

A NOVEL BY  
SARAH BOGGS



OUR FERAL  
LOVE

BOOK ONE OF THE FERAL WOLVES  
SERIES

# Our Feral Love

*Book One of the Feral Wolves Series*

Sarah Boggs

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# First Shift

## Aurora's POV

The light shone brightly through the purple lace curtains that framed the window in my bedroom. The room is dark around me; I poke my head out from under the covers and groan because today is the day, May 17th, my birthday. The most important one at that, the one that marks a turning point in my life. Today, I am 18 and expect to go through my first shift. It is never known when it happens, but it will come at any point throughout the day, and it's supposed to be incredibly painful. Happy birthday to me, right?

I heave all 160lbs of myself out of bed, making my way to the closet. I looked around at my bare room, and felt bittersweet. Boxes sat neatly packed and ready to go. All my furniture, except my bed, was dismantled. Opening the sliding doors, I instinctively grabbed the string to turn the lights on. Finally finding it, the closet lit up around me. It wasn't big, but since I didn't own a lot of clothes, it wasn't a problem. I sorted through boxed-up clothes until I came out with a pair of blue jean shorts and a bright, rainbow tie-dye shirt. I straightened the closet up from the aftermath of my rummaging, and then I grabbed a pair of socks out of the bin stacked on the top shelf, not caring if they matched. Holding my clothes haul, I walked down the hallway to the bathroom. My family's house wasn't too big, just a tiny 3-bedroom house. My mom works hard to make it as comfortable and homey as possible; those feelings radiated throughout every decoration hung up, and every knick-knack sitting on the shelves hooked to the walls. My father thinks it's adorable how much work mom puts into the house. He always says that as long as she is happy, so is he. Mom smacks him when he says that; I think it's hilarious. The bathroom door creaks as I open it and flip the light switch on while closing the door. I take a quick shower, and by the time I'm done getting ready, it's time for me to go downstairs for our family breakfast. My family believes

that all meals should be shared whenever they can. My mom has been a stickler about it since I was young enough to sit at the table with them. No phones, no electronics, just straight family time.

I gave myself one last once-over in the mirror; my curly dark brown hair hung down my back, drying slowly. I made a mental note to re-dye the red in my bangs since it was fading. My sun-tanned skin was flawless, thanks to being a shifter. We don't get acne as ordinary people do; even if we did, it would heal lightning fast. My green eyes were ringed with black liner, a cat-eye wing, and mascara that lengthened my lashes. I had eyebrows that matched my hair color and were in a perfect arch over my eyes. I am pretty minimal with makeup; I prefer it to enhance my features, not smother them.

“Aurora, let's go! Breakfast will get cold, and your father is hangry this morning!” Mom called from downstairs. “I'm coming!” I yelled back. I grabbed my phone from the bathroom counter and ran down the stairs. Rounding the corner, the light from the kitchen illuminated me as the smell of bacon and eggs made its way to me; I swear I started drooling. I made my way to my seat at the table and sat down. “Good morning, took you long enough,” dad said to me grumpily. “Good morning to you too, dad,” I said with a warm smile, hoping to cut through some of his iciness. Being a people-pleaser has always been my fatal flaw.

Kissing the top of my head, my mom breezed by, dropped a platter full of scrambled eggs and bacon in the middle of the table, then sat down in her chair. “Happy Birthday, baby girl.” She said with a smile big enough to light the entire room up and little wisps of brown hair breaking free from her loose bun. “Oh, yeah. Happy birthday, sweetie!” Dad said, perking up a little bit now that there was food in front of him; typical man. “Thank you, guys!” I said as mom glared at dad across the table. “It's okay, mom. Dad would forget his head if it weren't attached!” I said, laughing as dad grumbled something

inaudible through his mouth full of eggs. He reached back and smoothed his jet-black hair down in the back; there was always one piece that stood straight up. “I have something for you that I know you’re going to love!” Mom said, bouncing in her chair with excitement. Her love language was gifting, and she never missed an opportunity to give meaningful gifts to those around her. I was genuinely looking forward to opening what she had gotten me. “I’m sure I will, momma,” I said with another smile as I dug into the eggs and bacon in front of me.

“So, do you have plans for your big day today?” Mom questioned as we were cleaning up from breakfast. Me washing dishes, her drying and putting them away. “I need to go to Ella’s pack house later. I’m one hundred percent certain she is throwing a surprise party. But I’ve tried my hardest not to let her know I know about it,” I said, laughing. Mom smiled, her tired, blue eyes shining. “You have always been too intuitive for your own good. We can never get surprises past you,” she said. “I’m psychic, mom; what can I say?” I joked, and she laughed. As she finished drying the last dish and put it away, I wiped the table down with some disinfectant. “Mom-” I started saying before turning around and realizing she wasn’t in the room anymore. I was going to ask her how bad the shift hurt, so I could at least be prepared for it. She came running back into the room with a small gift box, and I decided my question could wait. She looked so excited it warmed my heart. I walked over to her, gave her a big hug, and kissed the side of her head. “I love you, mom. I don’t know what I’d ever do without you,” I said as I inhaled her comforting scent of lilac and lavender. She hugged me back and shoved the box into my hand as she pulled away. “I love you too, sweet girl. Now open that gift! I’ve been so excited about it since I got it made. It took a lot of willpower not to give it to you early.” She said, giggling. I smiled as I unwrapped the bow and opened the top of the box.

Inside sat a beautiful pendant and ring set. The pendant was oval-shaped and looked like a locket. Silver

vines snaked their way across the front of it with a single, beautiful opal stone in the middle of it. Tears sprung to my eyes, and threatened to fall. I am not emotional; I don't cry often, so I held them back as best as possible. Mom looked at me apprehensively, noticing how my eyes glistened, and said, "Take the locket out and look at the back of it." Pulling the locket out, I flipped it over to see the words, "I will always love you, my sweet girl. You can do anything you set your mind to." engraved into the metal in a cursive font.

"There's no picture in it yet because I wasn't sure what you would want to put inside it. But I hope you like it," Mom said, smiling warmly at me. Tears leaked from my eyes as I pulled her into a tight hug. "You're crying; I didn't mean to make you cry!" she exclaimed. "It's okay, mom. They're happy tears. This gift means a lot to me. It's gorgeous, and I love it. Thank you so much!" I said through my tears while hugging her. I breathed in her scent, and it instantly calmed me down. "You're welcome." She squeezed me tightly. "Oh, and here is your father's gift." She said with a sly smile and handed me a \$50 gift card to Taco Petes. "Anything that has to do with food," I said, shaking my head and laughing with my mom.

I've never felt so tense in my life, waiting for my shift to take place. I laid around most of the day and watched T.V in my room, worked on some applications for an online college that needed to be submitted, and tidied up my already clean, packed room. It's funny how anxiety can keep you moving without knowing it. However, it was 5 pm, and I had to get ready to go to Ella's pack house. I glanced in the mirror, fixed my makeup, and brushed through my hair. My body ached as I got into my car and traveled across town. I drove on autopilot, lost in my thoughts.

I knew my sole purpose would be to find my mate and place in the pack after my shift. Each shifter is destined for someone, and I was hoping I would get lucky enough to be with someone who wanted a mate. Someone



who was a decent person. I was told you would be drawn to them by their smell; it will be the most delicious, enticing smell you've ever smelled in your life. While looking for my mate, I will be required to move into one of the pack houses where all the single shifters live their lives. Once I found my mate, we would be able to pick a house to move into together. Sometimes your mate never crosses your path. Or sometimes it's a messed up system, and your mate isn't born yet or hasn't shifted. I hope that's not the case for me. Your mate can reject you; it's supposed to be the most unimaginable pain. It was infrequent for someone to refuse a mate, not just because of the pain but because they would never be able to love someone else again. They would be stuck pining for each other until one of them passed away.

I pulled up to Ella's house and dragged myself out of my thoughts. Noticing the poorly concealed cars in the backyard behind her big country home as I walked up to the front of the pack house. I walked in, not bothering to knock, and was met with a dark room. Someone was giggling, and someone shushed them. Suddenly the room was lit, and a chorus of "Happy Birthday!!!" rang out from a room full of concealed people. I scanned the room, laughing, looking for my best friend. She came barreling toward me with a huge, giddy smile. Her blonde hair was curled, and her makeup was subtle against the splash of freckles on her face. Her petite 4'9" frame crashed into me, giggling, and we hugged. "Thank you; it was such a great surprise!" I whispered in her ear. "I know damn well you knew about this party. You always figure out surprises, don't act like you didn't know," she said, pulling back and tapping me on the nose. "You caught me; I'm guilty." Ella chuckled. "Mhm." The party was being held in the common room of the pack house, which meant that everyone who lived in pack houses could come and celebrate. Most of the people in the room I graduated high school with. Walking over to the table, I saw a pile of presents with my name on them, a massive tray of cupcakes with "Happy Birthday, Aurora!" written across them, a fruit and veggie tray, and a couple of

bowls of chips and dip. A couple of kegs stood in the corner of the room with cups stacked next to them. The entire room was framed in purple and silver decorations. Purple streamers, silver tablecloths, purple plates, purple silverware, and silver confetti were sprinkled everywhere. It was gorgeous, man, did my best friend know me or what? “So, has your first shift happened yet?” someone shouted at me from across the room, breaking me from my observations. My throat constricted, and my heart fell into my stomach as I recognized the voice. “Hello? Earth to Aurora?” he said as he snagged a cupcake on his way over to me. “Hi, Eli,” I said calmly. I’m not going to let him get to me; I don’t want him to know how I feel. “No, I haven’t shifted yet,” I said, looking up at him. He towered over me at a little over six feet while I was a sturdy 5’4”. “Damn, I was hoping I could see what your wolf looked like. You’ve seen mine, right?” he winked at me, and I rolled my eyes; everyone had seen his wolf. Since he shifted last year, it’s all he has talked about 24/7. “You know everyone has seen your wolf, Eli. It’s all you ever talk about.” His wolf was pure black with bright blue eyes and a giant, muscular frame. Very attractive to some people, but not to me. His arrogant personality ruined it for me. He leaned in towards me, “You’re just jealous because you know your wolf is going to be ugly like you, and mine will always be better than yours.” he whispered in my ear. I clenched my jaw and ground my teeth together. He laughed at the reaction he invoked and said, “Or, you could be one of the losers who never shifts. Considering you haven’t shifted yet and the day is almost over. I wouldn’t be surprised” He thumped my back and said, “Oh yeah, Alpha Max has decided that I am going to take over his beta position when his son takes over being alpha.” He smiled evilly, “So soon, you won’t have a choice in bowing to me, bitch.”

Suddenly I felt a fit of anger I’d never felt before. Usually, I’m a calm, collected person, but I wanted to rip him to shreds and then rip those shreds into tiny little pieces. Ella approached me, put her hand on my shoulder, and asked if I was okay, but I didn’t feel it. I didn’t hear

her question. Enraged, I yelled at the top of my lungs, “Eli!” He turned around in shock as everyone in the room stopped talking and partying. “What makes you think you’re much better than anyone else?” I growled. “You’ve bullied me and belittled me since ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. I never deserved it, and you know it!” Eli stood there in shock at being yelled at but quickly gained his composure. He came rushing towards me, anger and intent on his face. Then, the most unbearable pain wracked my body as I heard a loud, audible snap. Oh, God. It’s happening; I’m shifting. Not in front of this entire room full of people! Come on!

# White Wolf

## Aurora's POV

I couldn't hear myself screaming, but I was sure I was. Everyone in the room took a collective step back as they realized what was happening. Falling to my knees and rolling onto my side in the fetal position, I let the pain overtake me. It was terrifying as I listened to my bones snap and change. My arms broke first, then my hands, legs, and feet. Tears were rolling down my face, and my breathing was erratic. Then, all the pain stopped for a minute. What's going on? Why did it stop? I sat up. "Aurora, don't freak out. This is going to be the worst part." Ella warned. The worst part? What?!

As I felt little prickles along the entire length of my skin, I looked down and saw fur sprouting from every pore. Then as if on cue, my spine violently snapped, cracking my ribs and pelvis too. Agonizing pain ripped through my body, and I screamed until my throat was raw. Everyone stood around me, eyes wide and pity written on their faces. They had all been through the shift. They knew how terrible it was and what I was going through. My body convulsed, my head felt like it was going to split in two and everything went black. I couldn't see or hear anything, and my body felt like I was burning up. Then suddenly, my back arched, and my arms and legs formed into front and back legs. Long claws sprouted from my fingernail beds. Shaking my head and wishing I had my senses back, I could feel more fur growing along my body and a tail erupting from my back end. My clothes were torn to shreds. But I was in too much pain to care about my nakedness. Then, the last part of the shift took place.

My head morphed, and I found myself staring down a long snout; all of my senses came rushing back to me. They were heightened ten-fold; my new nose could smell food cooking from 10 houses down. I could see the individual wood grains on the floor. With the pain slowly ebbing away and leaving my body feeling like I just ran a marathon, I shook out my fur and stood up, then looked around. Everyone in the room was amazed. Their mouths hung wide open, and shock

was evident in every eye in the room. Even Elias couldn't move or speak, which was an accomplishment because that guy never shut up. Ella sauntered towards me, and I perked my ears up, whining at her as if to ask, "What's wrong with everyone?" Stopping next to me, she kneeled and ran her fingers through my long fur with awe. "We've gotta get you to a mirror; then you'll understand." She said. I looked for a mirror and spotted one in the corner of the common room behind the kegs. Everyone watched as I walked over to it on shaky new wolf legs. Ella followed behind me and used unnatural strength to push the beer kegs over like they weren't complete. I stepped in front of the mirror and stopped dead in my tracks.

Eyes wide, I took in my appearance. I was huge, no, maybe huge was an understatement. I was gigantic. Toned muscles ran along my body. My long fur was snow white, gray markings framed ears and at the end of my tail, and my feet were also capped in gray.

My eyes were bright green enough to look like they were shining. This is a big deal, a huge deal. I thought to myself as I inwardly started to panic. White wolves were pretty much unheard of since the very beginning days. White wolves were meant to be alpha wolves, and it was beyond rare for a she-wolf to be white, as average alphas are male. I looked at Ella, panic written clearly on my face, even as a wolf. She nodded at me and mirrored my thoughts by saying quietly, "This can't be good." Seeming to have broken the spell that kept everyone awe-struck, they suddenly started clapping. "She's gorgeous!" Someone in the back exclaimed. "I've never seen a white wolf before! Awesome!" Someone else said. Elias came charging over to where we were standing, his face scrunched in rage. Pointing at me, he opened his mouth, but no words came out. Stuttering as he tried to find any words to say, he finally spat out, "This isn't over, Aurora." He strode from the room to the stairs leading to the bedrooms.

Ella ran to her room to grab me some sweatpants and a t-shirt to wear once I shifted back as my clothes had been ruined. I sat down and stared at my wolf-self some more. Usually, your wolf had a voice, and its personality mashed

with yours in your head. I waited for her to speak up and show me she was here. Resigned to thinking it might be a while before that happened, I accepted the clothes from Ella and shifted back to human form. This time it was quick, like the blink of an eye. There was no pain, I noticed the extra senses didn't go away, and I felt a million times stronger. As a shifter, we heal insanely fast. So I'm not surprised my body took care of it quickly. Sitting down on the couch, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know much about our ancestors and what being a white wolf meant except that I was told to be an alpha somehow. Ella pulled her laptop out of her bag and searched "White wolf." She clicked on a site with an enormous paragraph on the history of white wolves. Reading it together, all I gathered was that white wolves were supposed to be faster, stronger, and better than ordinary wolves. Our senses and strength were comparable to being superhuman. Hence why they were always meant to be alpha.

The only way I would ever be able to become an alpha is if I challenge Alpha Max or his son. Challenging an alpha is never easy; you must be more assertive and muscular than them. It is a fight to the death; whoever loses not only the chance at being alpha but also their life. Our pack is living in harmony and doing pretty well, not to mention I wasn't ready for a fight to the death. Nope, I wanna live. Noticing my head felt fuzzy, I knew that was a sign I was about to be mind-linked. Mind-linking through packs means we can speak through a biological link we all contain as shifters. It's part of the DNA mutation that makes up our shifter composition. You can only use the mind link once you shift and can't shut any voices out.

You will also hear conversations between other pack members using the link if they are close to you, so anything you didn't want to be public should be said in person. "Congrats on your first shift, Aurora. Welcome to the Silvercrest pack!" I heard Alpha Max say his deep, booming voice through the pack mind-link. "Thank you!" I said back through the link. "There will be a pack meeting in three days at three pm; I expect everyone from Silvercrest to be there. It will be in the city hall auditorium. We have information from

the Midnight pack that needs to be discussed. Aurora, you can show your wolf form off there as well. I bet you're excited." Alpha Max said in my head. "Very." I linked with as much enthusiasm as I could muster.

There were two packs in our area of Colorado. Silvercrest and The Midnight Pack. The Midnight pack was blood-thirsty and violent. Whenever we crossed paths with them, we minded our business and did it as quickly as possible. Their alpha was unhinged, and rumors were lately that his son was also. We never messed with the border between our packs; it was common sense. Silvercrest was the pack where everyone loved each other like family. Well, some people do, anyway. Comparing the two packs was like comparing sunshine and darkness.

Two days later, it was a Sunday morning. I was unpacking the boxes that had been brought over to my packhouse, my new home. I was somehow lucky enough to be able to move into the house that Ella was in as well. If you were lucky, you could choose which packhouse you wanted to live in; but most weren't that lucky. Three main packhouses were scattered across our territory, each in a different area. They weren't that complete either, as most of the members in the pack had found their mates quickly. Pulling out pictures in frames from the box I was working on, I arranged them in various places on my bedroom wall. I stood there and admired my work for a moment. There was one of Ella and I in front of the Ferris wheel at our local carnival as teenagers, one of my whole family and me at my high school graduation, and one of me with my mother's arm slung over me while sitting on the couch, and one of Ella and I as children. Melted red, white, and blue popsicles in our hands and all over our smiling faces. The good ole' days, as we called them. I missed being carefree like that with Ella; now, we had to be serious all the time since we were official pack members. Sitting down on my bed, I let my thoughts wander.

How was I going to explain my wolf tomorrow at the pack meeting? Would Alpha Max want me to start training to become a pack warrior because of the strength of my wolf? I don't know if I could become a warrior, I had a pretty

muscular build, but I was nowhere near the physique of half the men in the pack. Would he feel threatened by me and kick me out of the pack? Nerves wracked my stomach and tied it in knots. Where would I go if he kicked me out? A timid knock at my door startled me from my thoughts. “Who is it?” I called. “Who do you think it is?” Came the sassy retort from my best friend on the other side of the door. I rolled my eyes and opened the door for her. She came bounding in, her little blue sundress flowing behind her. I shut the door and hugged her. “So, what do you want to do today?” She asked eagerly.

We had barely seen each other since she turned 18 and shifted. So it was time for us to play some catch-up. I was excited; I had missed her. “Well, it has been a while since we’ve gone shopping,” I suggested. Ella’s eyes lit up like I knew they would. That girl lived and breathed shopping. Her father was loaded; he owned a very successful law firm, so she never went without money. On the other hand, I was quite a bit minimalist. My parents had plenty of money, but I preferred comfy clothes over the glamorous ones Ella always picked out. Most of my closet was jeans, tank tops, and t-shirts. There was the occasional dress Ella picked out and gifted while saying she just had to get it for me. “Where do you want to go?” She asked. “Well, I’m new to this part of the town and don’t know the best spots. Why don’t you lead the way and show me around?” I smiled at her. “Alright, I can do that. Let’s go!” She said as she grabbed my arm and pulled me from the room. The sunlight caressed my exposed skin like a warm hug as we stepped outside; summer was always my favorite season; I loved the sun and its warmth. I wore a pair of jean shorts and a purple flowy tank top tied around my neck to complement the weather. Now that my senses had picked up, I could smell the sunshine. It smelled fresh, fragrant, and happy. As I inhaled again, I decided that the smell of the sun was my new favorite. Next to my mom’s scent, anyways. That would always be number one.

