna fill me in on that? Or at least what to wear?*

I love how quickly she's accepted the link and uses it willingly.

*I won't spoil the whole surprise, babe. Just wear casual clothes. T-shirt and shorts or leggings. Whatever you're most comfortable in.*

*Ugh. We're not going to work out, are we? I hate the gym.*

*No, lazy bum, not going to the gym. Don't ask me anymore 'cause I won't tell you. Just get your cute little ass ready and come eat your breakfast.*

*You made me breakfast? Awe, is there bacon?*

She bounds into the room, searching. When she finds it she squeals.

“You *do* love me! Look at all this bacon. Oh my god, it's perfect! Just the way I like it.” She takes the entire plate of bacon and sits at the counter, not caring about any of the other food.

Chuckling, I go over and try to nab a piece, only for her to smack my hand. As serious as she can be, she lowers her voice and makes it gruff, holding the plate of bacon in her arms. “My precious,” she says, obviously trying to imitate Gollum.

I burst out laughing. I love the playful side of her. She's joy and light and everything to me. I don't know a whole lot but I do know that I'm one lucky bastard.

“Hurry up and eat your bacon breakfast, Red, and we'll get out of here.”

“Sir, yes Sir!” She salutes and goes back to her plate. Or lack thereof really, she’s seriously only eating the damn bacon. I’ll know better next time to not even worry about any of the other food groups.

After I’ve finished eating my food, sans bacon, and she’s finished her heart attack on a plate, we grab our bags and head off to the woods. Cosa and I can’t wait to run with our girl. I can already tell today is going to be a good day.

## *Chapter 17*

### **Kimble**

Once again, I've no idea where Rifyn's taking me. But wherever we're going it has to be close since we're on foot.

"I thought maybe we could practice some of your powers today, just to see if you can adjust to them," he says as we're walking.

"That sounds good actually. I wasn't sure where I was going to do that since I don't think the apartment's a safe place to try. I don't know what I can do, and I'd kill myself if I hurt one of the girls. Or you guys." It would literally be the death of me if I caused harm to my family. Any of them.

"Good. Then where we're going is perfect. As a matter of fact, we're here."

Right as he says that, I look up. We're at a forest, or maybe a park that has a forest around it. I'm not sure. Either way, the place feels so familiar to me, but I can't quite put my finger on it. We stop right at the edge of the woods.

“Okay. First things first, you need to learn to control your change. Or glamour, or shift. I don't really know what to call what it is you can do, so let's go with change or shift right now, cool?”

I nod. I don't know what to call it, either, so who am I to complain? Hand in hand we take off walking through the woods. I'm looking around, scoping out the sights when, suddenly, my breath hitches. We're standing in the middle of the same clearing from my dreams. Everything is exact, from the trees growing around it to the lush grass in the middle.

“What is this place?” I ask, my eyes scanning everything around us.

“Wolf's Grove. It's a safe place for wolves to come and shift and just be. A lot of mating ceremonies happen here for wolves that have formed their own packs or whatever. It's just a spot where we can feel safe and so can our mates.”

“Wait, so nothing else can enter the grove?”



“Exactly. Only wolves, their mates or their packs can enter. Nothing and no one else can. Except for humans, sort of. They can stumble upon it, but once they leave, they won’t remember how to get back to it. It was spelled a long time ago by the eldest members of the supernatural community.”

“I dreamed of this place. A couple of times. Once, before the girls and I moved here, the next time about two months after we arrived. With the first one, I was scared shitless. It felt so real. I laid down right here in this exact spot for a nap because I was lost and exhausted. When I woke in the dream, Cosa, which I didn’t know at the time, was stalking me, staring and drooling. It looked like he was about to bite me. I woke up crying and covered in sweat. The next one was pretty much the same, but it was as if I had an understanding. I knew that I was supposed to meet him. That it was... my destiny. But as I reached out to touch him, again I woke up.”

“That was the mate call. It was our souls searching for one another. I had the same ones. We dream-walked together. Only mates do it. If you hadn’t been sheltered your whole life, you’d have known what was happening and we wouldn’t have scared you. I’m sorry you had to go through that. We’d never do anything to hurt you. We... love you.”

Hearing those three little words makes my heart swell. “I know that. Now. I trust you, Riftyn. You and Cosa both. I’m braver with you by my side. I love you, too.”

*Even me?*

***Yes, Wolfy. I love you, too.***

*You've no idea how long I've been waiting to hear that. Waiting for our mate. Waiting for you.*

Riftyn's face is instantly enveloped in a huge smile. Wrapping his arms around me, he kisses me. Slowly at first, but quickly he deepens it, pouring all of his love into this one single kiss. Too soon, it's over, but I'm okay with that. We're out here for a reason and I need to practice. I could easily get distracted by him. Staring into my eyes, he swipes his thumb across my lower lip. "Let's get you shifting, Red." Kissing my forehead, he steps back.

"A lot of us struggle starting out, so don't expect results right away. Don't let it frustrate you and try not to be nervous. Mostly it's mind over matter. Just breathe, relax, and focus. Remember, it's just you and me here. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Try thinking of your wings and the way your parents looked the other night. Concentrate on that and the feeling of shifting, or whatever you want to call it."

*You can call it bubbling for all I care, Mo grá. I just want to see it again.*

*Oh yeah, Cosa? So, it's official. You only love me for my powers?*

*And that ass. Don't forget that.*

I laugh, shaking my head. Poor Riftyn just runs a hand down his face like Cosa does nothing but embarrass him, which I guess he probably does. I don't mind how brash and outspoken Cosa is. It makes me trust him even more.

Closing my eyes, I try to focus. "Sure, sounds easy enough." I empty my mind of everything else but the idea of shifting. I think of my wings, per the description that Riftyn gave me. Concentrate on how my mom and Uriel looked in their true forms and how elated I'd be if I'm as perfect as they are. I inhale deeply, gathering all of those thoughts in my mind. After a couple of minutes, I squint one eye open to see if something's happening.

"Anything?"

"Not this time. Deep breath in, concentrate. You'll get it."

Shit. Okay, regroup. This time, I take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds and slowly breathe out. Focusing on my intent instead of the images. I think of what I want to happen; my glamour falling and my wings extending. My body tingles,

and I feel warmth all over, almost like I'm bathed in sunlight. I know something's changed even before Cosa speaks through the link.

*Open your eyes, Mo grá. See how dazzling you are.*

Opening my eyes, there's a green shimmer around me and a bright green light. Holy hell, are those my wings? They're remarkable. Tears pool in my eyes. The stress of everything, from finding out about my parents, to finding out that all of this supernatural stuff is real, just melts away. I can accept everything and I actually feel... happy about it all.

"Babe, you did it! Look at you. You're amazing!" Riftyn exclaims as he scoops me up in his arms, twirls me, and plants little kisses all over my face. I retract my wings as if I've been doing it my whole life. "Now," he says, "we need to see what else you can do. But first, Cosa wants to run. Is it cool if we take a break? I need to shift and let him out to play."

"Yes, I'd love to see Cosa and watch you shift. *Without* fainting this time," I laugh. Riftyn takes a step back and I watch with bated breath as his body transforms from human to the large, white, sublime wolf that is Cosa.

*Hey, Mo grá. Good to see you again.*

***Hey, handsome. Need a run?***

*Yes, very much. I love RIFTYN and all, but sometimes you need your beast to come out and play with you.*

He raises his eyes to mine and I think he winks. Can wolves wink? I don't know, but how crazy is all this? It feels as if I'm in this super real, super ridiculous, super elaborate dream that, honestly, I hope I never wake up from.

Cosa comes closer, his head down, but keeping eye contact. I run my fingers through his soft fur and he growls a low, deep rumble that feels like it shakes the ground. It almost sounds like RIFTYN.

*Because that is me, Mo grá.*

***You always call me that. Mow grow or whatever. What does it mean?***

*Mo grá means my love.*

***Is that what I am to you, Cosa? Even though I'm not a wolf? Which is something I don't understand. I thought fated mates had to be of the same species?***

*Not always. It doesn't matter what you are. Not your species, your gender, nothing. If our soul calls to your soul, then we're the perfect match. Details mean shit when it comes to love. Now, you're our other half. The only thing that matters to us anymore is your well being, your safety and, most importantly, your happiness. Nothing and no one will ever come before you. Not even when our souls leave this Earth.*

What is it with these two and making me cry? I feel like such a little baby whenever they say all these sweet nothings to me. The crazy thing, though, is that they don't feel like just words the way they do with most people. Deep down in my soul I can tell that everything they say is true. No waiver, no miscommunication, no sweet words to appease me. Just absolute truth. Nothing more, nothing less and I'm totally here for it.

*Can we run now, Mo grá? I need to move freely. Spread my wings, ya know?*

These guys and their jokes. Note to self: Google wolf jokes.

***Sure... but... um, Cosa we have a slight problem here.***

*What's that?*

*I'm not really a runner, like at all. And if you see me running, have it in good faith that something big and mean is chasing me. I don't think I can keep up.*

He laughs at me, or well whatever a wolf version of laughing is, but the bastard is seriously rolling his big ass around on the ground and some weird noise comes out of his snout.

*Oh my sweet, silly girl. You won't be running.*

*Okay? So, what, I just stand here and watch? That doesn't sound very fun to me.*

*No, Mo grá. You're gonna ride me.*

“Alright,” I stutter, “how do I do this?”

Nuzzling me with his nose, Cosa lays on the ground as flat as he can and lifts his head toward his back. I take that as my cue to climb on top of him. As I'm not the most agile person in the world, this could be entertaining for anyone watching us right now. The thought makes me pause and look around. I really hope no one is watching.

My first attempt to climb up there goes exactly like I thought it would. I fall off, right on my ass, with an oomph. I

know this damn wolf is laughing at me again because his whole body is shaking and he has his face covered by his paws. Asshole.

With a huff, I stand up, dust off and try again. This time, thankfully, I actually get up there and he stands to his full, four-legged height. I latch onto his fur and give myself a little pep talk. Calm your tits, Kb. *You have wings now, you can probably fly. I'm pretty sure your fear of heights is irrational.*

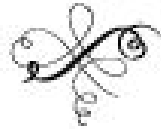
*You're fine, Mo grá. We won't let anything happen to you.*

***I know, but damn you're big.***

*That's what she said.*

If my eyes could roll any further back into my head they'd disappear. Cosa is brazen and bold. Doesn't give a shit about what he says, when he says it or who he says it to. A complete opposite of Riftyn, who is strong and stoic. Fearless and protective. Yet, so caring and kind and sweet. Together they're the total package and I couldn't be any luckier if I made them myself.





Running with Cosa is the most amazing experience I've ever had! Splayed across his large back, the wind whips through my hair. He's so fast, yet so agile. So much fun. And such a thrill. Knowing this powerful beast and the man within are mine? That they're always going to have my back and love me. Best feeling ever!

We make our way back to the grove and Cosa lays down again so I don't have to jump off. As soon as my feet touch the ground, I turn to ask Riftyn for what I've been wanting to do all day. The moment I turn, my mouth starts to water. Riftyn is shifting back and holy hotness is this man fine. The sun beaming down on his muscles and tan skin. His eyes sparkle in the light. He's drop dead gorgeous and I have to take a minute to savor him. Just drink him in. Too soon, he's dressed and grinning at me.

Even though I'm drooling over him, I'm able to clear my throat and ask for what I want. "Can we," I start, hardly able to focus and speak with the desire that's coursing through me. "Can we work on my other powers before we head home?" I give myself a pep talk. *Get it together girl! You're not a dog in heat, repeat you're NOT a dog in heat!*

Riftyn chuckles and instantly I'm reminded of the damn link we share. Shit! I *have* to learn how to control that. I bury my face in my hands, dying of embarrassment. I feel his presence next to me. Removing my hands from my face he says, "Don't do that. Nothing to be ashamed of. This hunk of man meat is all yours." He *actually* winks.

"You got jokes. Seriously, though, can we? Please?"

"Sure, babe. What do you want to work on?"

Shaking off my nerves, I look him dead in the eyes. "Flying, if I actually can fly. But I don't want to hurt anyone, unintentionally. So, can we stay here in the grove and practice?"

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea. Plus, we can't let anyone see what you can do. Go ahead and shift and let's see what we're working with. Mind you, I've no clue or anything about your powers. We're just gonna have to wing it," he says with a smirk.

I chuckle at his phrasing. They think they're comedians, he and Cosa both. Stifling my laughter, I close my eyes and think of my intent again. This time, my wings come out easily. I'm giddy with excitement for how simple it is.

“Okay, that was easy enough. What’s next?” He may not know how to use my powers but he can direct me, which is what I need at the moment. That and his support.

“I’m not sure, babe. Maybe just think of flying? Picture yourself getting off the ground with your wings.”

“Okay, I think I can do that.” I close my eyes and picture myself hovering off the ground. Since I’m still afraid of heights, I refuse to open my eyes. But I don’t feel anything, or any different, so maybe this isn’t working. Through the link I hear Riftyn, *I don’t want you to trip out or anything, so listen to me, okay? Open your eyes. Slowly. You’re gonna be amazed, babe. I’m so proud of you.*

Opening my eyes, barely, I see what he’s talking about. Holy shit! I’m doing it! I’m actually up in the air. Riftyn’s pride in me, and my pride in myself, has totally taken away the fear. Also, it’s a gorgeous view from up here. I’m way above the treetops, and the sky is so clear and blue. It’s like I’m floating on the clouds. Feeling a little brave, I try to move around. I strike my best Superman pose and flap my wings. This only moves me an inch or two, so I try a little harder. Fail. Bigtime. Before I know it, I’m plummeting toward the ground so fast that the skin on my face is being pulled back.