We arrived at a local strip mall about ten or fifteen miles into town and got out of the car. I let Ella lead the way in, as I’d never been here before. Most people didn’t go into town like this until they had shifted. They usually stuck to the areas



their families lived in. We walked into the mall, and the smell of musty new clothes and shoes hit me like a brick. The next inhale, I smelled the bathrooms across the mall, and someone had just done a number two. Gross. I wrinkled my nose and groaned. "Is it going to be like this all the time? The smells are a little overwhelming." Ella looked over at me with a confused look.

"What smells? I can only smell the cleaner they use on the floors and the clothes." "I can smell the bathrooms across the mall, and trust me, you don't want to smell those," I said, pinching my nose. Ella laughed, "Remember, Aurora, your senses are much better than anyone else. It might be something you have to get used to." She reminded me. I nodded at her and started walking towards the closest store; it was a Foot Locker. "Uh, Aurora, you might not want to-," Ella began to say but was cut off by an angry roar from inside the store as Elias spotted us and started charging over. "Here we go. Can't freaking wait," I said sarcastically.

# Unfortunate Mate

## Aurora's POV

“Aurora, you need to keep your temper in check. There are regular humans here; you can’t accidentally shift in front of them,” Ella whispered in my ear. She was correct; humans didn’t know about our wolves or us. Alpha Max would kill me if I shifted in public in front of all these people. “I know,” I growled back at her. She glared at me. Elias arrived in front of us, red-faced and seething. “Who do you think you are to scream at me and humiliate me in front of that entire party?” He spat at me. I was going to nip this in the bud quickly. “I didn’t say anything bad besides that you’ve been nothing but a giant bully,” I said casually. Calmness would make him even angrier, but I refused to step down to his level. “Also, you were wrong. My wolf is better than yours; that’s why you’re so angry. Deep down, you knew I’d always be better than you. That’s why you always made me feel worthless whenever you or your group of losers were around. You don’t control me or my thoughts anymore, Elias. So your comment at the party about this not being over? It is over; you have nothing to leverage over me anymore. Nothing to make me feel bad about. You’re no more than a fart in the wind to me. So go spout your bullshit at someone who cares,” I said, finishing my tirade with an evil smile. Eyes wide, the fart opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water. He started saying something, but I gave it no care in the world as I turned on my heel and walked away. Ella ran after me, “That was awesome!” She said excitedly. “It was a long time coming,” “Did you have to call him a fart, though?” She asked, giggling. I just smiled and laughed with her. “It was pretty funny,”

After about four hours of shopping, my legs were tired, and I was starving. Despite telling her not to, Ella had picked out a bunch of clothes and purchased them for me. “I didn’t get you anything for your Birthday! Let me get you these.” She had whined at me. I gave in only because they weren’t as flashy as her usual choices. Choosing not to bring up that she threw an entire party for me. While we slowly walked to the car, I listened to Ella chatter about her latest assignments in

her college courses. She took classes to become an accountant and would have a job at her father's law firm once she graduated. My future wasn't set in stone like hers was. I still hadn't heard back from any of the online colleges I had applied to. It was a little discouraging, but I enthusiastically tried to listen to my best friend. We got into the car and started the journey home. I realized how much I missed days like these. Since Ella moved into the pack house and started her college courses and pack training, she hadn't had much time for me anymore. I'm sure at the meeting tomorrow; Alpha Max will tell me when my training will begin. Every pack member goes through various levels of activity to figure out how they can best serve the pack.

Nerves swirled in my stomach as I realized how close the meeting was. It was nearing four pm, less than twelve hours, until I had to face everyone. "Hey, Ella, are you hungry?" I asked as I merged off of an exit onto the highway. "That's a stupid question. I'm always hungry," She said with sass. I rolled my eyes; the girl could eat enough to feed an army if she could. "Do you want to go to Taco Pete's? I have a gift card" She nodded eagerly. "You don't have to use your gift card, though. I can pay for both of us." She offered. "You've already bought me enough today, Ella. Let me pay for our dinner. Taco Pete's isn't expensive, and I've got a fifty-dollar gift card," I said sternly.

Sensing I wasn't in a perfect mood, Ella just sat back in her seat and let it go. I knew I shouldn't be taking my nerves out on my friend. Guilt flooded my brain, "I'm sorry, Ella. I'm just really nervous about tomorrow," I said. She nodded. "I figured that was the case. We can talk about it more while we eat dinner." She said, rubbing my shoulder.

Fifty dollars can get you a ton of food at Taco Pete's. I was never a big eater, but it wasn't uncommon to have a big appetite once you've shifted. Your metabolism goes a lot faster once you have your wolf. There were probably about thirty tacos and burritos on the table in front of us, plus two extra large cups of soda. We started eating our way through our food in silence. We were both starving after our adventurous day of shopping. Around my fourth or fifth taco, though, I felt a

nagging feeling in my head, like there was a second presence inside of it. A melodic voice rang out in my head. “Hi,” it said. I jumped in my seat and dropped my taco. Ella watched me with interest. “*You don’t have to talk to me immediately; I know having another voice in your head is weird. My name is Raina, and I’m your wolf; it’s nice to meet you, Aurora finally.*” the voice said. I sat there in awe with my mouth full of tacos; it was even more incredible than people had told me. The voice laughed in my head. “*I can hear everything you think, by the way.*” “Your wolf finally started talking?” Ella asked knowingly. “Yeah, she did; her name is Raina. Her voice is beautiful,” “*Thank you,*” I heard in my head. “That’s such a pretty name; my wolf is named Bracken,” Ella said, shoving another burrito in her mouth. “So, what do you want to do about tomorrow?” She asked casually. “I’m not sure; I don’t think there is much I can do at this point but rip the band-aid off and show them my wolf. I can’t hide it,” I said with a slight frown. Ella’s brows furrowed, “Do you think Alpha Max will challenge you when he sees that you’re stronger than him? I know he seems like a level-headed guy, but I’m worried he will challenge you right then and there.” She said with concern. “*He’d be stupid to do that. We would win any fight.*” Raina said, her melodic voice dripping with confidence. “He wouldn’t be smart to challenge me right then and there; it would put his reputation at risk. People would think he’s more power-hungry than he is.” I said. “Plus, he probably already knows about my wolf. Word spreads fast around the packs. Hell, The Midnight pack probably knows at this point too.” Ella raised her eyebrows, “Maybe he has to see it to believe it. But I think you’re right; we will have to see what happens. I know that doesn’t ease your anxiety, though.” I shrugged my shoulders, “I’ll get through it. I’m a strong independent woman!” I joked, more to ease my apprehension than to make Ella laugh. She laughed at my lame attempt at a joke. We finished our tacos and headed home for a girl’s night.

Three horror movies, two bowls of popcorn, and a bottle of wine later. Ella was passed out on the floor next to my bed as I tossed and turned while I tried to fall asleep. I stared at her, sleeping, jealous that she could fall asleep anywhere. I was buzzed from the wine but not drunk. I took a lot to get

drunk while Ella was a lightweight. *“Why are you so worried, Aurora?”* Raina asked me. The alpha and beta were probably going to be furious when they saw my wolf; that’s why I was nervous. *“It doesn’t matter what they think of me. We are meant to be Luna. I’m here to help you however you need it.”* I don’t want to be a Luna; I’m not strong enough for that. *“Yes, you are; we are both strong enough for it. It’s just whether or not you want to divide the pack by issuing the challenge.”* What part of I don’t want to be a Luna, don’t you understand? It’s not about the challenge but the roles I will have to fulfill. I’m not good at talking to people; I’m not even good at making simple decisions, let alone big enough to run an entire pack. Raina was silent in my head; she knew that was the truth. I turned over and reached into the nightstand drawer next to my bed for my headphones and phone. Connecting my headphones, I switched on my phone and started streaming one of my music playlists.

The following day I woke up suddenly. I must have fallen asleep with my headphones on and music playing since that’s the last thing I remember doing. Blinking the sleep out of my eyes, I saw that Ella had plugged my phone in to charge and turned my playlist off. I flipped the covers off and stood up, noticing that our mess from last night had been cleaned up. The bag in the garbage can had been replaced. The dishes we borrowed from the kitchen were washed and sitting on a hand towel in the bathroom attached to my room. I was so appreciative of that girl, but where the heck was she, and what time was it? Tapping my phone, I saw that it was almost one pm. How in the world did I sleep so long? I never sleep past eight or nine! Hurrying into the bathroom, I took a quick shower, slapped some makeup on, and threw some mouse in my curly hair to keep it from getting frizzy. By the time I was done, it was two pm. Stepping out into the room in my towel, I walked to the closet and grabbed some cheap underwear and a cheap bra, then a pair of gray sweat shorts, and finally, a pink tank top. I had come up with the idea of getting cheap underwear and bras when I had to shift in front of the men in our pack. Most women were okay with stripping down to shift, but I was not particularly eager to put my body on display like

that. I'd rather rip up some cheap undergarments than throw away my morals.

Just as I finished getting dressed, Ella cruised back into the room dressed in a pale orange sundress and a bagel in each hand. "You ready to go?" She asked, handing me a bagel. It was my favorite, blueberry with a ton of cream cheese. My stomach growled. "You're a lifesaver. I'm starving." I said as I took a giant bite and groaned. "I figured you were hungry," She said, tasting the cream cheese in her onion bagel. City hall was about half an hour away from our house, so if we were going to make it on time, we had to leave.

Arriving at city hall, the parking lot was filled to the brim. The building was huge, with gold trim and large brown wooden doors. We walked in and made our way across the ornately decorated lobby. Mosaics of cherub babies and old-fashioned statues lined the walls with little splashes of gold in random places to keep with the theme. We approached the giant wooden doors that led to the auditorium. Two massive, muscular men stood at either side of the doors; I didn't recognize them. They must have been warrior pack members standing for security. That means Alpha Max was already here and inside the auditorium. They stopped us and asked for our names, then let us through the doors, "You can sit anywhere you want," one of them said as we passed by. "Thank you!" Ella called. Nerves wound their way through my body and settled into my stomach. The bagel I had eaten earlier threatened to come back up as I sat in my seat. The big clock on the wall in the front read 2:56 pm. Alpha Max was punctual so that the meeting would start within the next couple of minutes. The vast auditorium was about half full—most people I recognized from passing, and some I didn't.

The doors behind us opened with a big boom, and Alpha Max strode to the front of the room through the auditorium chairs with his son behind him. He wore a formal suit with a yellow undershirt, and his black hair was clean-shaven and spiked up in the front. He was an older man in his forties or fifties, and the stubble on his face and chin was short and graying. Despite his age, he was sturdy and toned. As he walked, his legs and back muscles rippled with power. His son

was the spitting image of his father, only younger and with ice-blue eyes. Alpha Max had brown eyes. As he passed each row, heads started bowing, the Alpha aura was in full effect, and although nobody else saw just how happy the control made him, I was good at reading people.

I could see how much the power he had stoked his pride. He walked past my row, and everyone bowed their head while I was stuck in my thoughts. *“Aurora, bow your head. Now!”* Raina boomed in my head. But it was too late; Alpha Max had turned his head and noticed I was the only one who didn’t bow on cue. He wiggled his eyebrows at me, and his alpha aura grew around me. Whines erupted from anyone close enough to feel it as he turned it to the max. Some got on their knees and bowed further. Still, I did not incline to bow. If anything, it was pissing me off that he was trying so hard to control me. I raised my chin and stared at him directly in the eyes in a clear challenge. What was I doing? I didn’t want to challenge him! Raina laughed in my head.

*“You’re meant to be a Luna, and it’s part of your nature to challenge anyone who tries to control you.”* Glaring at me, he took off the rest of the way to the front of the room. Nothing in his posture or gait gave away that he was furious. *“Hello, every one of the Silvercrest pack. Welcome to the meeting! We are here to discuss a few things regarding pack law, pack territory, and a new agreement I have been contemplating with the alpha of the Midnight pack.”* Alpha Max said in a booming, enthusiastic voice. Gasps rang out from the room at the mention of the Midnight pack.

The doors behind us swung open again, and the most delicious smell hit me. It was as though a million freshly baked blueberry bagels were sitting just beyond that door. As I turned my head, I felt a snap inside me and shut my eyes in pain. *“Mate! Mate! Mate!”* Raina yelled inside my head, going crazy at the scent. I felt the bond start to form as the snap receded. Opening my eyes, the mystery guest started to make their way through the room, and my heart dropped to my feet, and I fell into a panic. No, no, no, no, no, no! He can’t be my mate! NO!

# Misunderstood

## Ryan's POV

“Why do I need to be here, father?” I had asked, glaring at him. “Because you are going to be alpha soon, you need to know how these meetings work,” he said, straightening his jacket. “I know how all this shit works. I also know this pack is the most annoying one we know.” I rolled my eyes. I wouldn’t say I liked these meetings; they were always pointless. Father never kept his word when he agreed to things during them. I was in a sour mood already, and this wasn’t going to help it. “Boy, watch it. Or you’ll find yourself paying for it later,” he said with venom and malice in his brown eyes. “Let’s get this show on the road,” he boomed and put on the fakest smile an evil man like him could be capable of. He wore jeans, a navy blue button-down shirt, and a leather jacket. His blonde curly hair was smashed with mousse and hair gel. He confidently pushed the extensive double doors open and strolled down the hallway between the auditorium seats. I followed behind him with my eyes down, trying not to draw too much attention. I took a deep breath and immediately whipped my head up and stopped in my tracks. What was that smell? It smelled like sunshine, honey, and fresh-cut lilacs. It was the best smell I’ve ever smelled in my life. “*MATE.*” my wolf, Zion, yelled inside my head. Could it be my mate? It has been four years since I first shifted; I’ve been waiting for this moment for so long! I scanned the crowd, eyes wide. “Ryan, what is your issue?” Father hissed back at me. I felt a snapping sensation inside me, like a rubber band, as the bond formed inside me. I hissed in pain at the sting. “Ryan, walk now!” Father prompted, and his alpha aura rose around me. “*You must find her, Ryan.*” my wolf pushed me. But the only thing I could do was train my eyes forward and keep following father up to the center of the auditorium.

Sitting there listening to them talk terms and negotiate with all of their pack members was the most boring way I’ve ever spent my afternoon. Nobody needed any input from me, so I just sat there and pretended to pay attention. Next to me, Max’s son was doing the same thing. We just sat in to “learn.”



“Every once in a while, he would look at me and mimic his father, and I’d chuckle. He was a great guy; he would make a great alpha. I ran my hand through my short, unstyled blonde hair. They discussed allowing pack houses and schools to merge between our territories to encourage people to meet their mates. It seemed it was going in favor of starting the preparations for it. It didn’t matter to me; father wouldn’t give his alpha status up until he was on his deathbed, and I pried it out of his hands. I sighed, and father looked over at me angrily. I rolled my eyes at him, which caused his entire face to turn red. I was gonna pay for all of my attitudes later, but I refused to let it phase me. I was stronger than him, and he knew it. I could challenge him whenever I wanted to; I just hadn’t had a reason to want to. However, that didn’t stop him from beating the snot out of me. He took his anger out on me whenever he wanted to. Usually, I just took it, knowing that if I challenged him during one of his fits, I’d never gain the respect of my pack as their alpha. They took a lot of pride in doing challenges respectfully and honorably. I was broken out of my thoughts by the sound of clapping and saw heads bowing across the auditorium as both alphas stood front and center. What did I miss? Oh well, I’m sure I’ll hear about it later. I reeled my focus back to my surroundings, and as I scanned the sea of people in front of me, I noticed one girl who did not bow her head. That’s weird; the alphas were putting their auras out hard. She shouldn’t have been able to resist it. With a shit-eating grin, she stared directly into her alpha’s eyes. Wow. *“She must be a future alpha. That’s the only way she would be able to resist the aura,”* Zion said in my head. No freaking duh, Zion. He growled at me, and I laughed. He was fun to mess with.

“Now, we have a new pack member who shifted just a couple of days ago. You all know it is custom for us to show our wolves off after we’ve shifted and get your training schedule to figure out where you fit into our pack.” Max said when all of the legalities were taken care of with the school/pack house agreement. I just wanted this to be over with. I wanted to find my mate. She’s in this room somewhere. “I’d like to welcome Aurora up to the front here,” He continued. Timidly and nervous, the girl who didn’t bow stood

up. My interest was piqued. New and able to resist the alpha aura? I watched intently. She was gorgeous, her body lean and petite at the same time. She had a great-sized butt and a great rack. Someone I would take home and have my way with. I desperately tried to clear the naughty thoughts from my mind; dang, it had been a while. Her face was determined, and she walked up to the front, trying to show confidence. Her curly dark brown hair was flying behind her, the red streak in her bangs shining. She walked past me to stand in good view of the entire auditorium, and the sweet smell of honey, sunshine, and lilacs enveloped me. My face lit up; I had found her. “*MATE!*” Zion yelled. She paused a little bit after passing me as though she wanted to say something to me, but she didn’t dare in front of her entire pack. I quickly schooled my features, but it was too late. Max and father were watching us with interest. They’d noticed my mood change. “Welcome to the pack, Aurora. We’re so glad to have you with us.” Max said to her, his voice dripping with sarcasm. Why was he that way with her? Was he mad about her not bowing? It makes sense now, though, as I am meant to be alpha, and she is my mate. She’s not meant to bow to anyone; I couldn’t even use my alpha aura on her once I became alpha. I had this fierce instinct to protect her, to grab her and stick her behind me while I faced this prick for daring to speak to her any other way but respectfully. I pulled myself back into check and watched with curiosity. I was glad that today I wasn’t having difficulty controlling my emotions. “You may shift now,” Max ordered her. She waited a few seconds before obeying to show him he wasn’t in charge of her. I knew that drive; I had the same one. It was silent in the auditorium as she removed her clothes and stood in her bra and underwear. All the loud snaps that accompanied shifting echoed around the auditorium. In a few seconds, there was a huge, gorgeous pure white wolf with gray caps on her feet, gray around her ears, and on the tip of her tail. Her green eyes were trained on me. My jaw dropped; I had never seen a white wolf. They were rare, with one not having been seen in thousands of years. They held immense power and strength and usually had extraordinary gifts. They were meant to be leaders, alphas, or lunas. “*Our mate is powerful. I wouldn’t have expected anything less.*” Zion

commented. In an instant, I realized that instead of being awestruck, I should have been worried. Father and Max were downright glaring at Aurora. My father would do anything to prove that he was the most powerful wolf there is; he has no limits. He has repeatedly beaten me until I was nothing more than a bloody piece of meat to try to assert his power. Those beatings usually left me down and out for two or three days while my shifter abilities healed me. Noises of shock filled the air, and suddenly it was loud with talk about Aurora's wolf. Father and Max struck up a fast-paced exchange of whispers, I tuned into it to hear what they were saying, and because they were so caught up in their anger, they didn't bother to control the volume of their voices. "She's an abomination and a threat to both of our packs Max," Father whispered. "She is a meek little girl. She won't challenge either of us. She will pretend to be confident until it eventually gets her killed." Max countered. "I think we should take care of the problem." Father hinted. "If she gets disobedient or steps out of place again, then we will. I don't see a reason to murder a young shifter with strength that could be useful to the pack." Max shrugged, and father growled. I knew he was just irked because she could be stronger than him. They both turned to the crowd and dismissed the meeting. After countless comments and compliments, Aurora had shifted back to her human form behind the divider they had provided for her and was pulling clothes on quickly. She had a nervous look on her face as she faced her alpha. The auditorium was pretty much empty besides a few stragglers, including the blonde Aurora had come with. "Aurora, here is your training schedule. Don't miss any sessions, or your place in the pack will be jeopardized." He said in a bland tone. Her mouth dropped open in surprise. "You may go now." Did he threaten to turn her rogue?! "*Calm down. You will be able to step in before that happens. Don't alert them that she is your mate yet.*" Zion chastised me. I clenched my fists. "Alpha Max, I'm not comfortable with Elias training me." Aurora spoke up after looking through the list on the paper. "It doesn't matter what you're comfortable with, girl. You will be trained by whoever I appoint to train you." Max snarled at her. I was practically drawing blood with my fingernails at this point. "Whatever, I

won't be held responsible if I kill one of your good warriors then," She said, shrugging and walking away. You don't ever turn your back on your alpha; it was the utmost disrespect. Watching her walk away, I could only think, "Damn, that's my girl." Meanwhile, Max looked like he was about to blow a vein in his forehead; he was so mad. I laughed at him, which made his face turn even redder. He rushed towards me, "Woah, old man, I don't think you want to pick a fight with me. I'd rip your head off." I said with delight. He stomped past me and slammed the big double doors on his way out.

"Well, son, go find her," Father said with amusement behind me. I jumped; I'd forgotten he was still there. "Why would I go after that lowly girl?" I spat at him. My stomach lurched at my insulting her, and I almost vomited. "Do you think I'm stupid, boy? She's your mate; it was one hundred percent clear. I thought I taught you to hide your emotions better than that?" He snarled. "*Damn it.*" Zion cursed. "You don't push me to do anything positive unless you have ulterior motives." I pointed out. "You're right; I want my pack to be stronger than Silvercrest. But I also don't want someone stronger than me in our pack. So I guess I have a choice to make, don't I?" He smiled evilly. "If I just have her killed, then the issue resolves itself." He said, chuckling to himself.

"You heard Max. You can't do anything to her. It will start a war." I replied, irate. Snarling at him, I lunged toward him as he shrugged at me. He side-stepped me and got close enough to whisper in my ear. "We will handle this later, not in public." "Why? You don't want the word to get out that you beat the shit out of your son whenever you get the chance?" I said condescendingly. Shaking in anger, I didn't even give him the chance to answer me before I spun on my heel and stormed out of the auditorium. I'm sure it was a scary sight to see; I always was when I was angry. I rushed into the men's bathroom and slammed my fist into the paper towel dispenser with a roar. It crashed to the ground with the shape of my fist embedded in it. That didn't help me at all. I walked over to the sink and turned the tap on. I threw cold water on my face and ran my fingers through my hair. "*You need to find a release, or you will take this anger out on someone who doesn't deserve*

*it,*” Zion mentioned. My wolf was the rational part of my irrationality. Moving to the stalls, I slammed my fists into their walls until they fell off the frame. I ripped doors off, and I smashed toilets. I left fist-sized holes in the walls and shattered the mirrors. By the time I was done with my fit of rage, the bathroom was trashed. I had found my release, though, and I had done it without being violent like my father would have. He would have found someone and tormented them until he eventually beat them to death. Then he would use the excuse that they did something to offend the alpha, which was accepted by the pack. Pathetic. I’ll never be like my father; that was something I was sure of.

“Um, hello?” A small, timid voice rang out as the door opened a crack and a head poked in. My mate’s smell flooded my brain and instantly calmed me. “You can come in, just you, though,” I said cautiously. “Okay,” She agreed and stepped in. She was even more beautiful up close, and my heart stuttered. I was rarely nervous, but this girl made me even more aware of things than ever. “I think we need to talk, Ryan. Or should I say, mate?” She said, stepping closer to me and smiling.

# Temporary

## Aurora's POV

Looking around at the destroyed bathroom around me, I looked at Ryan and raised my eyebrows. "So, I've never met you before. All I've ever heard are rumors; from what I can see here, they seem true." Fear flooded my body; I didn't know if I could be with someone as violent as him. He didn't say anything as he examined my body. I felt uncomfortable being scrutinized so closely. Suddenly, I was aware of the extra weight on my stomach and how messed up my hair was from shifting. "Could you say something instead of just staring at me?" I questioned as I wrapped my arms around myself. "*Is he in shock?*" Raina said. I laughed out loud at her comment. Ryan's head whipped up to my face, anger apparent. "Are you laughing at me?" he seethed. "No, my wolf asked if you were in shock. I was laughing at her." The anger in his expression softened. "You're so beautiful," he said, stepping forward. Was this guy bipolar? Talk about whiplash. My stomach fluttered with butterflies as he kept getting closer to me. He reached out, ran his hand along my face, and stared into my eyes. I was mesmerized as I stared back into his brown eyes and wanted to touch my lips to his. "You're perfect," he said, leaning in and touching his nose to mine. "I want to mark you right here so everyone knows you're mine. But it's not safe, Aurora; you must stay away from me. I'm not rejecting you as my mate, I don't think I ever could, but you are safer away from me than with me right now." he said, sadness laced through his voice. "Wha-what do you mean?" I stuttered at him, surprised. "Exactly what I said. I will give you my phone number so you can text me or call me if something happens and you need help with it. But for the time being, we have to stay away from each other." Tears ran down my cheeks without my permission. My mate didn't want me; he was making excuses to get rid of me without dealing with the curse of rejection. "You don't want me," I whispered. Raina was whining softly; her voice rang out in my head, "*Aurora, you're being dramatic.*" "No, that's not it at all! I can't be with you right now!" The rejection stung my chest as he said those

words. Starting to sob, I ran out of the men's bathroom. I didn't want him to see how much he had hurt me. Not paying attention, I smacked right into a burly man standing against the wall. "Sorry," I mumbled and ran off to find Ella before he could respond. She was waiting for me by the front doors on her phone. She looked up, and her jaw dropped. "Please tell me he accepted you! I don't care if he is the alpha of the whole world; I'll freaking kill him!" She said, visibly shaking with anger as she pulled me into a hug. "I'm not sure. But I will explain on the way home." I mumbled into her shoulder. She nodded, and we started towards the car.

We talked about my situation the entire way home. As much as I loved Ella, sometimes she didn't know when to shut up. Not everything had a fix at that moment, and she was trying hard to find one for me. So far, maybe he was afraid of ruining my reputation with his bad one, but I knew that wasn't it. Getting out of the car, I looked over at Ella as she joined me at my side of the vehicle. "Can I have tonight by myself, please? I need some alone time." She nodded, "If you need anything at all, text or call me, please. Don't shut me out, Aurora." She hugged me one last time, and we walked into the pack house together. Taking separate directions toward our rooms. I unlocked my door and walked into my room. Turning on some music that matched my depressed mood, I headed for the bathroom and took a long shower—belting out songs until my throat hurt. I got out and pulled on a matching pajama set with a tank top and a pair of shorts with rainbow butterflies. I pulled my wet hair into a messy bun. After I was done, I spent some time folding my clean laundry and putting it away.

Flopping onto my bed, I noticed it was almost ten at night. "*It will be okay; you overreacted. He wanted you and was trying to protect you. Stop being sad and making a fool of yourself,*" Raina chastised me. After having been through so much with men, I guess that trauma spilled into my interaction today with Ryan. I'll find a way to fix it as soon as I can find a way to see him again. Reaching over to turn the lamp next to me off, I saw the training schedule I had thrown onto my nightstand earlier. I quickly looked at it in the auditorium and then folded it up after seeing Elias's name on the trainer's side.

Getting up and unfolding it, I noticed that the first thing Alpha Max wanted to know was if I was cut out for, was being a pack warrior. I shoved my face into my pillow and screamed. My first session was tomorrow, and I was one hundred percent not ready to deal with Elias again. My notification sound went off on my phone next to me, breaking me from my thoughts. I tried to ignore it, but it went off again and then once more. “Why can’t she just leave me alone?” I said out loud with frustration. I unlocked my phone and saw on the text preview that it was a number I hadn’t saved in my contacts.

**Unsaved number:** Aurora? Is this the correct number?

**Unsaved number:** This is Ryan. Please answer me. >:(

**Unsaved number:** If you don’t answer me I will show up at your pack house, territory rules or not. Please don’t test me.

I rolled my eyes. Boy, was Ryan bossy for a guy who told me he didn’t want anything to do with me earlier. And emojis? What was he, fifteen?

**Aurora:** Yes, you have the correct number. How did you get it?

It only took a few seconds for a response. I raised my eyebrows; he was quick. I turned my phone to vibrate, anticipating this wouldn’t be a short conversation. It was late, and I didn’t want to annoy the people on my floor with incessant binging from my phone. Then I saved his number into my contacts. I named the contact “**Mr. Bossy.**”

**Mr. Bossy:** I have my connections. Are you okay?

**Aurora:** I’m fine.

**Mr. Bossy:** Are you sure? You have to know I didn’t mean for everything to come out the way it did earlier. I have some circumstances that I need to take care of before I can mark you and make you mine.

**Mr. Bossy:** Which, by the way, you are mine. Regardless of me marking you now or later. Any guy that even looks in your direction the wrong way? I’ll rip his head off.



**Aurora:** I'm fine. But you're going to tell me everything as soon as you can. With our half-established bond, it will be hard to be so far away from you. Sorry for overreacting, I've been rejected by the men in my life too many times.

**Aurora:** Also, what if I like girls and not guys?

**Mr. Bossy:** Uhm, what? I guess that goes for anyone who tries to steal MY girl. Do you seriously like girls?

**Mr. Bossy:** And any man who ever rejected you was the stupidest man in all existence.

**Aurora:** No you asshat, It was a joke.

**Aurora:** I, however, am going to bed. It's late and I have training tomorrow. Goodnight XO

I plugged the charger into my phone and set it down on my nightstand, turned the volume to silent, and set the alarm for eleven o'clock in case I overslept again. That would give me an hour before I had to train. I was exhausted, and I wasn't going to stay up all night texting when I needed every last drop of willpower and sanity to get through tomorrow's training session. I turned off the bedside lamp beside me and snuggled under my covers.

**"BANG, BANG, BANG!"** I was awoken abruptly by the sound of someone banging on the door of my room. I tapped my phone screen to check the time and squinted at the bright light. It was midnight, and I didn't miss the long string of texts and calls from "Mr. Bossy" I groaned and got out of bed. "Who is pounding on my door in the middle of the night? Something better be on fire for this bs." I snarled. "Open the door." A familiar voice said from the other side. Even in my half-asleep state, I knew that voice. What the hell? I ripped the door open angrily, and Ryan rushed into my room and shut the door quickly, locking it. "So you tell me you don't want to be seen with me because it's dangerous. Then, you break into my freaking pack house and beat your fists on my door. For the record, you probably woke the entire floor up doing-" I was interrupted mid-sentence by Ryan grabbing me and pulling me into a tight hug. "You didn't answer any of my texts or calls. I didn't know if you were okay or not, and it scared me. Nobody

saw me come in, and I didn't wake anyone up." he said in a rush as he pulled back. I looked him up and down, trying to calm myself down. He wore a pair of blue flannel PJ bottoms and a black muscle shirt that showed off his toned arms. His hair was messy like he had taken a shower and let it air dry without brushing it. His shoes were hastily thrown on with no socks, his feet only in them halfway. *"Okay, do we have the sexiest mate on the planet, or is it just me? He doesn't even have to try!"* Raina cooed in my head. Shut up, Raina. I'm trying to focus on being angry, not horny. *"You know I'm right."* She teased. She was right; I could feel the bond inside me begging for it to be consummated. Once you find your mate, the bond will urge you to make it official by mating and being marked by the male counterpart. They would bite the inside of your forearm with their teeth enough to draw blood, and the mark would instantly heal and scar, sealing the bond between the two. My mind drew back to the situation at hand. "Ryan, you have to tell me what is so dangerous that it had you rushing to my packhouse at midnight," I demanded, looking up at him. He towered over me at a little over 6ft tall. "I don't know if I should tell you. It'd be safer to avoid you and wait for it to resolve. Eventually, it will." He said sadly. My eyes widened, "Eventually?" I repeated in surprise. "You want us to stay apart until, eventually, some unknown issue resolves itself? An indefinite amount of time? How can you even say that? Do you know the pain that will cause both of us?" He looked me in the eyes, and I saw his resolve falter. "I don't want to do it either, Aurora. But I want you to be safe." "You think I can't protect myself? Didn't you see my wolf? I know that you are aware of my extra abilities. My senses are ten times stronger than yours; my strength is the same. I will be fine." I argued. Ryan sighed and sat on the bed, patting the spot next to him for me to sit. "I'm going to sit on the floor," I said awkwardly. Sitting on a bed with him wasn't a good idea right now if we were planning on only talking. He looked at me perplexed, then shrugged his shoulders. "Whatever. While you were showing your wolf off to your pack, Max and my father talked about dealing with you. They know you are stronger than them and don't like it. My father wants to kill you, but Max told him that he didn't see a reason to kill you

because you are an asset to the pack.” Wow, Alpha Max did have a heart. Albeit for a selfish reason, at least it was there. Ryan put his head in his hands and continued. “My father saw my reaction to finding you earlier. Even though I tried to hide it, it wasn’t easy to hide, and he caught it.” Groaning, he punched my pillow, and feathers flew everywhere around us. “You wouldn’t be in danger if I had been better at hiding it.” he said through clenched teeth. As I stood up, feathers swirled around me; I walked over and sat next to him. I put my arms around him and pulled his head onto my chest. Instantly, his body relaxed against me. “You’re the only one who has ever been able to calm me down that quickly.” He said, wrapping his arms around my waist. I laughed, “Isn’t that my job as your mate? We’re supposed to be yin and yang. We compliment each other.” “*You’re very confident tonight. I like it; keep it up.*” Raina commented. I internally groaned at her. She laughed in my head. Ryan didn’t say anything and snuggled into my chest more. “Why are you so afraid of what your father will do? He doesn’t seem very powerful.” I inquired. He looked up at me; at that moment, he looked like a scared little boy. “He has done a lot of terrible, inhuman things. I can’t talk about things yet, but I will be able to soon. I need a little bit more time to process how to begin telling you.” “Well, we have all the time in the world, so it’s okay. I’m not going anywhere, no matter what has happened in your past.” I said, smiling warmly at him. I wanted him to know that I wanted more than anything to be his. He sat up and moved closer to me, reaching up and grasping the side of my face with his right hand. “I have no idea how the universe decided that I deserved you. But I’m never going to question it.” He whispered as he leaned in and gently pressed his lips to mine. His lips were soft and warm, the scent of sunshine and honey all around me. The stubble on his chin brushed against my skin. Butterflies swarmed in my stomach, and my body felt warm. Wrapping my arms around him, I deepened the hesitant kiss, and he immediately pulled me onto his lap. I melted into him and kissed him with more intensity than I’d ever kissed anyone in my life. Everything was him; it was always going to be him.

# Bonding

## Ryan's POV

I woke up abruptly and in an unfamiliar place. It took me a moment to realize where I was and who I was with. There was a weight on my chest and a tangle of curly hair in a messy bun on my face. Her scent was all around me; how did I sleep with all this hair all over my face? I looked down at Aurora sleeping peacefully on me. Don't get me wrong; she was beautiful but even more breathtaking while sleeping. Her features were softened, her mouth slightly open. It was as though nothing in the world had ever made her hard and stubborn. She had her legs wrapped around mine and her arms around my waist. I've never slept with any other girl like this before. I almost always made them leave an hour after hooking up. I didn't want them to get attached. I was a one-and-done guy. I hated cuddling, and we didn't even hook up, but I could do it all day with her. I hope I get the chance to do that. I grabbed her phone off the table to see what time it was. Unlocking the screen, I saw that she had her and her friend as her lock photo. I smiled at it; I'm glad she has someone who makes her happy on the off chance this doesn't work out for us. It was eight am, and she had a text notification. The contact name was "Asshole," and he had texted, "Training today at noon sharp in the backyard of the pack house. Don't be late. Can't wait to show you up today, you worthless bitch." Anger flooded my entire body; this must be that "Elias" guy she had mentioned being uncomfortable within the auditorium. There was no way I was going to let that stand. I unlocked her phone and was set on texting this guy back until I realized she had also saved my number. "Mr. Bossy?" I said out loud, incredulous. I'm not bossy! *"Yes, you are. You're the bossiest asshole I've ever had the pleasure of knowing."* Zion teased in my head. I rolled my eyes and pictured my middle finger aimed at him. Zion laughed.

Just then, Aurora started stirring. She rolled away from me, sprawling out on her belly and snuggling her face into her pillow. Reaching over, I pulled the blanket up her shoulders so she didn't get cold. Was she always this cute? *"You're turning*

*into a softy dude,*” Zion said in shock. It’s okay; she’s my mate. She’s the one person I am allowed to be soft for. He scoffed in my head. I returned to her phone, changed my contact name to “Ryan The Great” and laughed. She would probably scold me for that later, but it was worth it. I sat there and silently debated if I should text Elias back to make it known that I’d skin him alive if he said anything like that to my mate again. *“Nobody is supposed to know you’re mates yet. Not to mention, Aurora would probably be mad if you tried to fight her battles for her. You should probably just let it go.”* Zion commented. Damn it, he was right. I gritted my teeth and locked her phone, setting it back on the nightstand.