*Red, calm down. You can do this. Straighten up and fly. You got this.*

With his words, I calm. I take as deep a breath as I can muster, and right before I hit the ground, I turn and shoot back up into the sky, flying around like a butterfly, fluttering above the trees. I don't actually have to move my wings to fly. Apparently, they don't work like a bird's wings. I just have to think of what I want, and where I want to go, and I move.

I take my time, having fun floating around the sky. I even pull out a few tricks for Riftyn's amusement. But after a few minutes, I have a better idea. Lowering to the ground, I stalk toward Riftyn with what I am positive is an evil, shit eating grin on my face.

He catches on quickly and starts backing away. "Oh hell no, Red. Wolves were not meant to fly! Our paws stay on the ground. Don't even think about it!"

"Come on, Rift. I got to go running with you and Cosa, you can come flying with me." Putting on my best pouty face, I charge at him. Grabbing him by the arm, I take flight. Okay, girl power! I didn't realize I'm strong now, too. I laugh loudly as I look at his face. He's white as a ghost and looks terrified. Kind of makes me feel bad.

"You okay, Riftyn? I'm sorry. I'll take us back down." I start to lower.

“No. No. It’s okay, just... just don’t drop me.” He gulps and tries to smile, but his eyes are so big right now it looks more like a grimace. I hold onto him tighter and drop down over the trees. Flying is way more fun than I thought it’d be so I swoop in and out through the trees, enjoying the feel of the wind in my face. Glancing at Riftyn, it seems he’s finally enjoying himself too.

I might’ve been scared when I first learned all this, but the more I embrace what I am, the more I enjoy and welcome it. I’ve never felt so... free. Now that I understand it all, I’m making myself a promise.

Nothing and no one will ever take this away from me.

## *Chapter 18*

### **Riftyn**

We return back to school on Monday with a new attitude. The guys and I are happy to have the girls to show off on our arms, and the girls are seeing everyone with new eyes. Very wide, astonished eyes. Respect for them for not gaping too hard, but I think Zane had to wrangle Willow a little. Kimble and her friends have to go see the dean to let her know their class is fae. Of course, they can't tell her the angel part but maybe she won't question it.

All we can do now is try to keep the secret as best as we can. Protect the girls at all costs.

I walk into Defense Class and take my seat. Claire Gardner, or Bitch Barbie as the girls call her, comes in and plops her ass right on my desk.

“Riftyn, baby, how come you don’t call me anymore?” Her voice sounds like nails on a chalkboard to my ears.

I cringe, watching her fake pout. My voice lowers to a menacing tone, “First, don’t ever call me baby. I’m not yours, Claire. I want nothing to do with you. When are you going to get that through your thick skull? Second, I have my true mate. You certainly could never take her place.”

“She’s not your true mate, Riftyn. You just think she is because she’s all shiny and new. When you get tired of playing you’ll come back to me. Where you belong.”

“I do *not* belong with you. I belong with Kimble. You were a mistake. A huge one. One I’ll never make again. Now, move your ass off my desk, Claire, we’re done here.”

If looks could kill, I’d be dead. She scoffs, and as she moves away from my desk she mumbles, “We’ll see about that.” Claire and her friends of fake are the worst females to tangle with in the whole school. They’re all certifiable.

Last year, I wasn’t in the best frame of mind. I was seventeen and thought the world had abandoned me and owed me. I hadn’t found my mate, my friends and I had gotten into some trouble, and I didn’t give a shit about anyone or anything. Cue Claire. She’s full-blooded fae, but I’m positive

she's part succubus because she sucks the joy out of everything. Her family is part of the elite here in Legend Springs which makes her think she's entitled to anything she wants. Including me.

Long story short, we slept together a few times and it was the worst mistake of my life.

I stay back after class to gather my things and try to avoid Claire as much as possible. As I'm leaving the room, I hear a commotion down the hall. Recognizing the voices, I run toward the noise.

"Go away, Claire. Nothing you say to me means anything. You can fuck off in the same direction you came from," Kimble says through her teeth.

"Who do you think you are, talking to my friend like that? Bitch, do you not realize I will cut you?" Willow's voice echoes throughout the whole hall.

"Just like scum to talk that way. I'm simply stating facts. When Riftyn is done with her, he'll come back to me. Like he's meant to." She turns to Kimble, who looks like it's taking all she has in her to keep from kicking Claire's ass. My girl's amazing as she stands there, disdain clearly written on her face, but holding back so the world doesn't find out her secret.



Lucien steps up and everyone silences. They know that whatever is about to come out of his crazy mouth will be entertaining. He doesn't disappoint. "Look, Crayzilla. You were a warm spot for Rift to park while he wasn't... himself. He doesn't want you now, hell, he didn't really want you then. You were just easy, as you are. Why would he want your sloppy vag-a-burger again, when he has prime, Grade A choice steak right here?" He wraps his arm around Kimble's shoulders to further show just whose side he's on. Everyone is laughing, which pisses Claire off even more. Even her squad standing behind her has to cover their mouths so she can't see them laughing. Kimble looks up at Lucien and smiles, and I start moving from my spot.

I make my way through the crowd and when I reach my girl, I grab the back of her neck and plant a deep, passionate kiss on her, claiming her as publicly as I can. I feel her tremble under my touch and grab her hands, anticipating her light coming out. Everyone but the evil bitch squad oohs and ahhs. Without taking my eyes off Kimble, I address Claire. "Claire, as I told you before, I don't belong to you. Never have and never will. I don't want you. I have everything I could ever want, or need, right here." I kiss Kimble's lips again, softer this time, and give her a smile. I know she's mad at the situation right now, but I never want her to underestimate my feelings for her or to ever think I want anyone else.

She puts her palm on my cheek and kisses me again before heading off with the girls to their next class. Watching her walk away, I know in my heart she's it for me, and I'm never letting her go.

## *Chapter 19*

### **Kimble**

Standing in the girls bathroom, I'm fucking fuming. We skipped our next class so I can calm down. "Who does that bitch think she is?" I say, pacing back and forth in front of the sinks.

"Someone who wants me to rip her fucking head off and shove it down her neck apparently," Willow grunts. She may be the life of the party, but she can also be murderous when need be. Especially when it comes to family. Mila and Piper are mad too, but they tend to show their two hotheaded besties more compassion rather than feed our anger.

"Thankfully Riftyn and Lucien showed up. I could've just fucked everything up out there. I was two seconds away from exposing my light to everyone. How am I going to control this supposedly huge power when it's connected to my emotions?"

Specifically, when I'm nothing but fucking emotional all the time.”

“You'll figure it out, we'll help. You couldn't tell but you held yourself together pretty good out there. Better than any of us could do.” I love Piper's confidence in me, but I just don't know that I believe it right now.

I take a minute to gather my thoughts and calm my nerves. Splashing my face with cool water from the sink, I notice the bathroom door opening. Claire and her friends walk in sporting wicked grins across their faces. Claire snaps her fingers, locking the door. Fine. This bitch wants a fight, that's exactly what she'll get.

But instead of fighting fair, they do something none of us know how to counteract. With a flick of her wrist, Fallon pins Piper and Mila to the wall. Neither can move or speak. Willow steps forward, hands clenched at her side. Tempest nods her head, and Willow crumples to the floor. I've no idea how they're doing this to my friends. I rush over to Willow to make sure she's okay and still breathing, but before I make it, Claire claps. The sound echoes off the walls of the bathroom and I'm frozen in place.

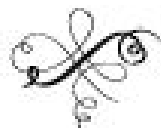
“What are you doing to us?” I ask, barely able to get the sound out.

“I told you. You’re nothing. Scum. You and your friends don’t belong here. You should leave LSU and run back home, wherever that is. Look at you. You can’t even use your powers to fight back. You’re worthless. A nobody. Almost not even worth my time and effort. But seeing as how you think Riftyn is yours, and that he loves you, I thought I’d show you what he’d do when you’re not such a pretty face anymore.” With that she extends her hand out, palm up, and sharp, pointy shards of metal rise from her hand. She raises her hand to her lips and blows. The shards of metal pierce my skin; on my face, my chest, and my stomach. The pain is excruciating. She releases me from her hold and I fall to my knees. Doubling over at the waist, I sit there. Blood flows freely from the wounds. With a snap of her fingers, the shards fly out of me and back into her palm.

I have no idea how to retaliate and my friends are still under whatever spell Fallon and Tempest put them under. Tears gather in my eyes, and my emotions spin all over the place. I look around, my blood is flowing heavily onto the floor into puddles beneath me. I’m not able to control it when my light appears, shrouding me in its bright green hue. I can feel it trying to heal me, but it may be too late.

Claire leans down and whispers in my ear, “I don’t know what you are, but know that you’re finished now. Don’t worry, with me in his bed he won’t miss you for long.”

She and her friends laugh as they leave the bathroom. I've succumbed to the darkness before they've even shut the door.



I'm lost again. This time in a sea of nothingness. It's pitch black all around me except for a faint light far ahead. This must be it. The end. I hear faint whispers of voices I don't recognize all around me. Open your eyes. Breathe. Come back to us. Please don't *leave us*. The voices all cry for me to listen, but I'm focused on making my way to the light.

Just as I get there, a voice I do know brings me to a halt. *Kimble, my delightful little girl. It's not your time. You're strong. Stronger than you think. Believe in yourself and you can heal and go home. People are waiting for you there. You can do this. Just try.*

The voice of my father, Uriel, urges me on. I don't know if I'm as strong as he says. I'm new to this. Never had to face any of these things before.

*Maybe if I can make it to that pretty light I can rest and figure everything out.*

Claire is right, I am worthless. I'm nothing. I haven't trained hard enough or learned enough to even protect myself.

*It looks so alluring. I should go there and see it.*

Taking a few more steps, I can feel the warmth of the light. Its bewitching, green glow covers me and erases the darkness. I'm right where I should be. Safe and happy.

I sit down before the light. Soaking up as much of it as I can, I give in and embrace the nothingness.

## *Chapter 20*

### **Riftyn**

The guys and I are taking up our usual spot in the back of Magical History: 1800's-Present, bored out of our minds. Professor Mills, a dwarf with gray hair coming out of... everywhere, drolls on about Jack the Ripper.

“Ya know, I know Jack and he isn't as bad as they claim him to be. Solid dude. Has a mean poker face but whines when he loses. There was one time, at one of Dad's Thursday night games, that Adolf got a papercut and Jack got sick and passed out. Over a damn papercut and a little blood. Yeah, really good serial killer he is, huh? It's bullshit what they say about him,” Lucien chuckles.

“Yeah, I met him once in London. He was nice and timid,” Kerner begins, “but that guy can party!”



Laughing, I tune them out and try to concentrate on what Professor Mills is saying. The shit in the hall has my nerves frayed, or maybe it's Kimble. She's fuming, a little scared and hurting. Probably from embarrassment and the fact her light almost came out. And because we can feel her, Cosa is restless too. I close my eyes, breathing deep and pushing both Cosa and Kimble from my mind. I just need a little peace for a moment.

Meditating, time seems to stand still. The quiet, the calm, and the monotone voice of the professor has given me the break I so desperately desired.

*Riftyn!*

*Riftyn, damnit pay attention to me! Something is wrong! She's hurting, bad. Cosa screams in my head.*

I drift back to the moment and focus once again on him and Kimble, but something *is* wrong. There's an excruciating pain in my chest and I lose my breath, feeling dizzy. Then... nothing. I can't connect with her anymore.

Suddenly, Zane and I stand at the same time.

“The girls. Something's wrong. We gotta go!” I growl.

Zane's eyes widen and he takes a big whiff of air. "I smell blood, Rift. Lots of it."

Without asking for permission, all four of us race out of the room. Following Zane's nose, we head toward the girl's bathroom. When we burst through the door, the scene before us is straight out of a horror movie. Mila and Piper are laying by the wall under the window, unconscious. They have some bruising around their throats. Willow is crumpled over by the sinks, her body lying in an unnatural position. But Kimble, fuck, Kimble is sprawled out in the middle of the floor surrounded by an excessive amount of blood. There are cuts and deep lacerations everywhere that can be seen. Her face looks swollen, and bruised and there are long cuts trailing from her chin up to her forehead. It looks like she was mangled by a bear or Freddy Kruger. My heart falls into my stomach. I can't think. I can't breathe.

We're just standing there, frozen in time. None of us make a move or a sound. Unsure of what happened, and scared to find out. We're like statues, shocked expressions line each of our faces.

*Don't just stand there, dipshits. MOVE! Help them!*

I blink, Cosa's horrified, pissed off voice breaks through my shock.

“What the fuck happened?” I question out loud, which seems to snap everyone back to attention and, finally, we move.

Dropping to my knees, I start assessing Kimble’s wounds and checking for a pulse. It’s there, faint, but there. Her clothes are covered in blood, but I can’t see if she’s still losing any more or not.

Kerner and Lucien busy themselves by picking up Mila and Piper, shaking them lightly to try and wake them. Fortunately, they stir. The girls look around, their eyes landing on Kimble and Willow and they burst into tears. Zane is holding Willow’s limp form in his arms, tears pooling in his eyes. It breaks my heart to see my brothers hurting like this, but we need to focus. The girls need us to be strong right now, even if we want to break down too.

“What happened?” I growl, my anger and worry apparent in my tone.

“Claire and her goons,” Mila whimpers, almost choking on the words.