The next time I woke up, it was to an alarm blaring a rendition of an ACDC song. At least she has good taste in music. Aurora sat up abruptly, “You’re closer to it; turn it off, please,” she said in a deep, sleep-filled voice. Her curls stuck out of her bun everywhere, and she had pillow marks across her face and dried drool on the side of her lip. “Can you quit staring at me and turn the stupid alarm off?” “Yeah, sorry,” I said, laughing at her moodiness and reaching for her phone to swipe the alarm off. I looked over at her as she sat there, trying to wake herself up. She was most definitely not a morning person; she appeared as though she would kill anyone who looked at her wrong. “Why are you still here?” She asked crankily. “I don’t know, actually. I live in an apartment alone, so nobody is missing me.” I said, shrugging. She grunted, swung her legs out of bed, and scuttled into the bathroom. I heard the shower turn on, so I relaxed under the covers and waited. The smell of her shampoo wafted out to me, along with a more intense version of her normal scent since she was wet. I got out of bed and went toward the bathroom door, hypnotized by that smell. She hadn’t shut it; was that an invitation? Maybe she was so used to living alone that she didn’t realize she hadn’t shut it. Either way, I couldn’t stop looking into the steam-filled bathroom. The shower was a glass stall shower, so the walls were completely see-through. I was disappointed that I couldn’t see her from the shower’s angle to the door. *“Go in there!”* Zion urged. I sighed and said, “Hey, did you mean to leave the door open?” I wanted to do the right thing and let her decide if she was ready. “No,”

came the reply. *"She didn't tell you not to come in,"* said Zion. "But..yo-you can come in." She stuttered. Raising my eyebrows, I walked into the bathroom and saw her facing the tiled wall of the shower while massaging conditioner into her hair. It was wet and down to the middle of her back. I let my eyes linger downward for a second; she was curvy but lean. The muscles in her legs and calves were visible. Damn, did she have a nice ass. It was wide but also round and perfect for her body size. "Are you nervous? I don't have to be in here if you're uncomfortable with it," I asked, staying where I was to give her some space. "Yes, I am nervous, but no, you don't have to leave. You can get in with me if you'd like." She offered. My jaw hit the floor; no way did this gorgeous girl ask me to get in the shower with her. *"She's your mate, you idiot; quit acting like a high school boy and man up."* Zion scolded. She reached up, angling the shower head towards the wall. Then she turned around and opened the shower door for me. My clothes hit the floor in less than a second, and I stepped into the shower. She angled the shower head back to the middle of the shower and stepped back so I could use the water. I wasn't paying attention to anything except the perfectly round, unbelievably perky boobs in front of me. My man brain was in overdrive, and I couldn't think correctly. "Ryan? Are you going to shower?" She said, amused. I grunted like a caveman and stepped into the water spray, my eyes still all over her. She had a flat-toned stomach and wide hips. I didn't miss how her eyes also lingered over my body. She stared at my abs and how my hips arched into a perfect "V." A blush spread across her cheeks as her eyes lingered lower and lower. The bond was practically screaming at me to mark her, and man, did I want that more than anything. Biting her lip, she moved closer to me and put her arms around my neck. "Aurora, I don't think this was a good idea." I said hesitantly. "I know we can't do anything yet because you have to mark me the first time we do. But that doesn't mean I can't make out with you." She teased. She pressed her naked body against mine, and that was my undoing. Growling, I lost control and slammed her against the tile wall as my lips landed on hers. She squeaked as her back hit the cold tile, then laughed against my mouth. I kissed her hard, and she kissed

me back equally, our tongues dancing. Her firm breasts pushed against my chest and one leg wrapped around my waist. I was sure I was at full mast, but I didn't care, and she didn't seem to either. I wanted her any way I could have her. I pulled away from her mouth and trailed soft kisses down her body. Starting from her ear down to the bottom of her collarbone and onto her breasts. She groaned and eagerly pushed against me as she ran her hands down my body. This was heaven; I never wanted to stop. The sound of the door to her bedroom slamming open abruptly interrupted us. "Who the heck is that?!" I whispered, annoyed. Ella's voice came carrying into the bathroom with a million questions. "Aurora? I brought coffee! Are you still in the shower? Do you realize what time it is? Don't you have training at noon? It's eleven forty-five." "Shit shit shit. How in the world did that much time pass that quickly?" She said in disbelief. "Time flies when you're having fun, and baby, I can't wait to make you mine." I whispered in her ear and leaned back, smirking at her. She blushed and quickly started washing the conditioner out of her hair. "I don't care if she knows about the situation we have. She's my best friend, and she won't tell anyone." She said, shutting the water off and getting out of the shower. "Okay, we can tell her." I agreed.

Five minutes later, she was dressed and ready to go. Her hair was pulled into a high ponytail, and she wore a bright pink sports bra and black tights combo. Her friend, whom I had learned was named Ella, was very shocked when I came out of the bathroom behind Aurora. I didn't miss Ella wiggling her eyebrows at her and the blush that spread across Aurora's cheeks. "I can't go with you to your training, but I can see the backyard from your window, so I can watch," I said with anxiety. I didn't want her to get hurt; this guy wouldn't go easy on her. "I'm going to go down with her to watch. The sessions are always public so it won't be an issue. I'll keep him in check if he gets too out of hand." Ella said, almost reading my mind. "You guys act like I can't take care of myself," Aurora said, pouting. Finishing the laces on her sneakers, she ran over, quickly pecked me on the lips, grabbed her phone and Ella's arm, and then went out the door.

My stomach growled loudly; I was hungry; she had to have some snacks stashed around here. She's a girl; they always have snacks stashed everywhere. Opening the drawers of her desk, I found nothing. Then I went to her bed and pulled out the storage cubes she kept under it. My luck was going strong as I opened the first one I saw and found a pile of snacks inside of it. I grabbed a granola bar and a bag of chips and set myself up with her desk chair near the window. I noticed a man off to the yard side sitting on a lawn chair, scrolling on his phone. His skin was a deep caramel brown; he was bulky in the chest and arm area but had very skinny legs. He looked like he had skipped leg day too many times. His black hair was perfectly styled with a fade towards his forehead. He wore a pair of black running shorts and a red t-shirt and had the definition of a resting bitch face. Aurora's ponytail suddenly appeared as she started bounding across the yard toward Elias. He stopped scrolling and looked up, annoyance written all over his face. *"I don't like this guy. We can't let him hurt our mate."* Zion said, whining in my head. I know; it's killing me not to be down there defending her. But it is safer for our mate bond to stay secret. It took every ounce of willpower in me not to mark her and make her mine in that shower. She was gorgeous, perfect, and **mine**.

Turning my attention to the training session, I could see the tension in Aurora's stance. Her arms were folded across her chest, and she only answered him with one-word answers. Suddenly, the annoyance turned to rage as she smirked at something she had said. Losing control, he slammed her against the concrete fence by her neck, cutting off her air supply. Her face contorted in fear, and she fought him brutally, thrashing and kicking wildly. Zion was going crazy in my head. I stood up and slammed her desk chair into the floor. I need to go down there, but I can't risk it. I clenched my teeth, balled my fists, and reluctantly continued to watch. Shock filled me when I watched my girl take control of the situation. She struggled wildly at first and then stopped to collect herself for a second. Determination set in on her face, and she slammed her legs directly into Elias's family jewels. I smiled; all my anger was gone; I was amused now. This was going to be fun to watch. She was also correct; she can most definitely



take care of herself. Grabbing my snacks and ripping the bag of chips open, I picked up the half-broken desk chair and managed to sit back down without it caving in on me. I carefully leaned back into it, crossed my legs, and prepared for the show.

# Fight

## Aurora's POV

As Ella and I made our way down the stairs and into the backyard, we chit-chatted. As we walked out the door, I told her I had wanted to wait to talk about Ryan until after this training session. She respected my wishes, but I could tell it was eating her up inside, not talking about it. Opening the glass screen door, I spotted Elias halfway across the yard in a lawn chair, scrolling on his phone. With my advanced sense of smell, I could smell him from where I was standing, and it stopped me in my tracks. I wrinkled my nose; he smelled repulsive. He smelled like a skunk and had taken a bath in a tub full of days-old sweaty gym socks. It seemed as though I might have to hold my breath throughout this entire session. Ella touched my shoulder comfortingly, "You got this girl, go kick his ass." she said, winking at me. I smiled warmly at her, then turned to bound across the yard. Noticing I was coming, Elias put his phone in his back pocket and stood up to welcome me. As I approached him, he looked at me with irritation. I stopped a couple of feet from him and folded my arms across my chest. "Have you trained before?" He asked me, his pitchy voice annoying me the second he opened his mouth. He didn't even have the common decency to say hi before he started grilling me. I wasn't interested in talking, so I put as little effort into the conversation as possible. "Yes," I said nonchalantly. The annoyance on his face grew. "With who?" "None ya." I pretended to look at my nails. He didn't need to know that I had trained with my father since I was a little girl. My father had been the best warrior the pack had, and even in his old age, he was still impossible to beat. So, of course, he trained his daughter to follow in his footsteps. "You have to tell me, Aurora; I need to know where to start and who my competition is," he demanded. "Why is that, you bonehead? Are you obsessed with me now that you know my wolf is better and you have nothing to brag about anymore? It's none of your business who I trained with before. Let's get this session over with, so I can beat your ass." I said, smirking at him. Suddenly I was flying through the air and slammed

against the concrete fence behind us with my hands wrapped around my neck. Fear enveloped my body, and all I could do was thrash wildly as I stared into Elias's rage-filled eyes. Then I remembered my previous training sessions. I heard my father's voice in my head. "Push the fear away; it will only limit your capabilities." "*How do you push fear away?*" Raina asked curiously. I felt her intently watching as I mentally shielded my brain from feeling anything but pure anger, which wasn't hard to do considering my opponent. "Analyze the situation. If they messed up, where did they mess up?" my father's voice returned to me again. His first mistake? Having my body pinned between his legs. I slammed my feet upwards so my knees and calves slammed into his groin as hard as they could. He howled in pain and quickly lost his hold on my neck. I was gasping for breath as my body slammed into the ground. Elias was on the floor, too, but he was on his knees, rocking back and forth while spewing obscenities. Gathering myself and standing up once I could breathe correctly, "You ever gonna man up and get back into the fight?" I taunted in a raspy voice. He whirled around, shaking with anger, and stood up slowly. As he was stalking me, I dropped into a defensive stance and started to circle with him. He broke the circle and came at me swinging his fists. As I blocked every hit, he got angrier; his entire body shook. He stepped back again. "Not a fair fight if you shift Elias. We should probably take a breather for you to calm down." I mentioned to him. "I'm fine," He said through clenched teeth. "You certainly don't look fine," I said, amused. "Don't you tell me how I look or what to do bitch. You won't win this fight." He snarled at me. "Okay then, serves me for trying to be nice." I laughed. "Let's go then!" I said with an evil smile.

He continuously leaned back out of my reach as I leaned heavily toward him. Every move I made, he dodged, ending up getting further away from me. "Are you running away from me?" I said, even more entertained. He rushed me, and I blocked him once more. At this point, I was playing with him; I could take him down if I wanted to. I was tired of waiting for him to make a legit move. After another five minutes of circling each other, I finally rushed him and landed a round kick into his ribs, knocking his breath out. With my heightened

sense of hearing, I heard a small crack as my foot connected. While he was distracted, I slammed my fist into the side of his face, splitting his cheek and spilling blood. Slamming my other fist into his nose, I heard another audible crack, and more blood spurted everywhere. He kept trying to hit me back, but I kept blocking them. He finally hit my face, my nose snapped, and blood came raining down on him. It hurt like a bitch, but I didn't falter; that was the number one rule my dad had always instilled in me during our fights. Never falter, and never show weakness during a battle. They will take advantage every time you do. I knew I looked insane with blood pouring down my face, smiling and laughing while I kept punching and taking hits. Until one of us rapped on the ground and tapped out of the fight, it would keep going no matter what. Elias seemed too stubborn to concede; he'd rather get beaten to a pulp. I lessened the strength I put into my hits to avoid straight-up killing him, but I still didn't stop. I targeted his torso after I was done with his head. He landed a few hits in my ribs. "Elias! Concede!" Ella yelled. She may have hated his guts, but she was too kind-hearted to watch a brutal fight. Elias growled under me as I hit him in the stomach for the 3rd time, and he leaned over and vomited on the ground. Finally, he rapped on the ground hard and threw me off of him as hard as he could. Not prepared, I flew across the yard and rolled to a stop. Slow clapping came from the direction of the packhouse, and I whipped my head in that direction. There was a small crowd standing on the concrete porch that had been watching our fight intently. Alpha Max stepped out behind the open glass screen door with a broad smile. Fake enthusiasm dripped from his voice as he congratulated me for winning my first fight as a shifter. He slapped my back, "Got the best of you, did she, Elias?" He said with a laugh. Elias was pouting in his lawn chair and refusing to look our way; most of his injuries had healed already. Being shifters, we heal at an insane rate. I couldn't feel any pain in my throat or nose anymore. "*He is good at faking things, isn't he?*" Raina commented inside of my head. Yes, he is. I don't know how but I could always read people despite how fake they tried to be, and Alpha Max was pouring fake from his pores. He leaned down to whisper in my ear,

“You may be strong and have better senses than most of us. But you will never be good enough to lead our pack. If you try, you will be killed. That is a promise.” he squeezed my shoulder and leaned back up as Ella ran across the yard to us and pulled me into a hug. “I have never seen you fight like that. You’re such a badass!” She said, laughing. I took a moment to compose myself while everyone was talking and celebrating my win. I looked up at the window I knew was my room. There he stood, watching as he had promised, and I swear his eyes were shining with pride for me. He put his thumb up and winked through the glass when he noticed I was looking. I smiled warmly and turned back to the celebration in front of me. Elias ran off, presumably embarrassed, slamming his shoulder into mine as he passed me with a growl. Alpha Max came over, put his hand on my shoulder again, and announced, “Congratulations, Aurora. You’re now going to be a pack warrior. No further training is needed, but you will need to keep up with the exercise schedule that the pack follows.” Everyone cheered and clapped for me, but deep down, I felt ominous about the whole thing.

Slowly walking into the pack kitchen with Ella, I told her everything Ryan and I had talked about while he was in my room last night in hushed whispers. I knew nobody was around tonight; there was a big party in another one of the pack houses. Nobody ever missed an opportunity to go to a good banger. “What do you want to eat?” I asked, knowing Ella couldn’t cook to save her life and had probably been living on hot pockets and frozen pizza before I shifted. I considered myself an okay cook and could cook pretty much anything. Ella’s favorite had always been my stuffed pepper casserole. “Will it be too much for you to make that pepper casserole?” She said with puppy eyes, mirroring my thoughts. “Nope. I figured you were going to ask.” I smiled at her. “You can chop the peppers and onions for me,” I ordered, laughing.

About an hour later, we had stuffed our bellies full of casserole and laughed until our sides hurt at Elias’s expense. I was exhausted. We walked up the stairs together and said our goodnights as Ella branched off to her room. I balanced a giant casserole plate in one hand as I used the other to unlock my

bedroom door. Walking inside, it was dark, and my heart sank slightly. Had he left? I was looking forward to seeing him. *"Don't get too attached to him; you don't know if he will even take you as his mate. He seems to be back and forth on the issue."* Raina said. I couldn't help it; I'm pretty sure I was falling for him despite the fact I might get hurt. That was a typical problem for me; I felt things too quickly and always got hurt. My instincts told me, however, that Ryan wouldn't hurt me unless he had to. *"I hope you're right."* Raina chastised.

I entered my room and set the casserole plate on my desk. My desk chair rattled, and the back fell off as I moved it. I just stared at it for a minute in surprise before I turned around and noticed my trash can overflowing with snack wrappers. Running over to the storage cube under my bed where I kept my snacks, I yanked it out. It was empty, besides a few stray pumpkin seeds in the bottom. *"That asshole ate all of my snacks!"* I said to nobody in particular. Disappointment grew in my chest as I changed into pajamas and settled into bed with my phone next to me. Last night I had fallen asleep in his arms, and it had been the best feeling in the world. I was pining for him and wanted him next to me more than anything. I pulled a book out that I had been reading from under my nightstand and started trying to read. Distracted, I kept checking my phone for texts and having to reread the same section over and over again. I gave up, tossed the book back down under the stand, and snuggled into my covers with headphones on and music blaring.

I slowly woke up the following day, my body sore from yesterday's fight. We healed pretty quickly, but that didn't include muscle soreness. We just had to deal with that. I eagerly checked my phone, but there were no texts. The plate of casserole sitting untouched on the desk only hurt my heart. I didn't bother getting out of bed; I snuggled back into the covers and turned a movie on the TV. I'd surely hear it go off by turning my volume high enough on my phone. *"I tried to warn you, Aurora,"* Raina said sadly. Shut up.

It had been three days, and I still hadn't heard from Ryan. No texts, calls, nothing. I was depressed, and everyone

around me had noticed. The only good news was that I was accepted into an online college I had applied a couple of months ago. While it wasn't my first choice, it was better than nothing. I had started enrolling, and they were processing the 2nd part of the application for me. I spent most of the last couple of days going to the pack exercise session in the mornings, then coming back to my room and just laying around reading, watching videos on my phone, or watching TV—anything I could do to keep my mind off of him.

The exercise started every morning at eight am. It consisted of running a couple of miles and switching between legs, abs, and arm workouts on different days. I was flying through it every morning and had even made buddies with a couple of the guys. I was sitting cross-legged on my bedroom floor, just scrolling through social media on my phone, my mind going a million miles a minute. Images flooded my thoughts, the feeling of being pressed against him in the shower, how he looked at my body, and how it felt to sleep in his arms and wake up to him. The way he looked at me out of the window after I had won my first fight. Feeling a tear drop onto my leg, I realized I was crying. What if he had found another woman to occupy his time?

My heart broke at that thought. Standing up and wiping my tears away, I decided to go for a run to try to clear my thoughts away from him. I wore a pair of green athletic shorts and a gray tank top. I laced up my sneakers, then grabbed my headphones and phone as I walked out of my room, locking my door behind me. Walking down the stairs, I spotted Elias sprawled out on one of the couches in the living room, reading a book. He looked up as I approached and started to walk past him. "Hey, Aurora? Can we talk, please?" he said nervously.

# Possessive

## Aurora's POV

I stopped walking and turned to face Elias. Raina was anxious in my head which was also making me anxious. What could he want to talk to me about, and why was he so nervous? His disgusting skunky, gym-sock smell permeated my nostrils, and I wanted nothing more than to lose my sense of smell for this conversation. "What do you want, Elias?" I asked, irritable. He stood up and walked toward me. "I-uh, I need to tell you something. Well, ask you something as well." He said, with his hand on the back of his neck. "*He's the one who has made your life hell throughout school until now, isn't he?*" Raina questioned. Flashbacks of him bullying me throughout my life, especially in school, plagued my mind. I saw when he tripped me as I had to walk past his lunch table to get to mine, landing on my food tray and being covered in it. While his entire table of friends laughed at my expense. He pushed me hard enough to slam me into a locker every time he walked past me. I saw him sitting in classes we had together, mocking me whenever I answered a question. Raina whined in my head. Yeah, it sucked. "Earth to Aurora, are you in there?" Elias said, waving his hand back and forth in front of my face and pulling me from the horrible flashbacks. I shivered and stared at him pointedly, waiting for him to continue with what he had to say. "You look nice. Were you going for another run? I've noticed you've been running a lot lately." He observed. My jaw dropped. "*Did he fall and hit his head or something? He just complimented you.*" Raina pointed out. Way to go, captain obvious. "I just wanted to stay in shape since I've been declared a pack warrior. If I lose muscle or fall behind, it could mean life or death for us." I said. Elias nodded, "Yeah, I guess that makes sense." "Why are we here, Elias? Cut to the chase, please." I said impatiently. "You haven't found your mate yet, have you?" he asked eagerly. "No, I haven't." I lied smoothly. Walking over to where he was sitting on the couch, he grabbed the book he had been reading and returned to where I was standing. He took a deep breath and handed me the book. I was about to chuck it back over to the couch, but something



made me look down and see what it was. It was probably another one of his cruel jokes because he got his ass handed to him earlier. I gasped loudly; he had given me a copy of Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales. It was my favorite book. I had a copy, but I had read it so much that the spine had given out and snapped in half. I hadn't had the heart to get rid of it, so it still sat on my bookshelf, sad and gloomy. "Do you like it? I was told it's your favorite. I read some of the tales in it, and you have a twisted mind for that to be your favorite book." He laughed a deep, throaty laugh. It sounded out of place for him. "Well, it shows that not every story has a happy ending." I said, a chill running down my back at the irony of that statement. "You're right." He agreed. "Who told you this was my favorite? You can't have learned it independently; you barely ever pay attention to me." I asked. Shrugging his shoulders, he said, "I know much more about you than you think." We stood there awkwardly as I waited for him to say something else. That statement creeped me out. It was also close to getting dark, and if I didn't leave soon, I would be running well into the night. I may have been a shifter, but I was still a woman, and it was never safe at night for us to be out alone. "Well, if that's it—" I started, but he cut me off mid-sentence. "It's not. I'm just being a chicken shit. Look, Aurora, I like you a lot. I have always liked you and never knew how to tell you without my friends being total assholes." He said sadly. "I have wanted to be with you for a long time." My eyes were as wide as saucers as he rendered me speechless with his admission. "Since we both haven't found our mates yet, I was thinking maybe I could take you on a date, and we could be a thing until one of us does find their mate." He added, enthusiasm in his voice as he stepped closer to me. "Elias, I—" A loud bang interrupted me from the rejection falling out of my mouth. "Did I hear that right?" A deep, familiar voice rang out from where the front door had slammed open. "No way. This is not happening right now." I said, shaking my head and rubbing my temples. The smell of my mate hit me, and I was grateful that it overpowered Elias's gross smell. "You're asking a girl who beat your ass and took great pleasure in doing it because you're such a damn douchecanoe to be your girlfriend; why?" Ryan said as he strolled towards us. Noticing

who had just entered the room, Elias lit up with a territorial rage. Any niceness that was on display before was suddenly gone. “Why are you on our pack territory and in this pack house?” He growled as he got into a fighting stance. “Answer my question, you runt.” Ryan bellowed. “Why is it any of your business? You’re not in our pack; you’re not even supposed to be on our territory without permission from our alpha. For the record, you’re speaking to the future beta of this pack, so you better learn some respect.” Elias spat at him. Standing there watching the interaction between the two, I was hoping Ryan didn’t get too aggressive. If he did anything stupid, like kill the future beta, there would be an all-out war between the packs. To my surprise, Ryan started chuckling. “You, with your chicken legs, are the future beta of this pack? Who told you that? They must have been yanking your chain, man.” He said as he composed himself. Elias started shaking with fury but didn’t say anything. “Oh, and it is my business who hits on MY girl. Both literally and metaphorically.” He said menacingly as he leaned closer to Elias. Looking down at the ground, I blushed as he said, “my girl . *“Seriously? Did you not learn your lesson?”* Raina chastised in my head. I rolled my eyes and pictured her with a muzzle on. *“Ha ha ha, very funny.”* Raina deadpanned but then remained quiet. Elias looked first at Ryan, then at me. “What does he mean by “his girl” Aurora?” he asked, downcast. Ryan started talking again. I spoke up, putting my hand against his chest and glaring at him. “I can speak for myself, you know.” My stomach dropped with disappointment as I walked toward Elias and handed him the book back. I was never going to keep it anyways, but man did it suck handing it over. “Ryan is my mate. I lied about finding my mate because we didn’t want it to be public yet.” I informed him. Elias’s jaw dropped to the floor. “He’s your mate? How did you get the future alpha of another pack as your mate when you’re so nervous and timid all the time? There’s no way you could handle being luna,” He said, glaring at Ryan, who stood there quietly. He was jealous. “I was only nervous and timid in school and around you because you made me feel worthless every second you were around me. You’re stupid if you think I’d have said yes to your proposition. You broke me down daily and made me want to constantly end

everything. If it weren't for Ella, I wouldn't even be around now. I am stronger and more confident and worthy of someone who is the same. I will be civil with you, Elias, but I will not be anything more than that." I said with finality. Elias sputtered like a fish out of water. Ryan came closer and tried to hug me with sympathy in his eyes. Pushing him away, I retorted, "I'm so mad at you. You're not allowed to touch me until you explain where you've been and why you haven't bothered to message me." He beamed a huge smile at me, then moved closer to Elias once again and said, "If you so much as look at my girl the wrong way, I'll end you, and I won't do it quickly. Oh, the same goes for if you spread the info you just learned around." He then quickly put his arms around me and hoisted me over his shoulder. "Ryan put me down!" I yelled, pounding on his back. Elias stood there wide-eyed and staring as Ryan laughed and started up the stairs carrying me. "Oh yeah, you smell horrible, dude. Go take a shower." Ryan shot at him as we disappeared around the corner upstairs.

Approaching the door of my room, Ryan tried the knob and realized it was locked. "Ha, you'll have to put me down to unlock it. The keys are in my pocket." I said, amused. "That's where you're wrong." He reached up, sticking his hand in each pocket of my pants until he got to the right side and found them. I growled at him as he unlocked the door. Walking over to the bed, he tossed me onto it hard. "Why were you even down there talking to him in the first place?" he said, clearly displeased. "You're joking right now, right? I haven't heard from you in 4 days, and that's after disappearing from my room before I even came back up! Not to mention, you ate all of my snacks. Now here you are, thinking you have some claim over who I talk to? No, sir." I said, exasperated, crossing my arms in front of me. "Not hearing from me for a couple of days doesn't give you the right to go running to some other guy, Aurora. You're mine. I'm your mate!" He yelled at me. Tears pricked my eyes at the accusation that I wasn't being loyal. "You're an asshole." My voice cracked. "You already knew I was. I want to know whether it's worth even fighting for this if you're just going to run to other men the second it gets hard." It'd be easier to walk away and not bother if that's the case." He said, his voice hard. I glared at him, too angry to

bother saying anything and holding back tears. Getting up out of bed, I walked into the bathroom, shut the door, and locked it. Starting the shower, I stripped off my clothes and got in. I didn't bother washing up or anything. I just sat down at the bottom and let my tears flow. How could he accuse me of wanting anything to do with Elias? Had he not seen me reject him? "*Aurora, the mate bond makes men incredibly possessive; you know that. It doesn't help that he has anger problems too.*" Raina said, trying to be practical. I just ignored her; the mate bond wasn't an excuse to be an asshole to me.

About forty-five minutes later, I was all cried out and composed enough to get out of the shower. Drying my hair off, I wrapped the towel around myself and opened the door. Ryan was sitting on the edge of my bed, scrolling through his phone. I could hear some eighties rock music playing softly from his phone. Did he like it as much as I did, or was he just playing it for me? Walking over to my dresser, I pulled out a rose-colored, silky pair of shorts and a matching camisole. Should I change in front of him? I mean, he's already seen it all, and if he can't touch me, it might make him rethink his earlier comments. "*Make him feel bad for being a jerk. He can look but not touch.*" Raina commented, echoing my thoughts exactly. I smiled, my evil plan about to unfold. "Hey, do you plan on apologizing for earlier?" I asked. "For what?" he looked over at me: wrong answer, bud. Dropping my towel, I leaned over, grabbing a pair of underwear from the top drawer. There was a growl as the bed groaned from his weight lifting off of it. I quickly stood back up and slowly pulled the underwear on. Then slowly slid the shorts on and the camisole over my head.

Ryan had moved closer and closer to me as I had gotten dressed. Putting his hands on my hips, he pulled me towards him. "Nope. You get the view, but you can't touch me. Not till you apologize for earlier." I said, smiling at him and stepping away. He glared hard at me but took a step back. "I don't have anything to apologize for, Aurora. You are mine, and I'm not going to share you." He started towards the door. "No, please don't leave," I said softly. He stopped and ran his hands through his brown hair, facing the door. "Why shouldn't I

leave?" He said, his voice shaking. "Ryan, do you think I want anything to do with Elias after hearing me reject him in front of you?" I said desperately. "You could have only said those things because I was there at the moment. I've been through it before." he countered. I sighed. "I didn't go searching for him. I was going to go for a run to stop myself from thinking about you constantly. I've been depressed the last week, and running with music blaring in my ears is one of the only things that quiets my mind." I admitted, tears threatening to fall again. "Where were you? You didn't get ahold of me at all. I made dinner that night and even brought a plate of it upstairs for you, and you were gone." I looked at him, only seeing his back, tears flowing freely down my cheeks. Turning around, he came closer to me and wiped the tears from my cheeks, his expression softening. "Don't cry; I'm sorry. I've just been through so much and have difficulty trusting people." He said softly, his hand still on my cheek. "I didn't contact you because I was planning on only talking or seeing you when I had to. I didn't want to risk anyone else finding out about us. My father will beat the shit out of me for coming back here, but I couldn't go another second without seeing your beautiful face. I think I'm also ready to tell you why I am the way I am. I want to learn more about you as well. I will never reject you, Aurora. I'm already falling in love with you, and I only found out about you a week ago." I stared into his eyes as my heart beat faster. "I will never reject you either; I don't want anyone else but you. I was afraid to admit it, but I'm also falling in love with you." I told him. "Why would your father beat you?" I questioned with concern. "That's something I will get to shortly. Come cuddle with me." He pulled me over to the bed with him, and we laid down together, my head on his chest as we snuggled under the covers. "I'm going to start with my childhood and how my mother died. You need to stop me if you don't want to hear anymore. It's not easy to hear." He said.

"Go ahead; I'm listening." I consoled him, rubbing his chest.

# Vulnerable

## Ryan's POV

Everything was perfect as we lay there together, snuggled under the blanket. I almost changed my mind about telling her my past in favor of keeping the peace around us. I was mentally searching for a way to start the conversation. Nobody knew any of what I was about to tell her. For her to fully be able to accept me as her mate, though, I needed her to know what had shaped me into the man I am today. She circled her fingers in the hair on my chest and snuggled closer to me. I smiled, strongly hoping that she would still want me after I was done with my messed-up story.

Well, here goes. “My mother died when I was young; I was six years old. She was a strong, beautiful woman. She had blonde hair and bright blue eyes, and her smile was the best. I vaguely remember having little mom and son dates with her because my father wanted nothing to do with her most of the time, even though they were mates. He used to beat her up when he thought I was asleep. She never hit him back; she was too kind-hearted.” I said as I pulled myself up to sit against the headboard. Aurora continued lying there intently listening, her green eyes trained on me. “She loved my father regardless, though. One night, she had my cousin come over to watch me while she went out for a while. I remember her coming home a little bit later and looking lost. She started packing our stuff but wouldn't answer me when I asked her why we were leaving. I kept asking, too. She was patient and kept telling me we had to go away for a little while. She was super jumpy, and every noise scared her.” I swallowed, coming to the hardest part of this story. “Within a few minutes of her packing our stuff, father came bursting through the front door. He was angry with her; I didn't know why at the time because I was so young, but I know now. She had gone to work and found him cheating on her in his office with the secretary. Like, full-on walked in on them in the middle of the act. He had told her to leave his office and sit in the lobby. He'd deal with her once he was finished and continued with the secretary like she hadn't even walked in. But she didn't stay there as he had told her,

and he was outraged that she had disobeyed him. She threw me into a closet and locked the door. When she heard the front door slam, she knew he wouldn't show her mercy. It was one with slats in the door so I could see through them. I started banging on the door, and she told me to be quiet. He came screaming at her about interrupting him and barging into his office. She screamed back at him about how he shouldn't have been cheating on her. He told her she was worthless and unattractive to him. She started crying, so he called her pathetic and punched her in the stomach." I took a shaky breath. Sitting up against the headboard with me, Aurora silently pulled me closer to her and rubbed my back in circles. Her scent washed over me and comforted me. "He beat on her until she died, and I watched the entire thing and couldn't do anything because the door was locked. Not that I could have at six years old anyways, but still. She didn't even do anything to deserve it at all. All she wanted was to be loved by him and for him to be loyal. He disrespected her the most by telling her dead body she was never worth anything and then spitting on her. The worst part? He knew I was watching in that closet. He opened the door and dragged me to my room." I stopped, needing a break as tears threatened to fall. I leaned into her and let her hold me for a few minutes, needing the support. "I'm sorry you had to see that. Your father is a sick, horrible man." She said with tears in her eyes. "He got rid of her body, and I don't know where. But afterward, he got a bucket of bleach water and a rag and made me scrub her blood off the floor and the wall. He told everyone in the pack that she decided to go rogue and leave her family behind. Nobody ever questioned it because their great alpha told them what he said was the truth, no matter what. I never got to say goodbye to her, and it kills me that she was just dumped somewhere." I growled. "From that day on, he did what he called "training" every day. He would beat me until I cried, then beat me harder for crying and tell me that men don't cry. He would come home from pack meetings furious and come into my room to take his anger out on me. He would tell me constantly that if I wound up like my mother, he'd do the same thing to me that he did to her, constantly demeaning her even though she was gone. It was hell growing up with him, still is. He still finds

ways to torture me and beat me. When I got home the night I left, he was waiting in my apartment. He beat the shit out of me for coming here without permission and then threatened you. That's why I didn't come back or contact you." I said, putting my head in my hands. "I missed you beyond belief, but I couldn't risk you getting hurt because of me. So many people have, and I can't stand it." I said through clenched teeth. She pulled my head up gently and looked me in the eyes. "Ryan, you didn't hurt anyone. Your father did, and it wasn't ever your fault. He is a terrible man, and you deserved so much better than that. We will get him back for it all, and it won't be small, either. He will go through hell to compensate for what he did to you and your mother." She said, determined. She pulled me closer and hugged me tightly. What did I do to deserve her? Any normal girl would have run away quicker than shit if I had told them my father, an alpha, was gunning to kill them. Her? She wanted to face him head-on, and I was shocked. "Aurora, you don't know how strong he is and how much influence he has over his pack. He isn't labeled blood-thirsty and violent for no reason. He has had our beta and a couple of warriors execute people who broke the rules. Even small offenses." I said, needing her to understand how much he could hurt her if he wanted to. "So he plays God is what you're telling me? You do realize that I am stronger than him. With the right training, we could overtake him together, you know." My eyes widened at her. "*She's a badass. Don't you dare fuck this up, man. You'll never find another like her.*" Zion commented inside my head. He was definitely right. "We'll see, beautiful. Right now, we need to figure out what we're going to do about our situation." I said as I sat up and kissed the top of her head. "What do you mean?" She questioned, panic in her eyes. "I mean, how is this all going to work? I don't want to hide you from the world. You are my mate, and we must figure out all the technicalities. I don't think it is safe to tell people about it now, but we need to within the next couple of weeks. I can't take not being able to mark you; it's driving me insane." I admitted. She smiled knowingly as her panic dissolved, "Yes, I want you too. More than you know. We'll figure it out together." I chuckled; I was sure she didn't want me as much as I wanted her. Just seeing



her sometimes had me tucking myself into the waistband of my pants. “So what do you want to do?” She asked, biting her lip. “Well, since we can’t do what I want, how about we turn a movie on and cuddle until we fall asleep?” I suggested. I was a whore for cuddling now, and I couldn’t get enough of it; I could cuddle with her forever. “That sounds good.” She agreed and flipped the TV on.

I woke up the next morning contented like a weight had been lifted off my chest. I had told her almost everything, and she still wanted to be with me. I stretched, rolled over to look at her, and faced an empty bed. What the hell? Where was she? I turned back around and reached over to grab my phone. It was a little after nine am, and I had a text from her.

**Aurora:** Early morning exercise session with the pack. I’ll be back in a couple of hours with breakfast. Don’t miss me too much. ;)

Breakfast? She’s an angel, I swear. I hoped she wouldn’t be long because I was starving, and she might kill me if I touched her snacks again. It was hot here, though, so I took off my pants and shirt, laid back down in bed, and passed back out.

The next thing I heard was the door unlocking and opening. “Bye, Ella. I’ll text you later!” Aurora called out. The smell of eggs and bacon smacked me in the face, and I sat up in seconds. She walked in, holding a full breakfast plate with eggs, bacon, toast, and even a tiny bottle of orange juice. I looked at her with an eager grin. She smiled warmly, walked towards me, and held the plate. “Here, I already ate with Ella downstairs. But I figured you would be hungry.” “Thank you, I am starving,” I said. Looking down at me, she started blushing. “Why are you half-naked in my bed?” She said curiously. Oh yeah, I didn’t have anything but underwear on. “It was hot,” I said, shrugging. “Well, I guess you’re excited to see me then too?” She said, giggling. Looking down, I noticed I was fully tenting my underwear. Damn morning wood, and damn her for being so sexy bringing me food in her tight workout clothes. I went to pull the blanket over me to hide it, but she had other plans. She carefully took the plate of food

out of my hands and set it on the nightstand next to us, then climbed on me, straddling me. Shocked, I just stared at her stupidly. She giggled harder and leaned down to whisper in my ear, "I'm excited to see you too, big boy." Taking in the weirded-out expression on my face, she burst out laughing, snorting in between because she was laughing so hard. "No, but for real, I am excited to see you." She said thoughtfully, leaning down to press her lips against mine. I kissed her back hesitantly, waiting for her to take the lead. Deepening the kiss, she pushed her tongue against mine, and I groaned. I moved my mouth from hers, nibbled on her ear, and kissed down her soft skin to her collarbone and onto her breasts. I grabbed her hips and pulled her down harder as she ground herself against me. Suddenly she stopped and slid off onto the other side of the bed. Disappointment flooded me, even though I knew we couldn't go any further than that. She was breathing heavily next to me, her face buried into her pillow. I turned towards her and started to rub her back. "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have done that." She said, her voice muffled. "It's okay; I don't mind. I enjoy having you any way that I can right now." I said sincerely. "Eat your breakfast; I'm going to take a shower," she ordered. "Yes, ma'am."

A little later in the day, I had to leave and return to my apartment for some clothes. Unlocking the front door, I walked into a pitch-black room. "Did you disobey me and go back over there, son?" my father's voice rang out across the room. My heart dropped as I realized I was about to get the snot beat out of me again. "*Worth it, though,*" Zion said. I flipped the light switch and walked over to the chair he usually occupied while waiting for me here. Sure enough, there he was. "Why are you in my apartment again?" I asked, my voice dead of any emotion.

"I told you that if you went over there again, I would have her and anyone close to her killed, didn't I? I don't make empty threats." He said with a malicious smile. "You better not touch her, father," I growled, getting in his face. He just sat there, sneering at me. "I mean it, father, if you so much as touch her, I will kill you." I boomed, my voice shaking the walls. "Well, son, I guess you won't have to kill me since I'm

not the one touching her. Alfred and some of my most loyal warriors are already on their way over. They've got a head start. Even if you left now, you would never make it to her on time," He laughed. "Besides, once you don't have that stupid mate bond to worry about, life will be much easier for you," he said. Zion went crazy in my head, screaming profanities as my world shattered. I'd never moved so quickly in my life. I punched my father as hard as I could in the face; he wasn't prepared for it in the slightest, so the hit landed. His nose snapped, blood spurted everywhere as his body crumpled to the floor. Then I shifted, and the sound of my bones snapping filled the air. Growling while ripping the door handle clear off the door with my teeth, I slammed through it and ran through town as fast as my legs would carry me.

I had to make it to her; I couldn't lose her.