“What did they do?” Zane asks. An eerie, almost scary, level of calm has washed over his face.

Piper tries to control her breathing enough to answer. “They came in and locked the door with magic. Then Fallon somehow pinned Mila and me to the wall. We couldn’t move or talk but we could see and hear everything. There was nothing we could do about any of it.” Her voice is so hoarse and callous that she doesn’t sound like herself. She looks over to Kimble again, loses it, and my heart breaks even more. These girls are now part of our pack. They’re family, and there’s nothing we wouldn’t do for them just as we would for each other.

“That cuntbag Tempest.” We hear the frail voice of Willow say. Zane lets out a sigh, relief shining in his eyes. “I don’t know what she did to me, but it hurt like fuck and I was out cold. When I get my hands on those bitches, I swear I’ll kill them.” Willow’s temper rises with each passing moment. Zane chuckles, he’s going to have his hands full with that one.

“Claire is the one who did that to Kimble. Some kind of metal arrows or something came out of her hand and she blew them, literally freaking blew them, right into Kimble. I’ve never seen anything like it. We were so scared. We didn’t know what to do, not that we could have anyway. We’re sorry, Riftyn. We couldn’t do anything. Kimble didn’t know how to fight her off. And we may have a bigger problem,” Mila stutters through her sobs.

“You don’t have to apologize, Mila. There was nothing you could do. This is my fault. I should’ve at least shown her some defensive moves. Something. I just never thought this would happen. I know Claire is catty, but I would’ve never expected this... wait, what do you mean a bigger problem?”

“Right before they left and Kimble fell into this... whatever this is, her light came out. They saw it. And then Claire told her that she didn’t know what she was but that she was done now. She meant to kill her, of that I have no doubt.” Piper fills in the blanks while Mila composes herself.

I’m not sure what’s going on with Kimble right now. Her body, as much as I can see, looks like it’s beginning to heal. But no amount of prodding or shaking, or begging, has gotten her to wake up. It’s almost as if she’s in a coma. Her powers should’ve healed her, which it looks like they are, so this doesn’t make any sense.

Everyone sits here waiting for me to tell them what to do. Guess it’s up to me to take action. I tell the guys to help the girls, and have Piper call Kimble’s mom since she’s the most composed. Mila stands with me as I lift Kimble into my arms. “C’mon, let’s all go home and see if we can figure out what to do.”

*Shouldn’t we tell Dean Anais or someone about what’s happened here?*

***We can handle that later, it's not like the University is going to do anything about Claire. Not with who her father is.***

*This was almost murder, Rifyn. We can't just let this go. Not for our mate, our family, us!*

***Don't worry. We aren't letting anything go. Those three will get what's coming to them. I'll make damn sure of it.***

*Eye for an eye?*

***Blood for blood.***

With Mila and Piper following close behind, I carry Kimble out to my car. Letting Piper get in first, I lay Kimble across the backseat with her head in Piper's lap. I slam the door a little too hard as I get in the car, making Mila jump. I feel for them, I really do, but I'm so pissed off I don't have it in me to calm them down too. Mila climbs in the front seat and I start the car. While I'm staring out at nothing, Mila places a hand on my arm. When I look at her, she nods as if she knows what I'm thinking. Maybe she does. They love her just as much as I do, if not more. Pulling my lips into a thin line, I return her nod and pull out of the parking lot.

I don't know when, and I don't know how, but I will destroy  
Claire and her posse if it's the last thing I do.

## *Chapter 21*

### **Kimble**

*Kimble, wake up. Come on my precious daughter, please wake up.*

I can hear my father's voice urging me to wake. But I don't want to. I'm safe and warm and no one can bother me here.

*Come on, Kimble, you can do it. Just open your eyes. Be brave, little angel.*

Little angel? Uriel's already adopted a nickname for me? I like it. I shuffle around, still sore, but managing to move to a sitting position on the floor of the... wait, I don't actually know where I am. My gaze darts around the empty space looking for any signs of something familiar. When I find none, I sigh.



“It’s okay. You’re safe, for now. Let’s see if you can stand, shall we?” Uriel says, suddenly beside me.

“Where are we? How’d I get here? Is this...” my words cut off because I’m not sure I’m ready for the answers.

“This is the Void. Think of it like limbo between life and death. A middle ground. For our kind, it’s the safest place there is as only Archangels can join another lifeforce here. Which is why I’m here with you. Although, it’s not your time, little angel. We need to get you home.”

“I’m not sure I want to go home. I’ve made a huge mess of things. I didn’t train at all, I pissed off... sorry... I made the wrong fae mad, though, I have no idea what I did besides existing, and not only did all of that get my best friends hurt, I let them see my secret. I messed up big time, Dad. I don’t think I can ever go back there.”

Uriel’s face changes and a big, bright smile brandishes it. Just then, I realize why. I called him Dad. I return his smile and sheepishly ask, “Is that okay? Me calling you Dad? There isn’t like some Archangel rule where that’s not allowed or anything, right?”

“It’s perfectly fine and, no, there’s no ruling against it. I’m glad that you feel comfortable enough to say it. I can’t

apologize enough for not being there for you as you grew up, I can only hope you understand. And I need you to know that while I wasn't there, I was around, and watched you grow into the perfection you are today. As a father, I couldn't be more proud." He places his hand on my shoulder and gives it a squeeze.

As a little girl, I always wondered how it would feel to be in my father's arms. No time like the present, right? I fall into his arms where he hugs me tightly against him. The tears flow freely from my eyes as I soak up every ounce that I can of my father's love.

Stepping away, I dry my eyes on my sleeve. "Do I really have to go back right now? Can't I stay here with you for a little while?" I ask, praying that he doesn't send me home.

"I suppose that would be alright, as long as we make good use of the time." He waves his hand and a forest, almost like the grove, appears around us.

"Holy fu... forest. It's amazing. How'd you do that?" I turn to him only to find him laughing. "What's so funny?"

"Kimble, while I appreciate the sentiment, I've heard you swear since you said your first at four years old. You don't

have to change yourself around me. Be you. You're perfect as you are. Besides, they're just words," he chuckles.

"Sorry, it just feels weird. You know, you being an angel and all. I feel like you could smite me or something." I shrug. How am I supposed to know that one of God's right hand men is just cool with me throwing out the F-bomb? I start laughing with him despite the fear that still lingers. "You can't do that, right? Smite me or whatever."

"No, Kimble. I won't. I can, though. So, I suggest you work hard and do as I tell you. You know, you being my daughter and all." He winks at me, and he must see the horrified expression on my face because he loses his shit. Doubled over in laughter, his whole body shakes with the sound. I've never seen him this way, not that we've spent a lot of time together, but the sight warms something in my heart. I realize that I missed out having a great dad all because they had to keep me safe. The sacrifices him and my mom made for me, push me to be stronger and more brave. I decide that I won't let them down ever again. I will show them that everything they gave up because of me, was worth it. I'm worth it.

Standing tall, I meet my father's gaze. His eyes are still glistening from tears of laughter and I smile. "So, what's with the forest? I'm all down for hanging out with the trees and stuff, but I warn you that I'm not very good with plants and I couldn't tell you an oak tree from a birch."

“Well, that particular skill won’t come in handy with anything we’re doing anyway. We’re going to train you. It killed me not being able to intervene and help you when that evil girl attacked you and your friends. I don’t ever want you to be unprepared for anything again.”

“Unprepared is an understatement. We were ambushed and out of my friends I’m the only one who has gotten her powers. I just stood there, Dad. Watching. Doing not a damn thing to save them. I was so scared. So, no, I’m not unprepared. I’m a coward.”

“Coward? That’s how you see yourself? In a matter of a few days, you’ve learned that the supernatural world really exists. That the mom you thought you knew is a fae. The father you didn’t know you had is an Archangel. You’re a mixture of the two, as are the three best friends you grew up with. And to top that off the man you have fallen in love with is a wolf shifter and his three best friends are a demon, a vampire, and a dragon. In no time, you accepted all of that. You even embraced it, Kimble. I’d say that’s as far away from cowardly as you can get.” His authoritative, fatherly tone sends ice through my veins. I guess it’s time to put my big girl panties on and learn how to kick some ass.

“Okay, Dad. I hear you. So, where do we start?”

## *Chapter 22*

### **Riftyn**

We pull up to the apartment building with the guys and Willow trailing behind us. All of us rush out of our cars and everyone helps me get Kimble out of the backseat. Suddenly, her mom is there beside us.

“What the hell happened? Who did this to her?” She rages, walking quickly ahead of us into the building.

“Claire Gardner and her band of cuntbags ambushed us in the bathroom at school, Auntie Fi,” Willow seethes, tears gathering in her eyes as she walks with us holding Kimble’s hand.

Fiona stops dead in her tracks and turns back to Willow. “Gardner. As in Reid Gardner? His daughter did this to her?”

Her face turns beet red and she's getting angrier by the second. Turning back, she stomps her way to the elevator.

"I grew up with Reid. He used to be this shy, backward kid and then around the time he turned eighteen, something changed. We came to LSU and he turned into a pompous, mean asshole. No one knows exactly what happened to him, but you can imagine the rumors that were passed around." She presses the up button and we all file into the elevator. Kimble rests lifelessly in my arms. Her wounds have almost all faded and she's no longer pale, but she still has shown no signs of waking. At this point, I have no idea what to do. I have to tamp down on my rage because all I can think of, besides her being hurt, is murder. Cold blooded murder.

We get into the girls' apartment and lay Kimble on her bed. She looks so fragile and broken. Sitting down beside her, I take her hand in mine. I try our bond again to see if I can reach her. No such luck. "Please, Red. Please wake up and come back to us," I whisper. With the peaceful look on her face I can almost imagine she's just sleeping, though, I know she isn't. Her not waking up is a mystery to us all. We've never dealt with anything like this before.

There's a bunch of voices coming from the living room as I make my way there. The other girls' moms have joined us now and our friends are pacing the floor while the parents take up the couch. "So no one has any idea what's wrong with her

or what to do?" Piper asks. She's switching between biting her thumb and running her fingers through her hair. The girls are more worked up than even Cosa. Which reminds me...

***Hey, buddy. You doing okay?***

*No. Not really. Why won't she wake up, Riftyn? I keep trying the bond but I get nothing. Is she going to die?*

***Don't even say that, Cosa. We won't lose her. We can't. We just found her and I don't want to think that way.***

*You're right. I'm trying to be positive, but I'm not used to this feeling of nothing. It's as though there's a huge, empty space inside me that only she can fill.*

***Same. I just want her to open those big, blue eyes and look at me. I'm broken, man. Nothing can fix me but her. I swear that somehow, someday, I will make Claire regret ever knowing me.***

*Can I bite her? I'd really enjoy ripping her head off with my teeth, then I could treat her like what she's worth and shit her out in the woods somewhere later.*

***Ah, dreams, dude, dreams.***

“I’ve tried to contact Uriel, but I can’t reach out to him. He has to know what’s happened to his daughter. Shouldn’t he?” Fiona says from her curled up position next to Poppy.

“I’m sure he’s doing his part, Fi,” Poppy says as she runs her hand up and down Fiona’s arm in comfort. The moms are just like the girls; inseparable. Where one goes the other three follow, probably have all of their lives.

“Is there a spell or potion or something we can get to wake her? I just don’t understand why she won’t wake up on her own. Her wounds have all healed, she should be perfectly fine by now,” I say as I fall down onto the loveseat. “Nothing makes sense to me. I just want her to wake up. Just hear her voice, have her look at me, anything.” My voice breaks and my brothers surround me.

“Whatever we have to do. Wherever we have to go, Rift, we’ll find a way to save her. She’s pack, she’s family. We will protect her with our lives,” Kerner says, placing his hand on my shoulder. I look around at my brothers and they all nod, cementing what I already knew; I have the perfect pack and we’ll all make it through this, no matter the cost.

“What about Kiki?” Jazmine asks. “You think she could help us figure this out?”



Everyone turns to look at her, questioning expressions on their faces.

“Who’s Kiki?” Mila asks her mom.

“Kiki Leveaux. She’s an old friend of ours, honey. A witch. A very powerful one. She used to be a member of the Council. If anyone can tell us what’s wrong with Kimble, it’s her.” Jazmine’s voice raises slightly with her excitement.

“She does owe us one. We *did* introduce her to her harem,” Raven pipes up.

“Woah, she has a harem? Like in the books? Miss Kiki’s got game!” Willow giggles. Laughter erupts around the room, lifting everyone’s spirits.

“I’ll call her right now. Hopefully, she can get here fast,” Poppy says. She stands up and moves to the window in the living room, dialing her phone and turning it on speaker.

Within moments, a very cajun drawl comes over the line. “Heya, shortcakes. Been a while. What’s up?” A woman, presumably Kiki, answers after the third ring.

“Kiki, we need you. It’s one of your goddaughters... Kimble,” Poppy answers her, a smile on her face. Obviously,

they are very fond of this woman. And since it seems she's the girl's witchy godmother, she must be fond of them too.

“Say no more. We'll be there soon. Hold tight, your savior is coming.” With that the call disconnects.

“Well, that's that. They'll be here soon. She'll figure out what's going on, I'm sure of it.” Poppy places her phone back in her pocket.

You can feel the energy change in the room. Everyone has a brighter, more hopeful outlook. I hope, whoever this Kiki Leveaux is, she can help my mate.

## *Chapter 23*

### **Kimble**

“Damnit!” I yell from the ground as I look up into the fabricated sky my father has made for us. “I can’t get this, Dad. What the hell is wrong with me that I can’t learn to focus my damn light!” I practically scream in frustration.