# Hurt

## Aurora's POV

Sitting cross-legged on my bed, I eagerly awaited Ryan's return. He had only been gone for five or ten minutes, but the bond was nagging me already with him so far from me. It was dark outside, the stars twinkling through my open window. I picked up my phone to text Ella, asking her if she wanted to go downstairs for dinner with me. *"I have a weird feeling. Something bad is going to happen."* Raina said anxiously inside of my head. I stopped for a second, realizing I had the same feeling; not good. I could almost always predict bad things before they happened. I sent a text to Ryan asking him if he was okay and to please call me when he could. Ella hadn't replied to me, which was odd, considering her phone was glued to her hand twenty-four-seven. *"Aurora, something is wrong. We need to leave now."* Raina nagged. I agreed with her. Standing up, I threw on a hoodie over my t-shirt and some sneakers on my feet. Grabbing my duffel bag, I also packed a couple of changes of clothes and the essentials I used every day. I went my phone charger and a few snacks from under my bed. Slinging the bag over my shoulder and walking out of the door, I locked it quickly. I made my way down the long, dimly lit hallway to Ella's room, hearing music blaring inside and her singing very badly to an Evanescence song. That explained why she hadn't answered my text. I laughed and managed to slip quietly down the stairs and out the front door of the pack house. The feeling was getting worse, enough to make me sick. I gagged as the familiar disgusting smell of skunky gym socks assaulted my nose. Elias stepped out from the side of the pack house and came walking towards me, his face set in determination. "Elias, I don't have time to talk. I have to go," I said as I started to walk away. He didn't say anything as he slowly picked up his pace and gained on me. "Elias, please leave me alone." I practically yelled at him. What was wrong with him? He broke into a sprint and quickly caught up to me, grabbing ahold of my hair violently and yanking me backward. I cried out in pain as I felt a few strands rip from my head. "You traitorous bitch. Where do you think

you're going?" he spat at me. I was too stunned to speak, not expecting him to grab me the way he did. "You going to answer me, or do I need to find a way to make you?" He said, moving his hold from my hair to my neck and pulling me up against him harshly. "None of your business." I managed to get out through clenched teeth. "Not good enough," he laughed maniacally. "Nobody rejects me and embarrasses me the way you have multiple times and gets away with doing it. I'm a million times better than that alpha. You should be with me!" He had truly snapped. Tears started running down my cheeks. He pulled out a dagger from the holster on his side, and a sharp smell hit my nose; my stomach dropped. The knife was coated with wolfsbane, the only thing that would slow a shifter's healing process and make whatever wound sustained with it scar terribly. He ran the tip of the knife across my cheek and up under my chin softly. "Hmm, where should I mark you so you remember why you shouldn't cross me?" He whispered in my ear. "*What can we do?*" Raina said, whining in my head. I thrashed against him, trying to get out of his grip. He tightened his grip on my throat, cutting off my air supply. "Keep fighting me, and you will fight for every last breath after this one." he threatened, loosening his grip as I gasped for air. Elias took the dagger, pushed it up under my jean shorts, and sliced through them easily. He also repeated the motion on the other side until they fell down my thighs, exposing me. "Mmm, nice underwear. Didn't peg you as a thong girl." He said huskily. I felt him start to harden against me. My heart raced, and stomach acid crawled up my throat. "I've wanted you for so long, Aurora. Now I get to have you and get my revenge simultaneously." He said with a dark smile, pushing the knife up against the other side of my neck while he put his lips on my shoulder. I shuddered and closed my eyes as Raina's whined in my head louder. Suddenly, I sensed that three huge dark figures had appeared along the other side of the house, stalking toward us. Elias didn't notice them. The scent of the midnight pack hit me, and I realized I was in more danger than I initially thought; my brain went into overdrive. "*You need to shift so you can get away.*" Raina said desperately. If I shift, it will throw him backward and kill him; he is too close to me. "*He deserves it for what he was about to*

*do to you.*” she retorted. As much as I wanted Elias dead, I would not be a killer unless I had to be. I refused to be careless and wanton with the life around me; I was better than that. I will try to find a way to get away from him so I can shift and run. Let Alpha Max take care of him when it’s all said and done. Raina growled, *“This is the stupidest idea.”* The three figures made it to us quickly, surprising Elias when one of them spoke behind him. “Well, don’t let us stop you, boy. If you want to get a quick fuck in before we do our dirty work, go for it.” he said, chuckling. They were three men, and all were jacked, Midnight pack warriors, one emitting the familiar smell of a beta. “Ryan’s father sent you, didn’t he?” I said, managing to keep my voice from shaking. “Yep, Alpha John sent us. His worthless son decided that getting some ass from the town whore was more important than obeying our alpha’s orders.” A different man said the one with the beta smell. Anger swirled within me at the insult. “Why are you here? You’re on Silvercrest territory.” Elias said, puffing up behind me. “Boy, I don’t think you are in the position to be getting territorial. We’re only here to take care of the girl before we leave. You won’t be around much longer either; we don’t need witnesses.” the first one said, irritated. “What do you mean by taking care of?” Elias stupidly questioned. The entire time they talked, I observed the area around me and looked for exits. The third man made a slicing motion across his neck, and the other two guffawed at him. Idiots. “How about we make a deal then.” Elias countered. “You can have her and do what you want with her if you let me leave. I’ll tell Alpha Max that she went rogue because she didn’t want to be mated to another alpha’s son. Save you some work.” he continued quickly without waiting for a response. My heart dropped; he did not just offer to let them kill me and cover for them so he could get away unscathed. What a cowardly piece of filth. Fear laced itself deeper inside of me. The three men looked around at each other and agreed. “We are wasting time, though. Alpha John said to do it as quickly as we could before Ryan had a chance to get here,” The third one reminded the beta. “Go, boy, make sure you tell your alpha what you promised, or we will come for you next.” He said in an authoritative tone. Elias nodded frantically, then let go of me

quickly and took off. Immediately I shifted, bones snapping and clothes shredding. I took off into the trees in the other direction. *“I don’t know how that worked in your favor, but we need to find a place to hide.”* Raina said in disbelief. “Oh shit, she wants us to chase her. This is gonna be fun!” the beta taunted, laughing wildly.

I ran blindly in the dark, as fast as I could, searching for a place to take cover. My heightened senses helped me avoid hitting trees as I ran. I had gotten halfway through the forest and was close to the highway when I slammed into something coming in the opposite direction. I whined as my body collided with a firm, solid weight. The taste of blood flooded my mouth, and a few of my bones snapped. The pain was quick and intense but faded fast as my bones healed and snapped back into place. Turning around, I instantly fell into a fighting stance and bared my teeth, growling loudly. There was a large black wolf in front of me in the same posture, its fur shining in the moonlight. The wind blew hard in the opposite direction, taking the mystery wolf’s scent. Their eyes were blazing with fury as they bared their teeth back at me. Suddenly, surprise flitted across the wolf’s facial expression, and immediately they shifted back to human form. There stood Ryan in all his naked glory. My jaw dropped, and I walked over to him, nuzzling him and whimpering. “Aurora, shift back.” He ordered. In a second, I stood in front of him. My curly hair was wild, and tears ran steadily down my cheeks. “Ryan, there are men from your pack; they’re co-,” I started frantically, but he cut me off. “I know; my father sent them because I came back. Where are they, and how did you get away?” He asked as he pulled me close and hugged me, unmistakable anger in his voice. “Come out, come out wherever you are.” The beta’s voice echoed through the forest, answering Ryan’s question. “We have to get back to the pack house; if they don’t get you, they will get Ella. Father made that their backup plan,” He said quickly. “Shift and follow me. We can go around the forest so they can’t hear or smell us.” He shifted back into his colossal wolf, and I followed suit. He instantly took off, and I ran after him, not paying attention to anything but him in front of me. He took us up around the highway and the trees along a slow-flowing river. Amusement

flooded me; this would be romantic if we weren't running for our lives. I made a mental note to get Ryan to take us back through here. "*Ha ha, very funny,*" Raina commented dryly. Finally making it to the pack house, Ryan shifted back and ripped the door open. Running past him up the stairs, I ran to Ella's room and started pounding on her door with my paws, whimpering softly. The music had been turned off, and the light under her door was off, but regardless I kept going. "What the fuck?" I heard her say softly as she padded to the door and opened it. I barreled into her room, knocking her over, and Ryan came running up the stairs naked, slamming the door behind him. "Um, excuse me, what the hell is going on?!" She exclaimed from the floor. I shifted back and said with authority, "Lock the door, Ella. Use all three locks, and we will pull your dresser in front of it." Following the directions, I sank onto the floor after everything was done, shaking and exhausted. "Aurora, tell me what is going on." She demanded as she stood up and walked into her closet to grab a robe for me. Ryan grabbed the blanket off of her bed and wrapped it around himself. "Yeah, dude, keep that covered. I've seen more of you flapping in the wind tonight than I have ever wanted to." She said with an amused look on her face. Ryan scowled and looked at his feet. Pulling on the robe, I told her what had happened and what was going on. Fear replaced shock as she realized she was in danger as well. I heard the door open quietly downstairs and ran for the light switch, flipping it off. I listened to the beta whisper. "She is with Ryan; both of their smells come back here," he informed them. The stairs creaked under their weight as they slowly climbed them. "Don't I get a turn with the pack whore?" the beta taunted. When all the noise stopped, Ryan slammed his fist into the wall and got up, ready to confront them. Ella glared between Ryan and the large hole in her wall. "Well, boys, Alpha John just linked and said to call it off. He sounded rough, but he said Ryan proved his worth tonight." the beta said softly with surprise in his voice. Sounds of disappointment rang out from the other two men as they descended the stairs. "She lives to see another day!" one of them joked at my expense. I breathed a sigh of relief as I heard the door downstairs open and close.



It took me an hour to tell Ryan and Ella what had happened with Elias. I couldn't stop sobbing long enough to get the whole story out. As expected, Ryan flew off the handle. He immediately wanted to find Elias so he could rip his throat out. I was able to calm him down and talk some sense into him. Ella sat there silently in shock, not knowing what to say to help the situation. "I think our best bet is to come clean about us being mates, Aurora. If we are public, then father nor Max can do anything to you without people getting suspicious." Ryan said cautiously. "What does that mean? Like, how do we do that? Will I have to move in with you and join your pack? How does all of that work?" I shot out a million questions at a time. Ella looked at me sadly; if I had to move in with Ryan and join another pack, she would lose me for good. With the territory borders open for the packs to mingle, it would be easier to spend time with her than before. "Yes, you would have to join my pack as I am the future alpha and can't leave to join yours. Whether you want to live in one of our pack houses or move in with me at my apartment, it would be your choice. I think you should mind link Max and have him meet us here. You can tell him about Elias, and we will tell him about our mate status together." Ryan said as he rubbed my back. "But what about Ella?" I said, starting to cry again. "I could probably get father to accept her into the pack, too; it would look good for him to be welcoming," Ryan said, shrugging. Ella stood up and took a deep breath, "I don't think I will be able to go with you, Aurora. I love you, but I have my entire life set up here. We will find a way to get through this; you will always be my best friend." Ella said, tears rolling down her cheeks. I walked over to her and hugged her hard. In a sense, I was trading my best friend for my mate, and it felt all kinds of wrong.

"So you are going to have to teach me how to mind link because I have never done it," I said as I fidgeted with a pencil on my desk. We were back in my room together now. Ella had wanted to go back to bed after ensuring that she was safe since she had a test in the morning. We cried and sobbed for a couple of minutes before we could say goodnight. I was wearing a set of fluffy PJs, and Ryan had on one of my father's old shirts that I used as a nighty and a pair of sweatpants that

we had cut into shorts. The fabric stretched tight around his pelvis. “Just think about who you want to contact, picture their face in your mind and then think what you want them to hear,” Ryan replied, lounging on my bed. I pictured Alpha Max and then said in my mind, “Could you please come to the pack house? I have something important that needs to be brought to light.” His reply came instantly, “Sure, I’ll be there soon. We will meet in the living room.” I looked at Ryan nervously, “He is going to meet us in the living room.” I relayed. “Well, we had better go down there and wait for him.” He said, grabbing my hand. “Whatever happens, we will get through it together.” He said, smiling at me and rubbing the top of my hand with his thumb.

# Starting Over

## Aurora's POV

As we sat waiting for Alpha Max to show up in the living room, I couldn't keep myself from fidgeting. I was anxious beyond belief, even with Ryan trying to comfort me. We waited about an hour before I heard his car pull into the parking lot. I yawned, it was getting late, and I was exhausted and surprised I was still awake. Alpha Max came strolling through the front door in a pair of gray flannel PJ pants and a green t-shirt with his hair sticking out every which way; his eyes were tired and sleepy. I raised my eyebrows at his choice of attire and burst out in a fit of giggles. The sleep deprivation was getting to me and making me delirious. Ryan looked at me like I was crazy. Though I probably was, to be fair. "Yeah yeah, I'm sure I look amusing, considering you called me out of my bed, where I was peacefully sleeping." he said grumpily as he walked into the living room. He stopped abruptly and tensed up when he saw Ryan sitting on the couch next to me. "Hi, Ryan. Why are you in our territory? I don't remember permitting you to be here." He said, a stern expression on his face. It seemed to sink in between us before we even told him. "You two are mates aren't you?" He said curiously. "Yes, we are. We found each other at the last pack meeting we had." Ryan said cautiously. Alpha Max's eyebrows went up, "You hid your mate status for that long? It's been weeks since the meeting! You haven't marked her yet?" He said, shocked. Ryan shook his head. "My father wants her killed because of her wolf and her abilities. He sent a few of his men here tonight to kill her. I'm not sure why he called it off at the last second, but if he hadn't, Aurora wouldn't be sitting here with us." Ryan said, trying to hold his anger back. "Is this true?" Alpha Max asked, turning to me. "Yes, it is. I had a bad feeling right before they showed up, so I packed a bag and was going to go to my parents. But Elias stopped me in front of the house." Tears started rolling down my cheeks for the millionth time tonight. I had never cried this much in my life. "*You just almost got raped and then killed by four different men. I think it's okay to let yourself cry.*" Raina chastised me. "Aurora, tell

me what happened, please, so I can try to help you. We may have differences, but you are still a pack member. It is my responsibility to make sure you are safe.” Alpha Max said, laying a hand on my shoulder and looking at me with concern in his eyes. I took a deep breath to try to calm myself down and told him everything that had happened with Elias, including the fact that he had a dagger coated in wolfsbane. That was banned in our world; having it could get you exiled from the pack. Getting angry again at hearing what happened being recounted, Ryan walked outside for some air to cool his temper. “Elias has been unhinged for a while. I’m surprised that it came to this, though. I never expected him to pull this bullshit.” His eyes glazed over, and he went silent for a few minutes. I assumed he was mind linking his beta, Malakai, to find Elias so he could take care of the problem once he was done here. “I have sent Malakai to fetch and bring him to my house. Now, about your mate bond. You two were smart to come out about it now; John wouldn’t dare to bring down any bad publicity on his name. You should be safe for a little while. But do not underestimate him, Aurora. I have seen him do horrible, gruesome things to people he claimed he cared about. I know you will move to their pack, but I want you to know that you always have a home here if you need it. You are welcome back on the territory whenever you want to, without my permission.” He said, smiling warmly at me. “Thank you, Alpha Max. I assumed you didn’t like me from how things went at that meeting.” I admitted. “No, dear, you are stronger than me. It is an instinct for an alpha to get territorial when someone threatens to overtake them, not that you did, but you displayed incredible defiance when it came to obeying me. It was just in my nature to fight back.” He said, shrugging. I understood; I had the same fight in me as well. I never thought I had the gall enough to be a luna, but here I am. Alpha Max stood up and hugged me, shocking me, “I will have a few of the warriors come and move your stuff once it is packed. I likely won’t see you again before you go, so good luck. You will make a great luna.” He said sweetly.

A few days later, all of my stuff was again packed and ready to go. I had already said a very emotional goodbye to Ella, promising that I would visit and that we wouldn’t drift

apart. I loaded a few boxes into my car. I had chosen to move into Ryan's apartment with him, wanting to avoid living in a pack house where I knew absolutely nobody. Getting into the driver's seat, I started the journey to my new home, excitement brewing inside me with every mile I traveled.

As I pulled into the unfamiliar driveway of a gray duplex house in Midnight pack territory, apprehension swirled in my belly. Ryan stepped out from the right side of the house with a huge smile, waving enthusiastically at me. I could tell he was excited not to live alone anymore. Stepping off the top step and hopping to the ground, he came to the car to grab the boxes I had brought. He carried them in, and I followed. Walking into his apartment, I was shocked by how simple it was. There was a dark gray couch, a black, square coffee table, and a flatscreen TV in the living room. While the Tv was mounted to the wall, no pictures hung on the walls, and no curtains covered the windows. I walked further into the kitchen and noticed it was pretty minimal too. Nothing on the counters, and no dish towels or curtains in here either. It had a dark brown stained oak cabinet with black and white marble countertops. The oversized refrigerator had two doors with an ice maker/water dispenser on the front. The dishwasher sat next to the sink, the oven on the other side of the room. All the appliances were black, with a sleek shine on them. I exited that room and made my way toward the bathroom. A vast standing shower with glass doors sat in the corner of the room. The same brown-stained oak cabinets are in here as well. The sink was white porcelain with a silver faucet. Coming up behind me, Ryan put his hand on my shoulder and sighed, startling me. "I guess I could use some lessons in interior design?" He joked. I laughed at him and nodded. "I guess it's good that I brought some decorations from my old place with me." As I turned around, he took me into his arms. "As long as they're not too girly, you'll disrupt my man cave." He said, winking at me. I rolled my eyes at him and walked back into the living room. He followed and guided me toward the bedroom. We walked in, and the only two things visible in the room were a nightstand, a California king-sized bed with blue sheets, and a dark blue flannel bed-set. "You need that big of a bed for yourself?" I teased. He smirked, "You'll see soon why it's so

big.” He winked at me once more, and I went scarlet. *“Have you always been such a prude? Why do you get so embarrassed when he mentions anything sexual? He’s your mate!”* Raina chastised me in my head. It seemed she was constantly criticizing me; it was getting annoying. *“You gotta live with me for the rest of your life; you better get used to it,”* she said, giggling. “Anyways, there are two closets in here. You can have the bigger one since I’m sure you have more clothes than I do.” Ryan quipped. I opened up the closet meant for me; it was huge. There was enough room to put my dresser in and hang clothes up! Excitement filled me with the thought of organizing as I walked into the living room. I picked up one of the boxes Ryan had brought and took it into the bedroom. He followed me, and together we worked on unpacking my clothes together.

About two hours later, a moving van pulled up to the side of the road next to the apartment. A couple of my pack warrior friends from Silvercrest got out of it and started moving my stuff in for me. They asked where I wanted every piece of furniture before they put it anywhere, so I didn’t have to move it again myself. Ryan also helped; I was impressed that they all got along long enough to complete it. After everything was moved in that I wanted, they all hugged and man-patted my back goodbye. “We’ll put the rest of this into a storage unit a few blocks over.” Paul, a big teddy bear of a guy with several piercings and a giant mohawk, said as he hopped into the truck. “Good luck, Aurora!” He called out. I smiled at him and waved. “Thank you! Use my name for the bill after you’re done.” Ryan called. Paul nodded, and off they all went.

Boxes littered the living room, making the small room look even smaller. “Do you want to order something for dinner?” Ryan asked. I was exhausted, starving, and didn’t want to cook anything. I was thankful he suggested it. “Yes, order whatever you want. I’ll eat anything; I’m not picky.” I said as I leaned back on the couch and closed my eyes. “Okay,” Ryan said as he walked out of the room and into the kitchen, dialing on his phone.

Something gently shook me, and I startled awake. Shit, I must have fallen asleep. “You must have been tired; you slept

for the last hour or so dead to the world,” Ryan said, laughing. He was sitting next to me with a giant box of pizza and a few 2-liters of soda in front of us on the coffee table. “I didn’t know what soda you drank, so I got a couple of kinds. Same with the pizza, half is pepperoni, and the other half is cheese.” He said a little modestly. “As long as it’s not pineapple on it, it’s perfect,” I said, smiling warmly. The smell made my mouth water, and the caffeine in the soda was calling my name. While Ryan went to get us cups and plates, I turned on a scary movie and had it ready to start. We watched back-to-back scary movies for the next couple of hours and shoved our faces with pizza. For once, I was excited about what the future would hold. I would worry about the bad stuff tomorrow.

Around midnight, I yawned and pried my eyes open for the hundredth time. “Are you ready to go to bed?” Ryan asked, yawning too. I was ready to go to bed hours ago but was nervous about going to bed with him. I wasn’t prepared to be marked, and I had already made him wait too long for it. I just wasn’t ready to belong to someone, like an object. It had always rubbed me the wrong way. “What’s wrong, Aurora? I thought we had a good night?” He questioned, concern on his face. “*You’re bad at hiding your facial expressions around him. You’re like an open book.*” Raina pointed out. Taking a deep breath, anxiety flooded my body.