We’ve been working on these light orbs for what feels like forever. I’ve mastered his sword, and most of the fighting moves he’s taught me but this fucking light power is going to be the death of me because my father keeps putting me on my ass. I’m tired. I’m frustrated and I miss home.

*Home. Rifyn, Cosa, the girls, my mom.* I miss them all so much, but I asked for this. I asked to stay and this is what I get for asking my father for shit. He has beat me up, tossed me around, and frustrated me to no end. All great parenting skills to possess.

“You’ll get it, Kimble. You just have to focus more. I’ve had many millennia to practice my abilities, you’ve had days. Try not to be so hard on yourself.” The self-righteous bastard is standing ten feet away from me, bouncing a light orb in his hand like it’s the easiest thing ever. Am I jealous? Yes. Am I slightly pissed that I can’t master this? Also yes. I stand up, dust myself off, and resume the fighting stance he taught me. I gotta get this down, as I’ve been gone so long and don’t have much time left here.

“I don’t know how much more focus I can have here, Dad. All I’ve done since we’ve been here is train. Can’t we have a little fun?”

*Thwap.*

A light orb whizzes by my head.

“Fun? Sure, how about we blow off training and you can just let Claire have Riftyn. That would be loads of fun, right?”

*Thwap. Thwap.*

Two more light orbs sail past me.

Let Claire have Riftyn? Over my dead fucking body! My anger grows with every release of Uriel's light until I'm shining brightly in the dimness of the Void. His words hit home, which is what they were meant for apparently since he's grinning from ear to ear.

Pushing my hands together, I think of Riftyn in Claire's arms. Anger is as good emotion as any, especially since my powers come from my emotions, so I focus on that single image. My blood boils and murderous thoughts enter my mind. When I decide to go home, if I can even get there now, I'll gladly take all of my emotions out on Claire and her goon squad. But first, I have to learn how to make this damn light orb.

I focus back on my task, using intent to do what I need. I think of the light orbs that have been knocking me on my ass for the last two days. Seeing their shape and color. I even try associating a sound with them. Suddenly, my hands feel warmer and the light radiating through my eyelids is brighter. I squint one eye to look at my hands.

Yes! I've done it! Finally. Opening both of my eyes, I admire the little orbs resting peacefully in my palms. Pride replaces my anger, but it doesn't replace my pettiness. Uriel walks closer to me, praising me for accomplishing the orbs. I wait until he's about three feet from me and a cheshire grin

spreads across my face. Before he has the chance to retreat or go poof, I lob the orbs as hard as I can.

*Thwap, thwap, thwap.*

Score! All three hit my desired target, my father, and I start jumping up and down, cheering.

*Oomph.* Next thing I know, I'm on my ass again. Sprawled out on the fake grass.

“Never celebrate taking down your target until you have confirmation,” Uriel laughs. *Bastard.* “Although, good job on finally making the orbs and your aim. That aim is impeccable. Let's see you do it again.”

He reaches his hand out to help me up, a proud smile adorning his face. I stand, brushing myself off and smile back. I guess there are worse ways a daughter could spend time with her father.

“I'm coming for you this time, Dad. No holding back.”

“Wouldn't have it any other way, little angel.”

I conjure up more light orbs with ease this time and resume my position. Uriel flitters amongst the grass and trees in the

Void grove he made for us. I extend my wings and focus on my target.

“Game on, Dad. Game on.”

## *Chapter 24*

**R**iftyn

Laying next to Kimble's lifeless form, I hold onto her pretending that she's just sleeping and we're cuddling. In a way she is sleeping but no matter what we do we can't wake her.

A commotion sounds from the living room, all the women doing the girlish scream of hello, signaling the arrival of the witch, Kiki. Reluctantly, I move away from Kimble to go meet the woman we're all desperately depending on.

As I reach the end of the hall, the silence is deafening. All eyes are on me now. Pity and sadness shine in them. Except the ice blue eyes of the newest arrival. Kiki stands at five foot eight with shoulder length, curly hair the color of dark chocolate. I know she's older but she looks young, possibly in her thirties. She has an athletic build with curvy hips. Her



black v-neck blouse leaves little to the imagination, as do the tight, black leather pants she's wearing. Even Willow is drooling a little at the sight of her, or it could be the three huge men that are stuck to Kiki's side like glue. Kiki points to the one who is average height, with long brown hair held up by a gold, filigree hair clasp, and dark brown eyes. He has water colored tattoos all over him and the gold bracelets around his wrists indicate he's a Djinn.

"This is one of my mates, Sol." She points to the other man with her who is tan, tall and stocky with wavy, blonde hair coming to his shoulders. He's slightly smaller than the other two men, and the scent he gives off is Vampire. "This is my other mate Niam." The men nod their heads in greeting.

"Oh, aren't you a gorgeous specimen my niece chose as a mate. Look at you, handsome. Fiona, our girl did well, didn't she?" Kiki says as she takes my face into her hands.

"Yes, RIFTYN is amazing. I couldn't be more proud of the mate Kimble has," Fiona says, her eyes radiating how true her words are. I choke up at the overwhelming pride I feel knowing that I have Kimble's mother's approval.

"Well, I'm proud too." Kiki sniffs the air. "Oh, you're a wolf too, just like my Orion. Orion, dear, come meet Kimble's mate RIFTYN."

The third man standing further back, the biggest of the three, steps forward and reaches his hand out. He's huge. At least seven foot tall, with broad shoulders and long, black hair. I place my hand in his to shake and he grips it tightly, making me wince. He smiles. "Nice to meet you, Riftyn." He turns to Kiki. "He's a good one, Kiks. Solid. Strong. Perfect for Kimble."

Guess we're playing a round of whether Riftyn deserves Kimble. Answer, not in a million years, but I'm damn lucky I have her.

*You're always so hard on yourself. I don't understand that, Rift. You know it's my job to be hard on you. When you bash yourself, it's not nearly as fun when I do it.*

***Very funny, asshole. Like it matters to you? You're going to give me shit no matter what.***

*True. Very true. But it's still more fun when I'm doing it first. You just get all sappy and shit and that's a buzzkill.*

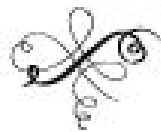
***Go away, Cosa.***

*I'd love to, but I'm stuck. I can't go anywhere without you and, since Kimble fell, I haven't been let out. Take me for a walk like your French girls, Jack.*

I roll my eyes. Though, he's right. I haven't shifted in a few days and he needs to run.

“Thank you for coming to help, it's very much appreciated. But could I ask for some time before we start so I can take my wolf for a run? He's itching to go since it's been a few days.” I turn to the moms and Kiki, pleading with my eyes for them to wait until I return. I don't want anyone touching Kimble without me here.

They all nod at me, that sad, pity filled look on all their faces. I hate that look. It makes me feel as though they all think I can't handle this. The pressure. The wait. The worry. But I can, I can endure anything that has to do with her. Until my dying breath she will never have to worry if I'm strong enough for her. I will be. Always.



I reach the grove in record time, removing my shoes so I can get grounded. I shift and Cosa groans.

*Ahhh. Finally!*

With that, he begins to run. His paws pounding the dirt of the forest with loud thumps. He lets his tongue loll out of his mouth and shows his teeth as if he's grinning. I instantly feel bad that I've kept him cooped up for so long.

*Stop brooding in there, you're dulling my shine.*

***I'm not brooding, I feel bad. I'm sorry I haven't shifted sooner.***

You're dealing, hands on might I add, with our mate's life hanging in the balance. I understand. I feel it too, Riftyn, and I don't like it. Everything being up in the air like it is. Why won't she just wake up? Did we do something to her and now she doesn't want us anymore?

I didn't even have that thought. What if he's right? What if she doesn't want us anymore and that's why she's... wherever she is?

***No. We can't think like that, Cosa. The only thing we did wrong was not train her more, better, any. We did the fun stuff to make her happy. But I never thought Claire would stoop to this. Hurting her like that.***

*Really? After the way that bitch did you, you really had no clue?*

***They were words, man. Just words. Me falling down a hillside and landing in a mattress field would've done more damage than her words did.***

*Right. So, that's why you drank every night until you passed out for almost six months?*

***No. I did that because I was miserable and I have an asshole wolf inside my head that doesn't know when to shut up.***

*Sure. Blame the cute, innocent, little wolf. Do what you must. You're right, I have to think positively. Kimble is coming back to us. She's okay, wherever she is, and she's just taking some time to do that thing that women do. When she's done, she'll wake up and everything will be fine.*

***What thing that women do?***

*I think they call it being petty. You know, plotting revenge.*

***You mean petty? Dude, don't ever let them hear you say that shit. They'd have your nuts in a sling for sure.***

*Whatever. The girls love me. But, since I'd like to keep my nuts firmly where they belong, I think I'll take your advice.*

We laugh and continue our run. It feels good to get out of the apartment for a little while, even if I am away from Kimble. Now, I can return with a clear head and help figure out a way to wake my mate.



When I return, the girls' apartment is in shambles. There's papers and books strewn everywhere. The girls are piled up on the couch, while the moms and Kiki stand over a bubbling cauldron.

Kiki must've conjured that up. Why in the middle of the living room, I don't know.

"Oh good, you're back! Did 'Buddy' have a nice run?" Willow teases as I step into the room.

"Yes he did. Maybe you should take Fluffy out too? Oh wait. You're not an awesome shifter, so you can't. Too bad you're just catty and not a real one, huh?" I tease her, thinking back to the first time we bantered after Kimble got her powers.

She flips me the bird and settles down beside Piper, grinning. Willow is the most outspoken of the girls. She gives zero fucks about what she says. Anywhere, anytime. I think it's why we became instant friends. That and I know my brother is already head over heels in love with her, so I might as well learn to love her too, right?

Kiki turns away from the cauldron, which I thought was a myth, shows how much I know, and points to me. "Come here please, I need your help with this." I walk over to where they're all standing and look down into the smoke of the cauldron. What I see there, shocks me. It looks like the grove almost, except it's darker and unrealistic.

"Where's that? It looks like Wolf's Grove, but not."

"We think," Kiki starts, "Kimble is in the Void. The place between life and death. If so, she's with her father, which would explain why he's not shown up or contacted anyone either. If he's with her, that's a good thing. It means she will live and we can bring her home. If he's not... Let's not think that way. We don't have much time. Our souls can only stay in the Void for so long before they have to move on. One way or the other."

"He has to be with her, right? There's no way she can be dying. I can't lose her. I just found her." I let loose the composure I've been holding in since I found her on the

bathroom floor. All of my emotions come flooding to the surface and I shed my first and only tear.

“Thank you! That’s just what I needed for this spell,” Kiki says as she places a small vial on my face and catches the tear in it.

“Why? What will that do?” I question, watching her place a cork in the top of the vial.

“It’s your emotions, Riftyn. Your love for Kimble is the key to everything. It unlocked her powers, it unlocked her mind, and now it will bring her home.” The witch places a hand on my chin, holding me there to look into my eyes. “You are the power she’s always needed. True love always wins.” With that she turns back to her work, effectively dismissing me.

I go to the kitchen and pour a glass of water. Maybe she’s right. Maybe our love is all I need to wake her, to have her here with us again.

As I sit at the table, my mood shifts. Determination and happiness fill me.

***She’s coming back to us, Cosa. I know it.***

*You’re right, Riftyn. I was a fool to ever think she wouldn’t.*



“It’s time!” Kiki yells.

Rushing, we all pile into Kimble’s room. Kiki has a glass bottle in her hand that has a swirling green liquid in it. There’s smoke coming off the lip of the glass and even though I know it’s a potion, it’s still slightly scary.

“This won’t hurt her will it?” I ask, searching the witch’s eyes for the answer.

“It won’t hurt her really. Just... sort of, shock her a little.”

*That’s comforting. NOT. Are we sure this witch knows what she’s doing? She’s... weird.*

***We have to be sure. We don’t have a choice at this point.***

*Fine. But if she hurts our mate, I’ll tear her apart. Deal?*

***Deal.***

Just then, Kiki begins to chant.

“Troubled blood with sleep’s duress,

Remove the cause of this child’s stress.

Sleep forever, nevermore.

Remove the source of danger bourne,

From this child, whom we shant mourn.”

She pours the liquid into Kimble’s mouth. Kimble’s body thrashes around on the bed. She’s moving and bending as if her body was possessed by one of Lucien’s dad’s demons, and is now expelling it. I rush to her, but Kiki puts her hand out.

“She’s fine. This is how the potion works. Let it do its job.”

I calm, allowing the witch to do her thing and watch as my mate thrashes around the bed. The sight breaks me more with each thump of her body.

Suddenly, she stops. Only silence can be heard. All eyes are on Kimble, the upper half of her body rises off the bed. Her eyes open and her head turns in my direction.

Cosa whispers through our bond, *Mo grá*.

My heart beats faster, my breath coming in pants. There’s a spark in my chest I haven’t felt in days. I go to speak...

Then an ear-piercing scream fills the room.

## *Chapter 25*

### **Kimble**

I'm sitting in the Void grove with my father, going over all the things I learned with him in my time here with him.

“Remember, little angel that, yes, your powers are connected to your emotions but it doesn't mean you have to depend on that alone. Use your mind, your strength, your intention to guide you. You'll be okay now. And you can defend yourself. But don't ever think you can go at it alone. Rely on your mate and your friends. You four girls are stronger together than apart. Always keep that in the back of your mind.”