“I just, I’m not ready to be marked yet,” I said quickly, afraid of his reaction. He stared at me for a moment, processing what I had said. “I’m confused; you don’t want to be marked? You moved in with me but didn’t want to be marked by me?” He said, bewildered. “It’s not that easy to explain,” I replied, looking down at my feet. “Well, try to explain it to me.” he all but ordered. “You will not get anywhere with me ordering me around, Ryan. I’m not your property. This is why I don’t want to be marked yet. You’re going to think you own me and everything I do, and I don’t want that. I am my own person, and I will not be controlled. It took me a long time to reach my confidence level now.” I was rambling, and I knew it, but it was my way of trying to avoid facing him being angry at me. He sat there, staring ahead for a minute, making me even more anxious. Finally, he looked

over at me, “I understand where you are coming from. You are a strong-willed, stubborn woman, I would never be able to control you, nor would I want to. When you are my luna, we will be equals. I’m not interested in taming you, Aurora. I claim you when I mark you, but it’s only in a possessive sense. I want other men to know you’re mine and only mine. It’s not in a controlling way.” He said, slowly as if he was piecing together how he wanted to say it. “I’m worried you will change your mind after you’ve marked me. Then it will be too late.” I said, worried. “I’ll never change my mind. I’ll never make you into someone you’re not.” He reiterated. He leaned in and kissed the top of my head. “Let’s go to bed. We don’t have to do it tonight if you’re not comfortable.” He said with a bit of disappointment in his voice. I felt terrible; maybe I could sleep on it and feel better about it later. I’m sure he wouldn’t oppose me waking him up if I felt better about it later. “*What guy would be?*” Raina said, sarcasm dripping from her melodic voice. I pictured her tied to a short leash in the middle of a yard. She growled hard at me and went silent. I laughed under my breath.

Laying down in the giant bed, Ryan took the side closest to the door under the pretense that if something happened in the middle of the night, he could protect me better on that side. Not that it mattered, we were lying directly in the middle anyways. I laid my head on his chest as he put his arms around me. I could feel the bond inside me strengthening with us being close like we have been the last few days. I wondered if his bond was growing stronger too. I closed my eyes as he started rubbing my back and fell asleep.



# Marked

## Ryan's POV

I woke up disoriented; the room was dark around me. Moonlight shone through the window; it was a full moon tonight. Aurora was snuggled up against me, snoring softly. We were both under the blankets and warm. It was quiet, the kind of serene you only get when it's late, and the whole world is sleeping. I reached over to the nightstand beside me and grabbed my phone, squinting as the light hit my face to see the time. I blinked sleepily; it was three am. I had always been a very light sleeper, often waking up multiple times during the night. I had to use the bathroom, but I was too comfortable to get out of bed. I lay there for a few more minutes until the feeling worsened, and I couldn't hold it anymore. I groaned, pushing myself up and out of bed and stumbling down the hallway to the bathroom. While the toilet flushed behind me, I stripped my shorts and shirt off and threw them onto the pile of laundry on the floor. Yawning, I got back into bed and pulled the covers over me. Turning onto my side, I found Aurora lying quietly with her eyes open. "Are you always so loud when you get up in the middle of the night?" She questioned. "I'm not used to having anyone else here; I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up." I said, rubbing the back of my neck awkwardly. "It's alright; I'll forgive you this time," she said, smiling at me. Our mate bond was getting stronger. I could now feel little remnants of how she was feeling. Over time, the mate bond will grow strong enough that I'll be able to feel how she feels completely, but usually, it doesn't start until after the marking. She moved closer to me and laid her head on my shoulder. "I'm sorry for earlier. I shouldn't have assumed so many bad things about you. I've just heard a lot of rumors, and I guess my brain goes back to them. Even when I don't want them to," She said sincerely. The rumors, yeah, I'd heard them. They were centered around what my father had done. According to the other pack and most of the rogues outside our area, I was as bloodthirsty, violent, and controlling as he was. I was nothing like my father, and I had worked hard not to be considering my past. The rumors made me angry

every time someone brought it up. I wasn't sure what to say to her, so I kept quiet. We lay there together for a few minutes. A sliver of apprehension came through the bond, and I wondered what was wrong. "Are you feeling emotions through the bond?" I asked her. I felt her nod her head against my shoulder. "Weird. I thought that didn't start until after you marked me." She commented. "Probably has something to do with my alpha blood and your wolf form," I said, shrugging. The apprehension grew stronger, "Aurora, what's-" She cut me off. "Don't ask, or I might not have the guts to keep going." She said nervously as she climbed over the top of me, straddling me. My heart picked up the pace, feeling like a jackhammer in my chest. I looked up at her and was struck dumb by her beauty. Her messy, curly hair fell past her shoulders, and her green eyes shone in the moonlight. Full lips complimented her high cheekbones. Her body was perfect, with wide hips, perky breasts, and a round, firm ass. She smiled at me, staring at me as well. Leaning down, she pressed her lips to mine gently. I kissed her back just as gently, waiting for her to take the lead and deepen the kiss. I didn't want to do anything she wasn't ready for. She ended the kiss and sat back up, "Are you okay?" She asked, puzzled. "Uh yeah, I'm fine. I don't want to do anything you're not ready to do." I admitted, putting my hands on her hips. She was so petite my hands looked huge on her. "I'm ready." was all she said, and it was the only confirmation I needed. I growled, flipping her over, so I was now on top. She giggled and started kissing me again, her tongue parting my lips and finding mine. I was hard as a rock already at that point. I pulled her t-shirt over her head and was surprised when I realized she wasn't wearing a bra. She lay there exposed with a little smirk on her face. I kissed gently down her chin and collarbone to her breasts. Taking one of them into my mouth and the other in my hand, I swirled my tongue around her nipple, and she moaned. I continued the slow, sweet torture with my tongue and teeth until she was panting under me. Then I rained kisses down her stomach, Slowly pulling off her shorts and underwear and then tossing them onto the floor. I continued my rain of kisses until I got down to the apex of her thighs. I looked up at her, shocked, and she just sheepishly shrugged. She was soaked, and that

turned me on even more. I dove right in, devouring her like she was the best meal I'd ever had in my life. She probably was, to be honest, her taste intoxicated me, and I only wanted more. I swirled my tongue around her nub, and she bucked her hips up, moaning loudly. Running my tongue up her slit repeatedly, I could feel her coming apart. Inserting my finger inside her and using my tongue simultaneously, I felt a sense of satisfaction as her thighs started shaking, and she yelled out her release. I smiled as I came face to face with her again and kissed her. She broke the kiss and pushed me off of her. As she pulled my underwear off, I got on my knees in front of her. She spit on her hand and started stroking me, her slick hand feeling like heaven. She then took my long, hard length into her mouth and looked up at me. Her looking at me with my dick in her mouth was almost my undoing. She moved her tongue around my tip and sucked while using her hand to stroke the part of me her mouth didn't fully reach. I groaned and grabbed a fist full of her hair. She cupped my balls with her other hand and continued her lament. I had to stop her, or I was going to blow my load in her mouth, and I didn't want that. I gently pushed her back, reaching into the nightstand drawer next to me and grabbing a condom. Rolling it on, I positioned myself at her entrance, rubbed my tip up and down her slit, and then slowly pushed myself inside her. She was warm and tight. Her head went back against the bed as she cried out in pleasure. When I was fully seated in her, I gave her a moment to adjust before I started moving. I thrust out and then back into her at a furious pace, hitting her g spot and making her cry. Her cries got louder and louder each time I thrust, and I could feel her getting close. I was as well, she felt so good, and the noise she was making spurred me on harder. "*Mark her.*" I heard in my head in an unfamiliar voice. She raised her arm to me, almost as if she had heard the voice too. My canines lengthened in my mouth as I took her arm and bit down hard, piercing her skin. Tasting her blood in my mouth, I heard her cry in mixed pain and pleasure. Going over the edge, she tightened, pulsing around me as she found her release again. I followed suit, growling into her arm as I pulled my teeth from her. The outline of my bite was already healing and scarring. The only evidence left over was the few drops of

blood on the sheets. I felt the bond snap inside of me again like a rubber band breaking, harder this time, enough to knock the breath out of me. I collapsed onto her with my head on her chest, still inside of her. Both of us breathing heavily, she stroked my hair with a satisfied smile. I smiled to myself; that was perfect. I've never been intimate with a girl where it was that good. and it was only the first time. I couldn't wait to have her again like that.

We both woke up in the morning naked and tangled around each other. I was content; I'd never been this happy in my entire life. It was like she made everything bad that ever happened to me disappear. The bond made me feel even more strongly for her as time passed. "I'm starving," She said, her voice filled with sleep. "Me too," I agreed. Getting up out of bed, we moved around, starting to get dressed. She was pulling on a pair of underwear when I snuck up behind her; turning her around, I pushed her up against the wall hard.

I pinned her arms above her head and slammed my lips against hers. There was a moment of shock, but she quickly melted into me and kissed me back just as hard, burying her hands in my hair. I reached down and stuck my first two fingers inside her; she was wet already. Using my thumb to stroke her clit, I pushed my middle finger deeper into her to hit that particular spot, and I went to town, thrusting with it. She was moaning loudly against my lips and trying to stroke me, but she couldn't concentrate enough to keep up the momentum. "It's okay, baby, don't worry about me," I whispered huskily. I shoved my tongue between her lips as she ground her hips against my hand. She came hard and fast on my hand, squeezing my fingers and coating me in her release. I smiled darkly, pulling my fingers from her. I stuck them in my mouth, licking her off of them. Her taste compared to nothing; she would get tired of coming when I was done with her.

Deciding that we needed a shower before all of our plans today, we hopped in together. Despite my other plans, Aurora ensured that our only focus was getting clean. That was okay, I could have her again tonight, and I looked forward to it. Dressed and ready to go, we had decided to stop at a little

diner for breakfast before going to the town hall to file our mate status and announce it. Aurora had chosen a black halter-style sundress with sunflowers and a pair of black flats. Her makeup was simple, with just some mascara and eyeliner ringing her eyes while her hair was done up in a pretty bun with a pair of sunflower earrings dangling from her ears. I wore a pair of dark-washed jeans and a band-tee, my brown hair styled and spiked in the front. I was feeling plain compared to her. She was gorgeous without makeup and nice clothes; it was hard not to be giddily showing her off today. I had to keep my serious demeanor, though, if I wanted to be taken seriously by the people around me. My eyes kept catching and lingering on the mark on her forearm. I couldn't believe that was my mark on her; it all felt like a dream. Not even my father could break this happiness I was feeling. *"I wouldn't say that; he will ruin anything he gets his hands on,"* Zion said dismally.

After breakfast, Aurora and I walked hand in hand toward the town hall building. The parking lot was filled to the brim, which meant the entire pack was there. My palms were sweaty, and I knew she felt it. I was surprised she was still holding my hand. Looking over at her, I saw fear in her facial expression. She was nervous about this meeting where I would present her as my mate. When a future alpha found their mate, they automatically started being pressured to take the alpha position. Seeing how father didn't have a mate anymore, he didn't even qualify to be alpha. He just kept the job because nobody wanted to challenge him for it. She would be pressured along with me since she would be my luna. I could understand why she was so nervous. I squeezed her hand, reminding her she wouldn't be alone if this meeting went south. She looked over and met my eyes, smiling warmly. Walking into the building, Aurora pointed out that it was much like the town hall she had in her area. She looked in awe at the mosaic on the ceiling and the silver trim on the walls. "We have to wait out here for my father, then we all walk in together," I informed her. She nodded in agreement. She had so much to learn about being a luna and leading a pack. Just then, my father walked through the hall's front doors and beamed a broad, fake smile at us. Aurora glared at him hard,

and I had to admire the balls on that girl. They might even rival mine, and they were pretty big. My father ignored it and said, “Welcome to the family and my pack, Aurora. So glad to have you here. Son, are you ready to present your mate? I hope the rest of the pack can be just as welcoming as I have been.” He said, a hint of something sinister in his voice. I was sure the pack would love her, so I wasn’t nervous about that. “Thanks, I hope so since I will be their luna here soon.” She said confidently, not faltering in the slightest. That riled father up, hearing that his position of power was soon to be taken from him. He leaned in closer and whispered, “Just because you’re making this public doesn’t mean I won’t find some offense to execute either one of you or the both of you for. Don’t test me.” He stood back up straight. “Let’s go show you off, dear Aurora.” He said, with phony enthusiasm. Opening the big doors to the auditorium, father started walking down the long hallway between the seats. Aurora pointed her chin up confidently, and we followed slowly, hands entwined, drawing strength from each other. The auditorium was filled to the brim, with people standing in the back. We walked up to the front of the room and stopped, turning around to face the crowd. A slow clap started somewhere in the back of the auditorium and built momentum quickly. Soon the entire auditorium was clapping and whooping their excitement for us. I smiled proudly. Yes, world, she is mine! “*You’re a fuckin’ cheeseball,*” Zion said. I didn’t care. Life was bearable with her by my side; I desperately hoped she’d never leave.

# Complications

## Aurora's POV

A few weeks after joining the Midnight pack, I was happy, and things were going well. Ryan and I had settled into a routine, often picking up where the other slacked. I was terrible at remembering to switch the clothes from the washer to the dryer because I hated going into the basement. Ryan took care of most of the laundry. While on the other hand, Ryan couldn't cook to save his life, so I took care of our meals. It was a happy compromise. I had a few boyfriends before finding Ryan, and it had never worked out as well as it was with him in such a short time, but I wasn't complaining. I was washing the dishes from our dinner earlier, alone in the house for the first time. Usually, Ryan would be the one cleaning up the kitchen after dinner since I had cooked, but he had a meeting to attend with his father tonight.

I wiped the counters down and finished up, drying my hands. As I walked into the bedroom to put some PJs on, I looked around at the nicely furnished, decorated apartment. It had taken a lot of convincing to get Ryan to go furniture shopping with me, but eventually, he begrudgingly agreed. He complained, but it was still a nice outing together. We now had dark-stained oak nightstands on both sides of the bed. I had a dresser in the same finish inside my closet. I had hung my purple curtains over the window, and we had agreed on a purple flannel comforter on the bed instead of blue. A large black throw rug was in the open area before the bed. The living room had a mat in front of the couch, new throw pillows and blankets on the sofa, and a new recliner on the other side of the room. The bathroom had green accent rugs, hand towels, and a laundry hamper. The kitchen had knick-knacks arranged on the counters and a new table and chairs in the corner. I still needed to put some pictures on the walls, but for now, I was pleased with the way the apartment looked. Pulling my t-shirt over my head and unhooking my bra, I traded it for a blue tank top, not bothering to put pants on. I crawled into bed and settled under the covers with my phone.

Hours later, I woke up abruptly to a door slamming and things falling in the living room. The smell of alcohol found its way to my nose. Quickly getting out of bed, I ran to see what was happening. As I approached the room, Ryan was stumbling toward the kitchen while humming a tune I couldn't make out. Concerned, I hurried after him and grabbed his shoulder to turn him towards me. Unbalanced, he grabbed ahold of the counter next to him and turned to look at me angrily. He was one hundred percent wasted. I looked at him in shock, not knowing what to say. He was supposed to have been at an official meeting with his father to discuss when the alpha title would be transferred. Not out drinking enough to get wasted, which took a lot for a shifter, let alone a man his size. I scowled at him, trying to keep my anger to myself. "Where were you?" I asked calmly. "Whaddaya mean?" He slurred at me, the smell of the alcohol on him making me gag. "Where were you, Ryan? You were supposed to be at a meeting." I said. He blinked at me like what I was saying was a puzzle he needed to figure out. "Aha, where're your pants?" He said slowly, ignoring my question completely. I could see that I wouldn't get anywhere with him tonight. I had to get him into bed so he could sleep it off. He reached out clumsily, smacking his hand against the side of the counter as he reached for my breasts. I scowled at him and pushed him away. "I think you just need to go to bed," I said, my voice hard. "*He is going to have a wicked hangover tomorrow, that's for sure,*" Raina commented. Grabbing his arm, I tried to guide him toward our bedroom. Suddenly I flew across the room and slammed hard into the adjacent wall. I blinked in surprise as pain wound its way through my body. "Don't you dare touch me," Ryan shouted, venom in his voice. "I'm in control, not you. Nobody tells me what I can or can't do, father." He spat at me. He lurched towards me as if he was going to punch me but lost his balance. Tears pricked my eyes as I struggled to stand up, and my legs gave out. He was being completely irrational. "Ryan, I'm not your father," I said dismally as I slid back down the wall. He came at me again, landing a kick against my side. I cringed in pain, feeling one of my ribs snap. "Please stop!" I begged. "*Why aren't you fighting back?*" Raina asked in my head, puzzled. I ignored



her; there was no way I would hurt him in this state. Not when he was so intoxicated that he didn't even know who I was. I stood up shakily, pain flooding my body. I grabbed ahold of his face firmly. "Ryan, it's me, Aurora. I'm not your father. You are here in our apartment, nowhere near him." I said gently. He widened his eyes dramatically, "Oh no." was all he said before a fountain of puke came spewing from him, landing on me and the floor around him.

After he had vomited up all of the contents in his stomach, which was a surprising amount, he was on the verge of passing out. Even incoherent, he repeated the same phrase as I sat with him on the cold tile floor, rubbing his back. "I need to be better for her. Better than father," he mumbled once again as he passed out finally, snoring softly. My body felt better, and I was sure I had healed most of the damage he had inflicted on me. *"I don't think we've tested out our new strength. I bet you could lift him and put him on the couch."* Raina said suggestively. I guess it was worth a try so I could clean up the puke before I went back to bed. I reached down, cradling him in my arms, and lifted him. I pulled him up against my chest with no problem; he wasn't light, but he wasn't too heavy for me to carry. He was so long that it was awkward trying not to bump his head into anything as I walked over to the couch. I laid him down on it, covering him up haphazardly with a throw blanket. Bracing myself for the smell to worsen, I walked out into the kitchen to grab the mop and start cleaning up the mess he had made. After that was cleaned up, I hopped in the shower to wash his puke off me.

As I was making myself breakfast the following day, Ryan finally woke up enough to get himself off the couch and into the shower. I cracked open two eggs into the frying pan in front of me and let them sizzle while I went to get the precooked bacon from the fridge. *"You're not going to make him breakfast, are you? He doesn't deserve that, Aurora."* Raina snarled. I wasn't planning on making him any breakfast. I was too upset with him to think about doing anything for him. I finished cooking my food and started the coffee maker. I went to the dark oak table in the kitchen corner and sat down with my food. It didn't take long before Ryan sauntered in.

“You didn’t make me anything?” He asked sadly. He was looking at me with red-ringed, tired eyes. I just looked at him back in disbelief. “You’re joking, right?” I said, irked. He shrugged his shoulders, sighed, and grabbed a cup of straight black coffee. “I don’t remember much of what happened last night besides that I attacked and hurt you.” He said, cutting right to the chase. “It was not okay whether I thought you were someone else or not.” He added. “Yeah, you’re right. Do you often lie about where you’re going and then come home drunk and angry?” I said cynically. Putting his head in his hands, his voice was muffled when he said, “No, I don’t; it’s not a habit. I didn’t lie about the meeting yesterday. It just didn’t go well, so I stopped to get a drink before coming home. A couple of high school friends were there and congratulated me on finding my mate. They bought me a bunch of drinks, and I lost count of how many I had.” He looked up at me. “There are no amount of sorries I can say to you to express how much I regret doing it. I would never hurt you on purpose. You have to know that.” “I need some time, Ryan,” I said, grabbing my plate from the table and dropping it into the sink as I walked out of the room. I heard him groan loudly and smack something off the table behind me. Likely the salt or pepper shaker. “*Are you sure we made the right decision?*” Raina questioned.