“I will, Dad. I promise. And thank you... for everything. I love you.” I lay my head on his shoulder as the tears fall from my eyes. I've cherished the time I've gotten to spend with my father. After eighteen years of not having him in my life, I

resented him, but now, I'm glad I got to meet him and understand why he and mom had to do things the way they did. He always watches over me like, dare I say it, a guardian angel.

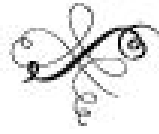
I giggle to myself over my silent joke and wrap my arm through his. He places a loving kiss on the top of my head and I snuggle in closer. Resting my eyes for a moment, images of home start coming to mind. Memories of me and the girls, my mom and Rifty and Cosa all play in my head like a movie.

I've just barely fallen asleep when my body starts shaking and the grove disappears. I look over to Uriel, but he's fading too. "It's time to go home now, little angel," he says as he completely fades away.

"But wait! Dad! I can't do this alone. Please, don't go. Come with me! Please!" I scream into the Void. He doesn't answer, no one does. My body shakes again, little shocks reverberating through it and a puff of green smoke seeps from my mouth. I crumble to the ground, no energy to hold myself upright. My eyes dart around, searching for something that's familiar. Nothing is there. I'm all alone. Surrounded by the darkness once again.

I'm so afraid and have no idea what's happening so I do the only thing I can think of.

I scream.



Rolling over, I notice Dad has finally conjured me a bed instead of that ragged cot thing he made me sleep on. Wait. That's not right. I left the Void, somehow sucked into nothingness. I open my eyes to bright lights and soft murmurs.

Looking around, I see there are fifteen sets of eyes staring at me. It seems I've drawn a crowd. Our moms are here, Willow, Piper and Mila, the guys, some woman and three other men, and Riftyn. All of them are crowded in my tiny room. I blink, not knowing what to do or say.

"Ummm, hi." I smile, adding a little wave. There's a beat of silence and then my friends pounce on me, all speaking at once.

"Where did you go?"

"Are you okay?"

"Don't ever fucking do that to us again!"

I laugh, not knowing who to answer first. A throat clears from beside the bed. I turn, seeking out the owner of the noise. Riftyn. My perfect, sweet, sexy Riftyn is patiently standing there waiting his turn with me. I reach out my hand to him, slowly untangling myself from my friends.

Sparks fly throughout the room as we touch. His eyes glisten with unshed tears. I knew you were coming back to me, he says through our link.

“I’m glad you had faith in me. Thank you. I’ve missed you so much. I love you,” I say out loud, needing him to hear the words from my mouth instead.

“I love you too, Red. You don’t have to thank me, I will never lose faith in you. I trust you with my life. You hold all of me right here.” He places his palm over my heart and his forehead to mine. “You are with me forever, just like I will be with you. End and beginning, remember?”

“Always,” I say as he places his lips to mine. Slow claps start around the room, then the cheering begins, our little family growing louder by the second. We separate, laughing. I turn and find my mom standing to the back of the room. I run to her and she gathers me into her arms, hugging me tightly. Her soft sobs echo through me.

We pull away and she takes my face in her hands. “Never ever scare me like that again, okay? You can’t leave me, Bumblebee,” She says through little hiccups.

“I promise, mom. I’m not even sure what happened, but I know dad was there. He helped me so much. We trained every day. He’s perfect and I’m glad I got to spend time with him. But... I’m sorry I wasn’t here, or well, not all of me was. I wasn’t trying to hurt anyone, I was just scared. I couldn’t come back on my own and I needed a little time to come to terms with everything that happened. I’m okay now, I swear. Besides, the Void is boring. I never want to return.” I smile and mom does too while drying her eyes.

“I’m happy you got to spend some time with Uriel. Do you understand more now why we had to do things the way we did?” She questions, a stern look on her face. I nod.

“Yes. I made a promise to myself that I wouldn’t let the sacrifices you and Dad made be in vain.” Moving away from mom, I turn to the unknown woman in the room. She’s standing there beaming, her dazzling ice blue eyes sparkling as she looks at me.

“Well, kiddo. I’m your Aunt Kiki and if you needed a vacation you could have come to Louisiana to visit, not scare the shit out of everyone.” Everyone laughs and I look around the room that’s filled with the love of my family. I was silly to

not want to return to this. I know without a doubt they all have my back. I'm glad for it because I'll need it for what comes next.

It's time someone put an end to Claire and the Bitch Barbies.

I'm just the Cranirian to do it.



## *Chapter 26*

### **Riftyn**

Auntie Kiki, as I'm now supposed to call her, and her guys spend a few more days here catching up with the girls and getting to know the rest of us. I have to admit, I was a little afraid she was a kook when she first got here, but the more time I've spent with her I can see that she's really more like a combination of the girls. She's smart and serious, like Piper. Eccentric and outspoken, like Willow. Worrisome and real, like Mila. Loving and kind, like Kimble. With the strong women these girls grew up with in their lives, it's no wonder that, with a single look, they had a wolf, a dragon, a vampire and a demon fall at their feet so fast. We're all saying our goodbyes to Kiki and her guys as they prepare to leave.

I glance over at Kimble. After several long, steamy showers, where getting clean wasn't the only thing we accomplished, her color is back and her skin is glowing again.

Her wounds fully healed a long time ago and you can't tell anything happened to her at all. Although, you can still see faint, dark circles under her eyes. The trauma of it all still weighs on her mind and she has trouble sleeping. She seems to rest easier when I shift and let Cosa curl up with her. I don't mind because she's his too and whatever makes her feel the safest is what we'll do. I guess the darkness isn't as scary when you have a huge teddy bear surrounding you.

*Teddy bear? Are you so jealous that you'd resort to name calling now? That's low. Even for you, shorty.*

Snickering, I ignore him and focus back on Kimble. She's laughing at something someone said and I cherish the sound. I didn't know if I'd ever hear it again.

Feeling a hand on my shoulder, I peel my eyes away from Kimble. My brothers are standing at the kitchen door nodding for me to join them. I leave my seat on the couch and we file into the kitchen, each taking a seat at the little breakfast table placed in the middle.

"Pack meeting, I take it?" I meet each of their eyes and they nod.

"Yeah, man. Something has to be done about Claire. The other girls don't have their powers yet, what if something

worse happens to one of them? We were lucky Kimble at least had healing. I don't know what I would do if Piper was to get hurt like that." Kerner speaks first, running a hand down his face.

I get it. The other's haven't bonded with the girls yet, and none of them have figured out how to make their powers unlock. They're all scared. It's understandable.

"I could have Dad send one of his guys to take them out. Hell demons love a good torturing. That would be nothing less than they deserve." Lucien offers.

"Do not go telling Willow any of your ideas, Luce. I've already had a hell of a time trying to keep her from going to kill Claire in her sleep. The last thing anyone needs right now is Willow having access to a Hell demon." As Zane finishes, I can't keep my laughter at bay so I cover my face with my hands. Poor dude, I told him he was in for one hell of a ride with Willow. Maybe now he believes me.

"While I appreciate the suggestions, it's ultimately up to Kimble how to proceed. If she wants us to handle it, fine. If not, that's her choice. Her blood was spilled, not ours or anyone else's. And if we're going to have a pack meeting, from now on they should be included. They're pack too.

Grumbles and yeahs sound in agreement.

“So, what’s a pack meeting and why are we just now hearing about them?”

Our eyes snap to the kitchen door, all four girls are standing there with their arms crossed over their chests, hips out, and evil looks on their faces.

“Um, uh,” I stutter. Not much in this world scares me. Being next in line for Alpha gets you trained against a lot of fucked up things. But our four women, standing there looking as if they could slice our heads off with a simple look, is scarier than anything I’ve ever faced before. Including the Devil himself, Lucien’s dad. “Some supernaturals have packs that are established throughout history. Like wolves and dragons. Usually, packs are formed within a species of supernatural, but sometimes we forge our own. A pack is family. Those you would die for. Eye for an eye, blood for blood. Your pack is sacred. We have been our own since childhood, just us four, but since you came into our lives we consider you a part of it too.” I explain, as best as I can, hoping they understand.

“So, what I’m hearing is,” Willow begins, “you love us. You really love us!” The girls all start laughing and throwing themselves at the guys. Kimble sits in my lap, wrapping her arms around my neck. I kiss her softly. “You know damn well I love you. So, Miss Sawyer, want to be my Luna?” Her eyes

get as big around as saucers and she goes to speak but nothing comes out, so she just clamps a hand over her mouth. I realize my mistake instantly. “No, not like this. That was not what you think. Seriously, Red? Do you really believe I’d propose at the kitchen table and like that?” I scoff, slightly offended she could even think I’m so simple and unimaginative.

“I sort of thought that, but you have to admit, it did sound a little... proposal-ish.” She can’t look at me as she says this, choosing to stare at the wall or anywhere else but at me. I tickle her side until she lets out a squeal and then get serious as I look her in the eyes.

“No, Kimble. A proposal from me would be special. Flowers, food, someplace amazing and a ring. Plus, a speech that I work on forever and forget the moment I go to recite it. It would be something you would never forget, not something you’d want to.”

She smiles at me, her whole face lighting up with the gesture. When I see her smile like that I know nothing in this world can ever be as bad as she is good.

“Alright, Mr. Romantic. Tell me what a Luna is and you might have a deal.”

I’ve said it before, I’m a lucky bastard.



## *Chapter 27*

### **Kimble**

After our pack meeting in the kitchen, I asked to have a while to myself. Everyone relented and I came to my room. Riftyn said that it's up to me how we handle Claire. Pack motto is 'Eye for an eye, blood for blood'. How am I supposed to know how to handle this when I've been a supernatural, a Cranirian, all of five fucking minutes?

My anger boils inside me. I need to talk this out with someone who can be level headed. I wonder if I can talk to Cosa, without Riftyn hearing? Can't hurt to try, right?

I reach out, whispering, through our link. "Cosa, can you hear me?"

*Yes, Mo grá. I hear you. What's wrong?*

“Can we talk? You and I, without Riftyn hearing?”

*We are right now. Intent is all that is needed. You learned that with your father, correct?*

“Yes, but I didn’t know it applied to our link.”

*It applies to everything, Mo grá. In all that you do, your intention is your greatest power. Not your light, or your fae powers. Your mind is your best weapon.*

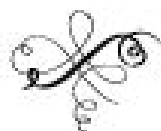
“I didn’t think of it like that. I need to talk this Claire shit out with someone who can be level headed and not push me one way or another like the others are trying to do. I know Riftyn and my mom don’t want me to get hurt again, our friends think we should do all things evil and murder. I don’t know what the right thing is. I don’t want to get hurt again, but I’m also stronger now and I’ve learned my powers. Even though I imagine ripping her throat out and she almost killed me, I guess that murder would still be frowned upon. I’m not sure what the right thing to do here is.”

*First time in my many years that I’ve ever been considered level headed. Thank you. Although, you may not be able to handle my ego much longer if you keep building it up like that. My head could explode. I can’t tell you what to do, that is up*



*to you. I can, however, listen and try to guide you. Will that help?*

“That’s all I’m asking.” I sink back on my bed, cuddling with my pillow and spend the next hour talking through my thoughts with Cosa. He’s right, no one can make this choice for me and I need to be completely sure about my next moves.



The talk with Cosa helps to ease my mind. He also taught me how to cut off my thoughts through the link. Something I desperately wanted, no needed, to learn.

I’ve decided what I need to do first and leave my room to discuss it with the others. Mila is waiting in the hall. As I step into the hallway, she throws her arms around me. “Kb, I was so scared,” she starts, wracked with sobs, “I’m so sorry I couldn’t help you. I tried, I couldn’t move and they were so much more powerful than any of us. We don’t even have powers yet, if we get them at all, since none of us know exactly how to unlock them. I know that you have a hard choice to make, but I want you to know that, no matter what, I

will back you one-hundred percent.” She sniffles, brushing away her tears with her hand.

“Miles, it’s okay. I know there was nothing you or anyone could do. We were caught unprepared, but that won’t ever happen again. And you will get your powers too, we’ll find the way to unlock them. Mine happened when I bonded with Riftyn. Maybe if you bonded with Lucien, you’d get yours too.”

“I can’t do that. Not yet. That’s a lifetime commitment, Kb, and we’re just getting to know each other. What happens if we bond and he decides I’m not the girl for him? What if I’m really not his mate and the bond doesn’t take? I’d be devastated and heartbroken. There’s too many factors to consider right now. Powers be damned. I can’t hand my life over to someone I barely know. Did you know I’m the first girl he’s ever been exclusive with? That doesn’t sit right with me. It shows he’s never had to commit to anything before. And he’s the Devil’s son. If my dad is an angel, what’s that going to do for our relationship?”

“First off, Mil, you worry too much. You being the first girl that Lucien has ever committed to shows that you’re special. He loves you, it’s written all over his face every time he looks at you. Own that, girl. He’s yours. Enjoy it.”

She scrunches her nose up how she does when she's thinking. "And second?" she asks.

"Second, if your dad is anything like Uriel then you have nothing to worry about. He's just going to be happy you have your mate. I mean, come on, the Archangels came down here and shacked up with fae women to make a reborn species. I don't think your dad is gonna be that pissed you're mated to a demon." I hope I make some valid points to her but in true Mila fashion, she's going to need time to think them over and weigh out every possible thing that could happen. Good or bad.

"So, what have you decided to do about Claire?" she asks, clearly changing the subject.

"Follow me and find out." I grab her hand and together we head into the living room.

I guess I've been gone longer than I thought because everyone turns and stares at me. Since I have their attention and all, I clear my throat hoping my voice comes out strong.

"I've made a decision on how to move forward. I was able to train with Dad but he couldn't help me with fae powers so it was more tactical and combat with angel powers mixed in. I'm stronger now. I'm not the weak girl I was before this

happened. So, before I can make a move on anyone I need to train with everyone.” I look at my friends. “And I do mean everyone. They may not have their powers yet, but it doesn’t mean that Willow, Piper and Mila can’t train too. We will never go anywhere as unprepared as we were before. That means we need to learn everything each of you knows. All things supernatural, everything about each other. I want to learn it all, things they won’t teach us in class. Wolves, vampires, dragons, demons, fae, witches, Djinn, all of it. After that, I can do what comes next. Deal?” I give my speech with as much confidence as I can muster. No one makes a sound for what feels like forever. But soon, they all look at each other and nod.

Riftyn is the first to speak, “Deal. But we all want to know, Red. What *does* come next?”

I look my mate dead in the eyes.

“Eye for an eye, blood for blood.”

## Chapter 28

### **Riftyn**

The next week goes by in a blur of classes and training sessions. Kimble wasn't kidding when she said we would all be training. Each day, after classes are over, we spar. Each of our classes sparring with a different one. Even Willow, Mila and Piper who, as of right now, are only human. But they've worked just as hard as the rest of us. My mate is evil, pushing us all to the brink and shoving us right over the edge.

*Don't let her hear that. It'd be worse than if I told her she was patty.*

*Petty, Cosa. The word is petty. And no worries there, I've grown quite fond of my face and I'd like to stay pretty for as long as possible.*

*Are you saying that our sweet little angel would hurt you, the big, bad wolf shifter? Pussy.*

***Ya know, I know that we're together until my soul leaves this Earth, but sometimes I wish I could remove you just to beat the shit out of you. How come you don't act like this with Kimble?***

*Firstly, you couldn't handle me as a mere human. I'm too strong and too fast. Secondly, Kimble is sweet and loving. I'll let you be the asshole, while I continue to be her adorable, amazing wolfy.*

***Hmph, adorable and amazing? Someone has been lying to you... wolfy.***

*Think what you will, but I am the one she came to the other day when she needed a level head. So, put that in your cheerios and choke on it.*

She went to Cosa for advice? She really has lost it if she thinks he's the level headed one. I ignore whatever else he's saying and focus back on my task. Currently, Zane is teaching Willow and Poppy some defensive moves while Lucien works with Mila and Piper on swords. Kimble, Fiona and Jazmine are practicing Kimble's fae powers.

Kerner and I are compiling all the information that Kimble wanted from each of us on all the stuff we know about supernaturals. I'm really starting to understand why their highschool couldn't pick a Valedictorian. All this smart shit is for the birds. I don't see how they do it. I've only been sorting these papers for thirty minutes and my brain is already melting. Of course, Kerner is a happy little dragon surrounded by information treasure and getting to sort it all.

“Man, I'd rather be out there letting one of the girls kick my ass all over the grove than sitting here doing this shit. How can you stand it?”

“I don't know, it's my nature I guess.” He shrugs a shoulder and continues his work.

He's a real conversationalist. I wonder if all the dragons in his family are that way? His dad is quiet and brooding too. His mom was killed when Kerner was young so we never got to meet her. Maybe she was the party animal of the family. I need a distraction from my grueling task so I look over to where Kimble is. She's flitting in and out of the space they're practicing in so that must mean she's picking up on her fae powers quickly. I didn't expect anything less from her or her friends.

I glance over to where Zane is and burst out laughing when I see Willow has him ass over head on the ground, holding

him there with his feet stuck in the air. Poppy is laughing so hard tears are streaming from her eyes. I take the opportunity to be the wonderful brother that I am and record a video.

I yell out, “Hey, Zane! What kind of defensive move is that?” I watch it load, still laughing my ass off, and send the video to our group chat. Everyone’s phones start going off and they all stop to look at the message. Now they’re all laughing at Zane too.

Willow stands up and rubs her hands together. She smirks and extends her hand to help him up. “You can call *me* Daddy now,” she says, throws him a kiss and saunters over to her mom where they watch the video, laughing loudly. I didn’t know that a pale ass vampire could turn so red.

Kimble catches my eye. Shaking her head, she gives me a look.

*You are so mean.*

*C’mon, Red. Tell me you didn’t think it was funny.*

*Oh no, it was hilarious. He has no idea what he’s getting into with Willow, does he?*

*I bet he does now. I’m still trying to figure out how she got him that way.*



*Maybe she has strength? I don't remember having it before my powers unlocked, but that seems like so long ago it's hard to remember what life was like before, much less if I was super strong.*

*Your powers could all manifest in different ways. With you four being a reborn species, who the hell knows how things work?*

*True. He could have also let her have the upper hand. He is a vampire. He could have taken her down or gotten out of that if he wanted to.*

She's right. Unless Willow is showing signs of her powers, Zane could have easily broken out of that hold. Who am I kidding? When you love someone you will do anything for them, including looking like a complete fucking fool.

Kimble must pick up on my thoughts because she brightens her smile at me.

*I love you, Rift.*

*I love you too, Red.*



The day carries on pretty much the same way as the rest of them do. We train, we share information, we eat, and we sleep. When Kimble sets her mind to something she goes all in.

I'm restless, not able to sleep. Worrying about what Kimble is going to do when she feels ready has me sick. I'm tossing and turning, so I get out of bed and head to the kitchen.

Raven and Fiona are sitting at the kitchen table, a plate of chocolate chip cookies between them, discussing something in low voices. As I enter the room, their conversation stops, both of them turning to look at me.

"Can't sleep, either?" Fiona asks as I get a glass from the cabinet. Opening the fridge, I reach in and grab the milk, filling my glass to the rim. If they think I won't take those cookies, they have another think coming.

"Not at all. My head won't stop spinning. I'm worried about Kimble. She's hyper-focused right now. Are we doing the right thing by going along with this?" Her mom knows her better than anyone does so her advice is solid.

“The thing with Kimble, Riftyn, is that she’s headstrong. Like you said, she’s focused right now. The good thing about it is that she doesn’t go into a situation without weighing the pros and cons. So, if she’s thought things through, and has a plan, then we have to trust her.” She places her hand over mine, patting it in that way moms do. “One thing she would never do, is something that would hurt her family or friends. If nothing else, that alone should give you some peace of mind.” Smiling, she takes a bite of a cookie and stacks a few on a plate for me.

“You’re her mom, how are you so calm about all of this?”

“Oh honey, I’m far from calm. This is my third batch of cookies in as many days. I just have faith in my daughter. I didn’t raise a fool nor a coward. Yes, she takes a bit to find her footing but once she does... she’s invincible.”

If Kimble’s mother can feel that strongly about the situation, then who am I to question it?

I was wrong when I asked Kimble to be my Luna. She’s every bit the Alpha I’m supposed to become. It’s time I show the woman I love just how much I have her back.

Claire has no idea what’s coming for her.

## *Chapter 29*

### **Kimble**

I haven't told anyone, not even the girls, what my actual plan is. Turns out that the University Handbook isn't just a good paperweight, it has some very interesting information in it.

After skimming it, I noticed a section on student altercations. According to the bylaws of the school, if one student feels they were wronged by another student then they can issue what they call an Honor Battle. Isadora, the Oracle, has to have permission to read your memories for proof of malicious intent before the challenge is approved. It's all very Medieval feeling as the student body will be present along with the dean and the battle takes place in the school's arena in the bottom of the main building of Stonewall. Just add that to the list of things I didn't know existed.

We've gone weeks now without any drama. Claire and her friends were shocked when I returned to school, but so far they've kept their distance. Guess they weren't prepared for me to come back from the dead.

I'm waiting in the lobby of the dean's office so I can put my challenge into place. I told everyone I wanted to take a walk alone to clear my head. Riftyn tried to come along but I insisted I needed to be by myself. He relented, but not without giving me his sad puppy dog eyes. I almost fell for them too. Almost.

"Kimble? You needed to see me?" Gwen sticks her head out of her office, a look of confusion on her face.

"There's something we need to discuss and I didn't want anyone to be able to talk me out of it." I know that everyone thinks I can't do anything without Riftyn or the girls, and that's the exact reason why I'm doing this the way I am today. Gwen flicks her head telling me to come in. I stand up, gather myself, and enter her office.

"So, what is it I can do for you, Kimble?" she asks, taking a seat behind her desk. I take in a deep breath and exhale slowly, preparing myself for the explanation and semi-lies I'm going to have to tell her. I'm still not sure who can be trusted with my secret, which worries me about Isadora but if I read everything correctly she's only allowed to look at the

memories of the dates given, so hopefully that's true and my secret stays buried.

"I'd like to issue an Honor Battle against another student." Lifting my head to look her directly in the eyes, I say this as confidently as I can.

Her eyes widen and she starts to stutter, "An... an... Honor Battle? We haven't had one of those in centuries. May I ask who?"

"Claire Gardner."

"I'd also like to utilize the Rule of Seconds so that I may have two champions alongside me."

"And you understand the rules, everything that must be proven and what must happen?"

"Yes, ma'am. I understand them completely." I start making a mental checklist of the rules.

*Grant Isadora permission into my memories of the allocated dates of wrongdoing to show proof of my claim. I'm allowed the two champions should I not have any co-challengers with me. Powers are permitted but weaponry may only be used*

*should all parties agree to it. The battle is over when there is defeat by submission or death, whichever comes first.*

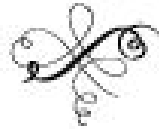
“I’ve read the entire thing, Dean Anais. I’m fully prepared for the outcome. Whatever it may be.”

“Can you tell me what happened?” There’s the question I have been waiting for, so I lean forward and tell her everything from that day.

When I’m done, she leans back in her chair and blows out a puff of air. “Okay, shit. Sorry, that’s a lot, but can I ask, are you sure this is what you want, Kimble? You’re only in your first year and still have so much to learn, and, while I don’t deny Claire and her friends can be... over the top, she has had extra training since birth. This is a very dangerous mission you’re on even if it’s well thought out.”

“I understand. I’ve weighed every outcome I can think of and I won’t be swayed from this. She left me for dead, Gwen. On the bathroom floor no less.” I can feel my face burning the more I think about that day. I’m pissed. I have every right to be. Sure this may be the dumbest thing I have ever done in my life, but it’s also the best way I can think of to stop Claire and her merry band of fuckwits. If I beat her, not only will she know she can never get to me again, but she’d be publicly humiliated.

No, not *if*... when I win.



I didn't realize that a battle took so much damn paperwork, but forty-five minutes and a majorly cramped hand later, it's all done. I meet with Isadora tonight and after that, once she gives the okay, then Claire will be notified with twenty-four hours to respond. Knowing that bitch, she'll wait until the last minute or refuse altogether since we know she's actually a coward in bully form. I'm hoping for neither. She probably thinks she has nothing to worry about when it comes to me. She's sadly mistaken. I aim to prove that to her no matter what it takes.

Right now, though, I have to do the scariest thing in the world. I have to tell everyone what I've done. The challenge doesn't bother me, the fact that when I tell those eleven people waiting at home for me what's coming and they murder me... does.

Walking back to the apartment, I have some time to clear my head. I need to just walk in the door and announce it, no bullshit, no hesitation, just say what I need to say and hope I



live through it. Easy, right? I reach out to Cosa while I'm being a chicken and hanging in the garage of the building.

*Hey, Wolfy.*

*Mo grá, you've been pretty quiet lately. What's up?*

*I needed time to figure out what I was going to do without the others being able to change my mind. But now I have to tell them my choice and I'm worried how they're going to take it.*

*Honestly? Not well... at first. They all love you, and trust you. They'll come around. Have a little faith in them too.*

*Are you mad at me for this, Cosa?*

*Never. You are the strongest person I know and I believe in you. You can handle yourself now, of that I have no doubt. Am I worried? Of course. But I won't try to stop you. As a matter of fact, I can't wait to see you destroy that girl. It's time she got what she deserves. Have you chosen your champions?*

*Not really. If you were me, who would you choose?*

*As hard as this is for me to say, because I'm leaving my mate in the hands of others, and as Riftyn and I have no actual*

*magical ability, I'd entrust our brothers to you. So for me, I'd choose Kerner and Lucien.*

*Thank you, Cosa. I want you to know I love you just as much as I do Riftyn.*

*I know. I love you too, Mo grá.*

Feeling better and more empowered, I shake off my nerves and enter the elevator. Hopefully, it's time to rally the troops.

War is coming.

## Chapter 30

### Riftyn

I'm making a sandwich when I hear Kimble come home. "Pack meeting!" she calls out. I smile because this is the first time she's referred to everyone as the pack. It makes me love her more that she can embrace my ways and actually seems comfortable with them. And I know she loves Cosa the same as she does me, which makes my heart swell with pride even more.

"I need you all to sit and not say a word until I am done. Please. This is hard enough for me to say as it is and I don't need any interruptions." She glances between me and Willow, her eyebrow cocked and her expression knowing, like we're the two who would interrupt.

"Hey! Why you looking at me?" Willow whines. Okay, so maybe we *are* the two who deserve that look.

“Seriously,” Kimble begins, “I’ve made the decision on what to do about Claire. I’ve already spoken with Dean Anais and everything is set into motion. I want you all to know that I have thought this through carefully and I’m confident in my choice. Please, don’t be mad and please don’t try to dissuade me because you can’t. It’s set in stone now and there’s no going back.”

“Kb, what have you done?” Mila asks.

“Good question, Miles. This all sounds very ominous, Kimble. You’re scaring me a little,” Piper adds.

Kimble looks solely at her friends. “I’m getting to it. I’m just nervous.” She takes a deep breath and continues. “I’ve issued an Honor Battle against Claire. I have to meet with the Oracle tonight and then in two days time I’ll be facing Claire in the arena.”

“YOU DID WHAT?!” I yell.

“Stop yelling at me. What’s done is done. I don’t need anyone’s bullshit about it, I just need to know that you all have faith in me and trust I know what I’m doing.” Her eyes pool with tears.

*Stop being a dick.*

***Fuck you. I suppose you helped her with this?***

*We've spoken about it, yes. She's our mate, Riftyn. You said yourself she has Alpha qualities, would you be pissed if one of your brothers wanted to do this?*

***No, because they can defend themselves and...***

*And so can she. Please don't tell me you're going all macho, he-man woman hater right now and think that because she's a woman it makes a difference, are you?*

***Not because she's a woman, because she's my woman!***

*Our woman. Our mate, who has trained and worked her ass off to learn everything she can about her powers and combat. Do you have such little belief in her? If so, pull the stick out of your ass and show her you have her back!*

***Fuck! I hate it when you're right.***

*That's a lot of time spent hating.*

I pull my head out of my ass and go to her. “I’m sorry, Red. I didn’t mean to yell. I know you can handle yourself, but that will never stop me from worrying about you. You can’t expect anything less, and, if you do, we should really discuss your taste in men.” I smirk, trying to ease the tension between us.

“Wait a minute. What are we talking about here? I mean, I know what a battle is, but since dog boy over there is so pissy about it, it must be bad, right?” Willow chimes in.

“It’s not great, Willow. It’s an archaic practice that started when the university was first founded. Times were different then, but apparently it’s still in use today. Basically, it’s a duel. A student can challenge another student to a fight in the arena. The entire student body, parents, professors and the dean are the witnesses. The duelers can have two others with them for the battle and it doesn’t stop until either the student who issued the duel or the one it was issued against, yields or...” Fiona cuts off. No one wants to think about that last part.

“Or what, Auntie Fi?” Piper questions.

“Dies,” Lucien fills in.

There’s a beat of silence, then the room explodes. The girls all talking at once. Kimble starts to retreat toward the door, but I place my hand on her arm to stop her. “You want them to

back you, you want them to know you can handle it? Show them now how strong you are. You are their Alpha, they *will* follow you.” I tell her.

Kimble nods her head, straightens her shoulders, and cocks her chin. “Quiet!” Instantly, there’s silence. “I realize you’re worried. I realize this may be stupid. But it’s done. This was *my* choice, it was me she almost killed that day and I can’t, no, I won’t let it slide any longer. This is the only way it’s done with an honor system in place. She can’t cheat, she can’t ambush us ever again, and she won’t win. I’m no longer afraid of her, or anything anymore. I will come out on top. I promise. Say you understand. Say you’re in my corner. I need you all now more than ever.”

The girls surround her, all of them hugging and crying. “You know we have your back, Kb. Always,” Mila says.

Piper nods. “Until the end of time.”

Willow hiccups and says, “They don’t call us Met-a-Four for nothing, Kb. We’re family. We stick together through whatever comes for us.”

I look over to the moms, tears streaming down their faces. They all look at each other and nod, a silent agreement happening between them.

“Bumblebee, I think it’s time we go home. You’ve all proven you no longer need us as you’re adults now and together can handle anything.” Fiona takes Kimble’s hands in her own. “I’m so proud of you, honey. Should you need me, I’m only a call away. I love you.”

“I love you too, Mom. And I’ll always need you, no matter how grown I get.”

The moms all say goodbye, hugging everyone and taking their leave. I know that Kimble is sad to see her go, but it has to give her some pride that her mom feels she can handle this. Of course, I’m pretty sure Fiona also didn’t want to stick around to watch her daughter battle. I can’t say that I blame her, I’m not sure I even want to watch this. But I won’t leave her side.

Willow is the first to recover. “So, besides Pupperoni and his faithful sidekick Floof, who else are you choosing as your champion?”

Kimble looks at me, dread clear in her eyes. Before she even says anything, I know she’s not choosing me.

“Oh fuck, this ought to be good,” Zane says, taking a seat on the arm of the sofa.



“About that. I’ve thought it over and as much as I know you’d like one to be you, Riftyn, I don’t think it would be a good choice. I know that you’d protect me with your life, as I would you, but I need to be able to focus, and with you out there, I’d only be able to focus on you. Plus, you don’t have any magic. It’s also the reason why I haven’t chosen any of you.” She turns to the girls.

“We understand, Kb. We’re not quite ready to get our asses kicked anyway,” Mila laughs. “So, who have you chosen?”

Kimble turns to two of my brothers. “I need those with magical abilities, and who won’t distract me. Plus, one of you has years of battle practice and the other can be ruthless and underhanded. And Zane, I’m sorry, but I’ve seen your video. So, I was hoping that you two, Lucien and Kerner, would be my champions?”

They look to me, worry and doubt on their faces. I nod, letting them know that it’s okay. While I want to be by her side for this, I also understand why she’s chosen them.

“We’d be honored,” they say in unison.

“That fucking video. Riftyn, I should kill you for that,” Zane grumbles.

“I’m not scared of you, brother. I’ll just sic your Daddy on you.”

We all laugh as he stalks out of the room.

Kimble smiles, the look of uncertainty erased from her expression. Calmness and ease replace it. She’s thought about this down to every last detail and now all I can do is be there for her.

“So, what time do we go see Isadora?”

## *Chapter 31*

### **Kimble**

Today is the day.

I'm sitting in my room going over everything that everyone has taught me in my head. I can't have self doubt now, I have to stay vigilant.

All the preparations are made. It took Isadora less than a minute to validate my claim, and, surprisingly, Claire responded way before the time was up. Kerner, Lucien and I have spent some extra time these last two days training with each other. Riftyn stayed faithfully by our sides, coaching and encouraging us. He's been the perfect boyfriend. Even if he's hated every minute of this, he hasn't shown it.

A knock sounds at the door and Riftyn enters. He comes over and sits next to me on the bed. "Hey, Red. You almost

ready?”

“Yeah, just going over some strategies to myself. I don’t want to let anyone down. I don’t want to fail,” I respond, looking him in the eyes.

“Red, no matter what, you won’t be letting anyone down. I’m proud of you.”

“You mean that? You’re not mad I didn’t ask you to do this with me?”

“I was a little hurt at first, sure, but I understand. Plus, Cosa and I had a talk. Well, he basically told me to take the stick out my ass,” he chuckles. “But his logic about it makes sense. Besides, I know you weren’t doing it to hurt me. You had a fucked up choice to make. I wouldn’t have chosen you either.”

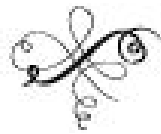
“For some reason, that makes all of this better.” I smile. See? Perfect boyfriend. I lean into him, he wraps his arms around me and kisses the top of my head. “But when all this is over, I think you’re going to have to be really nice to Zane for a while. He may be a little butthurt about it still,” he chuckles.

“He’s butthurt over that damn video, not that I didn’t choose him. It’s you that needs to suck up to Zane, not me.”

He sighs. “Maybe you’re right. I want you to know that I’ll be in the arena stands cheering you on today, Red. I love you more than anything in this world and I want you to go out there and kick her ass. Got it?”

“Got it. I love you too, RIFTYN. End and beginning.”

“End and beginning,” he says and kisses me. I can feel all of his love in that single kiss and it makes me braver. As long as I have him and the others in my life there’s nothing I can’t accomplish.



We pull up to the school, the guys in one car, me and the girls in another. I need a moment with my best friends before I step into battle.

“This is it, Kimble. Are you sure you want to do this?” Mila asks.

“There’s no turning back now. I have to do this. Not just for me, but for anyone who has ever had a Claire in their life. This

is important. I couldn't just continue going through the motions acting like she got the better of me, of all of us, which she did, but I couldn't take it anymore. When I was in the Void with my father, I thought myself a coward. He showed me that I wasn't, that it's okay to be afraid but you have to push through. I've overcome some pretty strange shit lately. I'm scared shitless now, but I won't let her see that."

Piper takes my hand. "We get it. We really do. Doesn't mean we aren't scared for you. Are you positive you can do this?"

"Absolutely."

Willow opens the car door. "Then let's go so you can kick her ass."

The arena is pretty much how I pictured it. The battle area is an oval-shaped pit with little sections off to the side for the contenders. The bleacher type seating for spectators looks like it has enough space to hold the entire state of Pennsylvania. It's all old wood and dirt, nothing fancy. There's a weapons rack off to one side that straddles both sides of the battlefield. Neither Claire nor I opted for weapons so it's empty now, which is a good thing because I'm positive Claire would be underhanded if they were there. There are flags hanging from the top of the arena in two different colors. Green for me and purple for Claire.

Everyone gathers on my side of the pit for one last pack meeting before the battle begins. I can see Claire and her goons, whom she must have chosen as her champions, on the other side staring at us and seething.

“She keeps that shit up, she’s going to start foaming at the mouth,” Lucien quips. I turn away from Claire and glance around at my friends... my pack.

“Thank you all for being here today and supporting me through this. I wouldn’t be as sure about this as I am if I didn’t have you. You’re my best friends, my family,” I turn to Riftyn, “my pack. You make me stronger, braver... better.”

“It’s what pack does, Kimble,” Zane offers.

“Yeah, we stick together. What one goes through, we all do,” Kerner adds.

They surround me, each of them holding tightly onto me and each other.

The horns blare indicating we have to get into position. Riftyn steps forward, picks me up and kisses me passionately. “Remember, Red, if you die out there that will be the last kiss you ever get. Don’t die. Deal?” He places me back on my feet

and turns to Lucien and Kerner. “Protect her with your lives. Understood?” They both nod and Lucien claps Riftyn on the back. “Her life is ours, brother. We won’t fail.”

With that our friends start moving away. Willow stops and turns back. “Hey, Kimble. Remember one thing for me, okay?” she says.

“Yeah, Lo?” Her eyes lower to the ground and slowly she raises them, her hand rising in the air at the same time.

“THIS IS SPARTA!” she yells and breaks into a fit of laughter before walking away to join the others.

Kerner, Lucien and I share a look, smiles on our faces. “That girl is nuts,” Lucien chortles.

I nod in agreement and we take our positions on our side of the pit. Professor Dyseron, a harpy, steps into the middle of the arena.

“Ladies and gentlemen, take your seats.” She gestures to the spectators. “We come before you today with an Honor Battle proposed in the name of Kimble Sawyer against Claire Gardner. Please remain quiet while we go over the rules. The two contenders have chosen their champions to fight alongside them should they be needed. The champions must be



summoned before they can intervene. If at any time a champion enters the battle before being called upon, their contender will be disqualified and the win goes to the opposing fighter.

“You have both stated that no weapons were warranted, so they’ve been removed. A scanner was used to determine if you had any on you when you entered the arena to keep things honest. This is a noble battle. You will duel until a clear winner is named either by yielding to your oppressor or in the result of your death. Do you understand the rules as I have stated them?”

She looks around at each of us, waiting for us to agree. When we do, she continues.

“Alright then, take your places. When the horns sound, the battle will begin. Good luck to you all.”

With that she walks away, joining the dean in the box seats set up for staff. Guess it’s time to show everyone what I’m made of.

As soon as the horns sound, my nerves catch in my throat. Lucien and Kerner place their hands on my shoulders, silently giving me the strength to step forward.

“Still mad about that little tiff, Kimble? Did you really need to have the whole school watch me destroy you... again?” Claire says, coming to stand before me. She turns her head, looking out into the crowd. Her eyes land on Riftyn, she gives him a little finger wave and blows him a kiss.

“Oh no, Claire, I’m not mad. I’m pissed off and, this time, you don’t have the upperhand.”

“Ooh, scary. Am I supposed to be worried about you now? A weak little... whatever you are.”

“No. You shouldn’t be worried. Since that day I’ve learned more about what I am. I’ve trained. I’ve fought my way to this moment right here all so I could make sure you would regret the day you met me. So, Claire, you really shouldn’t be worried. You should be afraid.”

My eyes flash with the green light of my Earth power, something I learned from dear old dad, and Claire slowly backs away. What she does next doesn’t surprise me in the least.

“I call upon my champions!” She yells, summoning Fallon and Tempest to the pit. Her eyes travel to mine and she smirks. What she doesn’t know is that I was prepared for it.

*Kimble, summon Lucien and Kerner. It's not a fair fight.*  
Riftyn says through our link.

I simply shake my head no in response. Even from this distance I can hear him growling, his anger flaring throughout the arena.

I take my stance, keeping my eyes bouncing from one bitch to another, waiting for whatever they're going to do. Claire looks at Fallon, jerking her head in my direction. Okay, so Fallon goes down first. Fine by me.

Falon steps forward slightly and flicks her wrist, four power orbs emerge from her palms. But I'm ready, and dodge each of them easily. She flings two more my way and the last one catches on my pants, searing a hole into them that scorches my skin. I look down, patting out the embers that still linger. Concentrating, I'm able to heal quickly, barely even noticing the pain.

"Is that all you got?" I ask her. She laughs, another flick of her wrist and I'm immobilized. She turns her hand over, effectively flipping me onto my back. I jump up, flinging my own power orbs in her direction. I rapidly fire them, not giving her the time she needs to maneuver away from them all. The last one rings true, hitting Fallon in the chest and knocking her down. She doesn't move, doesn't get up. A bell sounds and two staff members run into the pit, dragging Fallon's unconscious body out of the arena.

One down, two to go.

Again, Claire looks to her friend, signaling Tempest to take her turn at me. I'm not worried though, one-on-one is what I wanted from the start.

Tempest steps up, a cocky smile on her face, and flings her head in my direction. Her power comes out, sending me flying through the air. I land at Kerner's feet. He looks down at me, arms crossed at his chest, as I struggle to stand. "Our turn?" he chuckles.

"Not yet. I'm fine," I grumble, getting to my feet.

Damnit, Red. Call on them now!

Again, I only shake my head. I dust myself off, the only thing hurt at this point is my ego, and race toward the middle again. Over and over, Tempest flings her power at me. I'm doing my best to dodge her advances, struggling to wear her out. One huge blast of her power hits me and, once again, I'm flung through the air landing at the guys' feet. "Now?" Lucien asks, his face bright red from holding back his laughter.

This time, *I* growl, "No. Not yet."

“Alrighty,” he says in a singsong manner.

“Sit down, dog boy.” I hear Willow say. Without even looking I know that my friends are doing all they can to keep Riftyn in his seat. I don’t need the distraction so I tune out all the noise, focusing on the task at hand. Tempest.

Concentrating, I form a power orb between my palms. I bounce it back and forth in my hands, giving Tempest time to ponder what I’m going to do with it. I fake to the left, watching her move right, prepared to dodge.

When I don’t throw it, a look of confusion crosses her brow. Holding the orb in my right hand, I slam it into the ground. Since we’re surrounded by dirt and earth, I know that what I plan will work. I focus on what I want to happen, and the ground begins to shake. A large crack forms in the dirt, moving toward Tempest. She begins racing around, trying to move out of its path.

Suddenly, it stops and the room goes still. There’s a loud rumble and a large root-like vine emerges from the ground, wrapping itself around her legs and picking her up into the air. It continues to encircle her as she screams to be released.

I turn my hand over and over, banging her into the ground repeatedly like a toddler does a doll. I can hear my friends

howling with laughter and it makes me laugh loudly too.

When I finally get my fill of that, I fling my hand toward the wall. The vine releases Tempest, slamming her into the wall and knocking her unconscious.

Two down.

The bell dings and another two staff members run out into the pit hauling Tempest away.

One to go.

“Having fun?” Claire snarls.

“About to be.”

Claire and I race toward each other, slinging magic through the air as fast as we can. One of her assaults hits me in the side and I double over. My anger rises. We’re both running around in an effort to see who will tire out faster. I conjure up a power ball aiming it at her feet. Rolling waves of magic travel over the ground, knocking her down, but she doesn’t stay down long.

Rising to her feet and moving quickly, she throws a burst of fire at me. I duck, but not soon enough. The flame catches my

shoulder and singses my hair.

This really pisses me off as it took me forever to grow my hair out like this. Vain? Yes. Do I care? Fuck no, this is my damn hair!

I splutter some incoherent insult at her and fling another power orb her way. She sidesteps and it misses her altogether.

Shit. What do I have to do to take this bitch out?

I try once more, flinging power orbs at her and the ground as fast as I can conjure them up.

A few hit her, taking her down, but she doesn't seem all that phased as she always quickly rises.

Seriously? I'm wearing myself out now and she doesn't even look like she's breaking a sweat.

I turn my face to the sky, silently pleading with, well, whoever will listen, and I miss Claire's next move.

Her shards.

The crowd is going crazy behind us. But I can't focus on them right now.

I feel them pierce my skin. The memories of the bathroom come flooding back. I grab onto myself, hugging tightly. "I call up..." I manage to get out before I fall to my knees. I hear a howl throughout the arena as the darkness surrounds me.

I hear voices in the darkness.

Do not succumb. You are stronger than this. You've come too far to let her win *again*. *Stand up, my love. Rise, Mo grá.*

*Intent. Focus. You can do this. Rise, little angel.*

*Come on. Get up. Don't let her have this. Victory is yours. Rise, Red.*

*My precious daughter. You have been a true warrior today. This is not the end. Rise, Bumblebee.*

*Rise, Kimble.*

My parents and my pack pull me away from the nothing again. I know what I have to do now. Secrets be damned.



My body lifts from the ground, floating in the air. My light bursts out into a brightness that encases the entire arena. My wings spread from my shoulders, hovering silently behind me. I open my eyes, the green glow covers my sight. Using my power, I push the shards from my body and they drop to the ground in a loud thud.

Gasps echo throughout the building. Knowing my secret is out now, but not caring, I go to speak. The voice does not sound like my own.

“You bully and you tease. You torture and you belittle all of those you deem beneath you, Claire. That ends today!” My light explodes from my chest aiming directly at Claire. She has nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The power engulfs her, freezing her where she stands. Her eyes widen and a look of shock comes over her. A bubble of green light forms around her, keeping her in a stasis-like state.

I lower myself to the ground just as the horn signaling the battle is over sounds. Slowly, I walk to where Claire is in the bubble. Raising my hand, my light surrounds it. I run my hand over the outer casing of the bubble, it shimmers and drops Claire to the ground. Leaning down over her, I move her face to where I can look her in the eye. “I call that my twist of fate.” Placing a finger to her forehead, I give a small tap, putting her in a comatose state.

The crowd roars behind me. I look around the arena searching for Riftyn and my friends. When I find them, I'm shocked. My parents are there too, each one on either side of Riftyn. They both have a proud smile on their face and I rush to them, gathering everyone I can into a group hug.

We let go of our embrace and turn our heads to watch them take Claire's sleeping body away.

"Man, we didn't even get to play. That's not fair, Kimble," Lucien whines.

"Don't listen to him, Kimble. You were totally badass out there, you didn't need us," Kerner says proudly.

"We'll discuss you ignoring me later, but you really were badass, Red. What do you want to do now?" Riftyn says, placing an arm around my shoulders.

I look around at all the people I love.

"Can we go home?"

Everyone agrees and we head for the doors.

"Shotgun!" Willow yells and races ahead of us.

We all laugh and take off running, knowing that Willow getting the front seat means she also gets radio privileges and no one wants that.

## *Epilogue*

*A few months later...*

### **Riftyn**

Every year, to celebrate the end of the term, Legend Springs University throws a semi-formal dance in the ballroom. It's a chance for students to get dressed up and let loose. They really go all out for it, too. Food, champagne, ice sculptures, music... the works.

Things have been quiet around school lately. Claire is still in whatever state Kimble put her in and no one, not even her own father, has attempted to wake her up. Fallon and Tempest steer clear whenever they see us. I don't blame them. My girl made them look like fools that day.

The dean had a meeting with the girls about their powers, promising their secret would go with her to her grave. Turns

out her father is an elder and had told stories of the Cranirians so she knew the danger involved in their secret getting out. She, along with Isadora, have been instrumental in erasing the information from everyone's mind they could.

The guys and I are getting ready in our apartment. The girls, who started getting ready three days ago, are still hiding in theirs, claiming this was important and it takes a while for perfection. We've all told them they're already perfect but girls will be girls I guess.

Zane walks into my room balancing numerous boxes of corsages in his arms. "Dude, I'm so nervous I forgot what color Willow said her dress was," he says, dropping them all onto my bed.

"What're you gonna do, wait until you see her and then choose or just chuck them all at her hoping she catches the right one?" I laugh, teasing him. "Besides, it's just a dance. What have you got to be nervous about?"

"I'm going to ask her to bond tonight." The look on his face is pure fright. I understand that fear as I felt the same when it was time to tell Kimble.

"You got this, brother. She loves you, you love her. Just be real and honest. She won't turn you down." I go to him, giving

him the one arm, back pat, man hug and look down at his collection on my bed.

“Do you think you could, you know, help me out here?” he asks.

“I can’t help you. I have no idea what color her dress is. I had a hard enough time figuring out Kimble’s. Do you realize how complicated it is to find a corsage that goes with ‘dark champagne’?”

“I don’t mean that, dude. I mean... you know, do your thing with Kimble. Ask her.”

“Now *that* I can do.” I reach out to Kimble through our link. Hoping she hasn’t turned it off in preparation for tonight, something she’s gotten very good at these past few months.

*Hey, Red. Our brother needs a little assistance. Think you can help us out?*

*Depends. I’m not going to rush us just so you guys can ogle us sooner.*

*That’s not what I mean, babe. And seriously? Ogle. Who even uses that word anymore?*

*Do you want the favor or not?*

*Okay, okay. Sorry. Can you tell me what color Willow's dress is?*

*I can do even better than that. Dad taught me something awesome.*

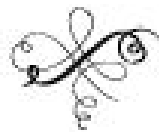
Just then, a vision of Willow standing there in her dress appears in my head. Okay, that *is* awesome.

*Thanks, Red. Love you, see you soon.*

I walk back over to the bed and look through the assortment of corsages Zane has gotten. I reach down, picking one up.

“This one,” I say, handing him the perfect one.

“Thanks, man.” He grabs the corsage and races out of the room.



## **Kimble**

“Hurry up, the guys will be here any minute. You are all taking forever!” Piper proclaims from the living room.

There’s a knock at the door just as we yell out, “Coming!”

We barrel into the living room, each of us oohing and ahing at the other’s looks. Nothing like your best friends fawning over you to boost your ego, right? Piper opens the door and there stand all four guys, in a row with their backs straight and an arm hidden behind them.

Kerner walks through first, placing a purple corsage on Piper’s wrist. It goes perfectly with her dress. She beams up at him and he places a kiss on her cheek. They’re so cute together as they stand there in silence staring at each other.

Lucien steps through the door next, placing a teal corsage on Mila’s wrist. She holds her wrist out, smiling and admiring the corsage, then wraps her arms around his middle in a hug. He places a kiss atop her head and they move out of the doorway.

Zane is next to come in and he places a blood red corsage around Willow’s wrist. Willow admires it for a moment before planting a huge, sloppy kiss on his mouth, covering his face



with her lipstick. “There. Now you look perfect,” she says, pulling him away from the door.

I’m laughing at her antics until Riftyn comes in. “You are flawless, you look stunning,” he says, eyeing me up and down.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” I return, giving him a peck on the cheek.

“I got this for you.” He takes the corsage he’s holding and places it on my left wrist.

“It’s perfect, Riftyn. How’d you get one this color?” I stare at it, amazed he was able to get so close.

“A certain witch helped me out.” He winks, obviously talking about Auntie Kiki. I’ll have to remember to thank her later.

“Everyone ready to go?” Riftyn asks. We file out the door and head for the university.

Walking into the ballroom, we stare at the decorations. They have ice sculptures and centerpieces in every color imaginable adorning the tables. There are buffet tables lined along one wall filled with savory foods and little cakes and cookies, a punch bowl sits right in the middle. There are twinkle lights

strung up everywhere and transparent pieces of fabric hang from the ceiling. There's a stage on the far side where a band is beginning to play light, flowy music. The only word I can think of to describe the whole thing would be elegant.

Everyone moves toward the dance floor and Zane excuses himself and Willow so they can step out on the balcony that overlooks the grounds. As Riftyn wraps me in arms and we're swaying together I reach out to Cosa.

*What do you think that's about?*

If I eavesdropped correctly, Zane is about to ask her to bond.

*No shit! Really?*

*I believe so, Mo grá. By the way, you look ravishing tonight.*

*Thanks, Wolfy. I just wanted to touch base to make sure our surprise for Riftyn is still on.*

*Definitely. It's been very hard keeping this secret, I just want you to know that.*

*I know. I've almost let it slip a bunch of times myself. I just hope he's okay with it.*

*He will love it. I promise.*

*I hope so.*

*He will. Go. Enjoy your night. I'll be here, should you need me.*

Riftyn and I stay in each other's arms, barely moving, just holding onto each other for the next three songs.

“So,” I start, “Wolfy and I have cooked up a little surprise for you.”

“Oh, really. What is it?”

“Well, I've invited your paren...”

Zane's call for help interrupts what I was about to say and we rush over to the balcony. Willow is lying in his arms passed out.

“What the hell happened?” Kerner inquires.

“I don't know, man. She said yes to the bonding, so I gave her the bite, and she just... fainted.”

Riftyn and I share a knowing look. “We should move her, dude. She’s going to be alright, but we can’t have everyone seeing this.” Riftyn moves to help Zane lift Willow off the ground.

I turn around, facing Mila and Piper. “Well, there goes the neighborhood. Willow’s about to get her powers.”

“Oh no,” they groan and then we double over in laughter. Linking arms, we follow the guys into the night.

Whoever thought a group of girls like us would *not* be...

Only human.

The End.

## *Acknowledgments*

Here we go, the long drawn out portion of the book where I thank all of the people that helped make this book possible. Get ready, because if you know me, you know I can be wordy!

First and foremost, to my wife, my ride-or-die, my forever. Without your encouragement, your love, your help, and your backing, I wouldn't have been able to do this. Seriously, none of it would be possible without you by my side. You've kept my sanity in check and pushed me to my boundaries and beyond. I love you and thank you so much for believing in me. You have been the rock I needed to stand on so I could see above the water and the life vest for when I was drowning. You are my end and beginning.

To my children- thank you for encouraging me, believing in me and not wiggling out when mom couldn't talk or barricaded herself in her room. I love you and I hope this shows you that dreams really can come true.

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Alex has been an avid reader since as far back as she can remember. Her fave genres are Paranormal Romance and Urban Fantasy. You can find her on any given night at home with her wife, kids, and fur-babies.

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