I texted Ella, and she met me at the mall on my old pack territory. I had told her what happened last night, and she had agreed with me on needing time to think. She encouraged me to talk it out with him and reinstate my boundaries. We were mates, after all, we didn’t have a choice in being together without causing each other endless pain. She was right, though. After a couple of hours of shopping, we went out for lunch at a small local diner. Ella was an excellent stress reliever; watching her be herself was fun. I found myself in a better mood driving home, blaring music while I danced and sang along. I was ready to talk with Ryan and try fixing things. Little did I know my mood would go sour soon. Pulling in, there was a bright red convertible in the spot that was supposed to be mine. I walked into the apartment and was immediately met with Ryan and his father arguing heavily. They both looked in my direction as I stepped in, and I felt like a deer in headlights. “Hi,” I said awkwardly. Ryan just

sighed and rubbed his hand down his face. “Here we go,” he said, dejected. His father was smiling evilly in front of him.

“Hi, Aurora. We were discussing a deal I had made previously to the Nightfall pack on the border of Utah and Colorado,” he said quickly to me with a fake smile. “Uh, a deal?” I questioned, knowing that any deal made with John was bound to be bad. “Yes. I made a deal with their alpha that once his daughter comes of age, Ryan here would give her a chance, and we could unite our packs.” He said, smiling harder. “Excuse the fuck out of me. I’m his mate! He’s not going to be with anyone else but me.” I yelled. “Yeah, I wasn’t expecting him to find his mate so soon. You do not disrespect your alpha like that either.” he sneered at me. Ryan stood there silently. “You have nothing to say about this? You’ll be with another girl while I sit here and wait for you to get done?” I spat at him angrily. “Did you not hear me arguing with him when you walked in? I’m not going to do it.” He said with a tired voice. I heard footsteps coming from the bathroom, and an overload of cheap perfume invaded my nostrils. “Don’t you dare tell me she’s in our apartment?” I snarled at them both. John’s smile could have split his face in half; it was so broad.

“Whew, that was a long drive. I’m surprised we didn’t have to stop more often. Girl’s gotta go when she’s gotta go.” a high-pitched, squeaky voice said as the owner stepped into the living room. “Who is this?” She asked, pursing her bubble gum-pink lips and looking at me disgusted. She had platinum blonde hair that was teased up to the sky. She wore a short black pleated skirt and a leopard print crop top that barely fit her double-D fake boobs. Her eyes were ringed in smudged eyeliner and blue eyeshadow, and her fake lashes looked like caterpillars on her eyelids.

Excuse me? She was in my apartment and would not look at me that way. “*You go, girl, get her.*” Raina cheered me on. Just as I was about to open my mouth to drag her, she walked over gracefully in her nine-inch heels and flung her arms around Ryan, resting her head on his shoulder. “I’ve waited so long to meet you! You’re so handsome.” She cooed at him. Anger so intense filled me that it made Ryan flinch through our bond. He stepped out of her embrace, “Cherry,

this is Aurora, my MATE.” he enunciated the word “mate.”  
“You have a mate?” She said incredulously.

“Daddy isn’t going to like this, John. You knew he had a mate, and you still let me drive all the way here?” She said, irritated. “That’s okay. You will still be with him, regardless of his mate status. If it is for the good of the pack, he will comply.” John said with authority, his alpha aura picking up around him. Ryan submitted to his father unwillingly, bowing low and growling. Glaring at him, I just stood there, daring him to do his worst. He snarled at me and threatened, “You will submit to your alpha, girl, or you will have no place in this pack.” *“Maybe you should bow? I don’t think becoming rogue right now will do anybody any good.”* Raina said quizzically in my head. I would not bow to that filth; he is no alpha of mine. He will learn that soon.

# Sharing Abilities

## Aurora's POV

“You will not kick my mate out of the pack and make her go rogue. I will not let that happen.” Ryan said through clenched teeth while raising his head with tremendous effort. “I’ll do whatever I want, boy.” John spewed at him, visibly shaking with anger. I just stood there staring at him, his aura not affecting me. Cherry was wide-eyed, looking back and forth between everyone quickly; since she was across the room, she wasn’t in reach of the aura. “Um, I don’t think it needs to come to this. I can go back and tell dad the deal is off. He will be angry, but I don’t think it will be that bad.” She said, her already high-pitched voice turning to a squeak with anxiety. Everyone ignored her. “Bow or challenge me, girl. I don’t have all day.” John said. I wasn’t ready to challenge him, not in the slightest, but I couldn’t bow. It went against every instinct inside of me. “I challenge you, father,” Ryan said, his teeth still clenched. It was as if the aura broke as soon as he said those words. He stood up, growling at his father.

“Get out and go home, Cherry. Tell your father the pack is about to have a new alpha and the deal is off,” he told her, motioning to the door. John laughed maniacally, “You’re pretty confident, aren’t you?” he taunted. Cherry slipped out the door quickly and took off to her car, wobbling in her heels. “Let me know when you want to do the challenge. I’m sure it’ll be done on the high school football field since you’ll want everyone to watch.” Ryan scowled at his father. “The only thing they’ll be watching is me finally kicking your ass. Now get out of my apartment.” He said, hatred leaching from him. “I’ll text you the time and day,” Was the only thing John said curtly as he walked out of the front door, slamming it hard. The sound of bones crunching reached my ears as he shifted and took off into the woods behind the house.

“Why did you do that?” I asked, worried. “It was bound to happen eventually,” Ryan said, disheartened. A stab of depression flitted through the bond. I just looked at him, feeling bad that he had to do this. Nobody deserved to have to

fight their family for their birthright. If his father was decent, he could have just stepped back and handed the title over. It looked like that wasn't going to happen, so Ryan would have to fight him, likely to the death, as his father was too stubborn to concede. He just shrugged and walked into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. *"Maybe you should go check on him? I know what he did last night wasn't okay, but he needs you now."* Raina said. While I agreed with her, I was apprehensive about going into the bathroom. Ryan had difficulty controlling his temper; I didn't want to be the target again after last night. *"He said he would never hurt you again, and he's not drunk anymore. You'll be fine."* Raina chastised. She was correct; I doubt he would hurt me again. I was being silly. *"I'm always right,"* Raina said confidently. I rolled my eyes and walked towards the bathroom. Approaching the door, I heard the shower running. I slipped quietly into the bathroom, shut the door, and sat on the toilet next to the standing shower. Ryan was facing the wall, the water falling over his head as he pressed his forehead against the tiled wall. "Are you okay?" I asked timidly. After a few moments, when I hadn't gotten a response, I sighed and started undressing. I stepped into the shower behind him, cringing at how hot the water was. "Are you trying to get 3rd-degree burns?" I joked as I turned the temperature down. Still, no response, and he hadn't moved his head from the wall. Stepping closer, I put my arms around him and rested my cheek on his shoulder. "Ryan, I'm here for you. You've got to talk to me." I said gently. "I challenged my father for you." He said slowly. "You didn't have to," I replied. He turned around quickly, grabbing my head between his hands and looking me in the eyes. "Yes, Aurora, I did. You are my mate. You are who I am spending the rest of my life with. It's my job to protect you, and I will not allow my father to throw you out of the pack." he said with sincerity. I was speechless, the chemistry around us building at our proximity without clothes on. "You are everything to me. You have been since the moment I caught your scent in that auditorium. I was pissed at myself for hurting you while I was drunk. I will never get that drunk again if that has even a mere possibility of happening again. I'd have done it regardless, but I hope that sticking up for you today helped to seal the fact

that I'm serious about this with you." he continued, twirling my curls around his finger while staring into my eyes. I tilted my head and pressed my lips to his, softly, then harder. He kissed me back with the same intensity, slowly backing me up against the glass shower wall. Our tongues met as he trapped me between the wall and his body, his erect manhood pressing against me. *"I try not to interrupt during stuff like this, but do you think now is the time to fool around? He's vulnerable. It'd be taking advantage of him."* Raina said quickly in my head, snapping me out of the moment. I groaned inwardly, realizing she was, once again, correct. As I slipped out between Ryan and the wall, he looked at me quizzically. "I don't think right now is the best time. We need to spend some time together and get our emotions in check before we jump right back into being intimate." I told him with a frown, hoping he'd understand. He nodded his head as he reached over and cut the water off. "Let's go order some food and play a game together." He said, giving me a cheeky smile.

Hours later, we were lying together under a throw blanket on the couch when Ryan's phone pinged. Picking it up, he unlocked the screen and opened the text that had come through. As he read the text, I saw the stress flare up in his eyes.

**Father:** Saturday. Seven pm. High school football field. Don't be late.

He quickly locked it and set it down clumsily on the table. It was already Wednesday, so he only had three days before the fight. "I saw the text. Are you okay?" I asked, stroking his chest worriedly. "I'm fine. It's just a lot sooner than I anticipated," he admitted. I wrapped my arms around him and hugged him tightly. "You've got this." I encouraged him. "I guess we'll see, won't we?" He said dismally.

The movie we put on wasn't even halfway over when I heard Ryan start snoring. He had promised he wasn't too tired to watch another movie, and he passed out. I giggled and grabbed my phone since I wasn't tired yet. I was curious about what else I could do with my wolf form, so I pulled up my web browser and typed "White wolf legends" into the search

bar. A host of websites came up with loads of info, most of which Ella and I had already read through. One website link caught my eye: **“Legend has it, white wolves can share abilities through bonds! Click to read more.”** I raised my eyebrows and tapped the link. This wasn’t in the search before. *“Wow! That’s pretty neat if it’s true.”* Raina commented. I quickly scanned the article and learned that there was a myth surrounding white wolves. They said they could share their “immense power and abilities” through a mate bond. It explained that there were so few white wolves in the world that it had never been formally tested, just assumed, and there were no instructions on how to do it. It piqued my interest; I could help Ryan with his fight on Saturday if I could figure out how to do it by then. I kept reading more about what I could do once I matured a little bit more. When I was about to fall asleep, I shook Ryan gently to wake him up, and we both went to bed for the night.

The following day, Ryan and I were sitting at the table eating breakfast cereal and doing our own thing. He had Reese’s Puffs in his bowl, and I had granola with nuts and berries in mine. I decided now was as good a time as any to mention the ability sharing I’d read about. “So, I was looking up some more info on my wolf form last night.” I started. He looked up at me with a mouth full of cereal, fully listening now. “I read a myth about how I can share my abilities with you through our mate bond. It said that it’s never been tested due to the scarcity of white wolves, but that legends say it’s possible to do.” I continued, waiting for his reaction. He raised his eyebrows at me as he lifted his cereal bowl to his mouth to drink the milk, motioning for me to keep going. “I thought that if it is true and I could figure out how to do it before Saturday, then maybe I could help you during your challenge. You would beat him with no problem with both of our strengths combined. ” I finished. He stopped everything he was doing and stared at me for a second. “I doubt it’s true, but we could always try it. No harm, no foul. Let’s test it out.” he said, getting up and putting his bowl in the sink. I finished my bowl as well and followed him out to the backyard. We were both already wearing comfy clothes, him in black basketball shorts and a red t-shirt. Me in a green crop top with a pair of tight,



black athletic shorts. My hair was in a messy bun on the top of my head. “So, how do you think it goes? We haven’t been mated very long, so I’m not sure it’ll work on such an immature bond.” He said, stretching his limbs and warming up. “Our bond has been strong from the get-go. If we can figure out how to do it, it will work.” I said, side-eyeing him and enjoying the view. He got to his feet, catching me watching him. He mischievously smiled at me and stalked toward me in a fighting stance. I watched him with interest, wondering what he was doing. As he got closer, he swung his leg out and tripped me. I wasn’t expecting it, so my body plummeted toward the ground. I grabbed him as I fell, landing on the grass with him on top of me. My heart pounded in my chest at his proximity. His smile got even broader as he leaned down next to my ear, nipped it, and said, “Don’t get distracted, Aurora. Or you might find yourself like this again.” He stood up, much to my disappointment. I jumped out of the grass, glaring at him as he laughed at my expense. “Whatever then. Let’s figure out how to do this shit.” I retorted. “Oh, come on, beautiful, don’t be mad. I was playing around with you.” He came closer, grabbing my hips to pull me to him and pressing his lips to mine. I melted like butter in his grasp, no longer mad at him.

“Do you think if I just push an emotion to you through the bond, it might work that way?” I mentioned it an hour later. We had been discussing how to transfer my abilities through the bond. I was ready to start trying things, but Ryan was more the type to be organized before beginning anything. “It might work that way. Maybe if you try to push it through as you do with a mind link?” He remarked, scratching his chin. “I’m going to try now,” I announced, determined and tired of talking. I had a little trick up my sleeve that I couldn’t wait to get him with. I focused solely on one emotion, making myself feel it thoroughly, and then I used my mind to propel it into the spot where I felt the bond the strongest; the middle of my chest. I watched Ryan as I did so, waiting for a reaction. It was immediate. He looked down at his groin, completely shocked, as he tented his shorts. I broke my concentration and started roaring with laughter. “*Well, that worked,*” Raina observed, amused. “What the hell? Are you horny or something? Did

you send that through the bond?" He asked. "That's what you get for earlier. You mess with me; you get blue balls." I struggled to say through my laughter. He crossed his hands over his crotch to hide it, "It's not that funny." He bitterly said. I just continued to laugh. "*You got him good,*" Raina said, laughing along with me. "Okay, haha, very funny. Now let's get back to business." Ryan redirected. Wiping the tears from my eyes, I nodded. "I'm going to try to do the same thing, but I'm going to try to push one of my senses through the bond," I informed him. I focused on my sense of smell and pushed the extra amount of it through the place where the bond was. I concentrated twice as hard as I did with the emotion transfer. It took a few moments before Ryan exclaimed, "How do you deal with this? I can smell the neighbor taking a shit three houses down." He wrinkled his nose. "Ah, so it worked," I said, amused. "Let me give you some of my extra strength now." I did the same thing, focusing on sending my strength through getting a little disappointed when nothing happened visibly. "*You don't usually see the strength, you idiot. He needs to pick something up.*" Raina said bluntly. "Ryan, go try to pick something up." I urged. Walking over to one of the giant trees in the yard, he grabbed ahold of it by the bottom of the trunk and quickly ripped the entire thing out of the ground.

Eyes wide, he stared at his hands in disbelief. Suddenly he turned around and started whooping and jumping around with excitement. "This is gonna be epic! I'm finally going to kick my father's ass. Finally!" He yelled, his head tilted towards the sky and his arms raised. I smiled at him, happy to be able to help him get revenge on the one person who fucked his entire life up. He seemed to remember I was there and turned around, running towards me fast. He slammed into me, tackling me to the ground as we laughed together. "I love you. So much." He sincerely said. Then he kissed me passionately, stealing my breath from me. "You are helping me do the one thing I have always wanted but never could. I will never be able to repay you for this. But I'll spend forever trying." He vowed as he pulled his lips from mine. "I love you too. Good thing we have forever, then, right?" I teased. He just smiled and kissed me again.

# Wound-up

## Ryan's POV

It was ten am the morning of the challenge, and I was beyond anxious about it. It was all anyone in the pack was talking about, and the more I heard people's doubts, the more I started having my own. Aurora was very good at hyping me up, though. We had mastered sharing abilities over the last couple of days; I could even heal as fast as she did if she sent it through the bond. That was not a fun test, but I must admit, having a mate with extra ability who could share it with me was pretty awesome. It made me feel giddy. It was weird because "giddy" wasn't an emotion I was familiar with. Zion had been very quiet in my head the last few days, which was strange, considering he always had a smart-ass comment to make. I could still feel him there, though, so I wasn't too concerned. I was sitting at the kitchen table scrolling through my social media when Aurora walked in, going straight for the fridge for food. I didn't look up at her until she sat down in the chair across from me with her bowl of nasty, healthy cereal. When I did look up, however, I was taken aback. She had straightened her usually curly hair and had braided her bangs, then pinned the braid around her head, the red in her hair spiraling throughout the braid. Her eyes were ringed in black eyeliner with tiny wings and gold eyeshadow that made the green in her eyes stand out. Her lips were painted a nude pink. She wore a rose-colored t-shirt dress and a pair of black flats. *"Woah, look at her. How'd we get lucky enough to bag that?"* Zion said in my head. Of course, you haven't said anything in days, and the first thing you say is that. "Are you just staring at me with your mouth wide open, or are you gonna say something?" She complained. I managed to pick my jaw off the ground enough to say to her, "You look beautiful today." She smiled at me. "Thanks. You ready for today?" She questioned, quickly changing the subject. "Is anybody ready to have to kill their father?" I sarcastically said. I felt the hurt stab me through the bond. She was being genuine, and here I was, being an ass. I got up from my seat and walked over to hug her. "I'm sorry, just anxious about later. I deal with

anxiety a little differently than you do.” I whispered into her ear while turning and walking away. She watched me leave sadly.

An hour later, I had only managed to get dressed and brush my teeth. I chose a pair of black shorts and a gray muscle shirt. I went out and sprawled out on the couch. I should probably have been running or exercising to prepare for this fight, but I was exhausted from training the last couple of days. My phone pinged on the coffee table in front of me.

**Aurora:** Going to hang out with Ella for a while. You’re welcome to join if you’d like! XO

I groaned; I did not want to join them in their girl fest. I ignored her text and flipped the TV on, and put it on some silent library show. It was enough to distract me for a while, but not long enough. I roamed around the apartment, cleaning up as I went. I slowly gathered our dirty laundry and entered the basement to put it into the washer. I was trying to make the task take longer than it initially would. After I came back upstairs and cleaned until there was nothing left to clean, I finally decided to go for a run to blow some steam off. Aurora still wasn’t home yet, and the bond made me feel uneasy being away from each other for so long. Once our bond matured, we would be fine being away from each other for extended periods. But when it is first established, the pair has difficulty separating from each other.

I knew she was just as anxious as I was and probably needed the girl’s time. As much as I tried, I couldn’t provide that type of support for her. *“What would you even do? Let her do your hair and paint your nails like a pussy-whipped sissy?”* Zion teased. The sad part? I probably would let her do all that if she wanted to, even if I didn’t like it. Zion scoffed in my head, *“Wow. You’re going soft, my dude.”* I rolled my eyes hard. Sometimes, my wolf was a real asshole. *“Better not forget it,”* Zion said, amused.

I ran until my legs burned, and my lungs begged me to stop. I needed to blow off some steam, or I would explode from the nerves bundled up in me. Sweat poured from me since it was still summer here in Colorado. As I walked into

my apartment, I pulled my sopping-wet muscle shirt over my head. Not watching where I was walking, I bumped into Aurora standing in the hallway just before the bathroom. “Ew, why are you wet?” She exclaimed, disgusted, wiping my sweat off of her skin. “I just got back from a run; I’m sweaty,” I said, sidestepping her and opening the bathroom door. “It’s like four pm; how far is this football field?” She asked from the hallway. She hadn’t entirely been around our town enough to know it yet. “It’s only five minutes or so from here. We don’t need to leave until seven forty.” I clarified. She wiggled her eyebrows at me and smirked, “Well, that means we have time for what I had in mind.” Eyes wide, I watched her sashay into the bathroom, shutting and locking the door behind her. “Why don’t we release some of that tension you’ve been feeling all day.” She said seductively, coming towards me and biting her lip. Shit, yeah, the bond. I forgot she could feel how wound up I was all day. I didn’t know if having sex with her was a good idea. I either wouldn’t be able to get it up because I was so distracted, or she wouldn’t be able to walk when I was done with her; there was no in-between. My feelings were all fucked up at the moment, and I didn’t know how to sort through them. “I don’t know if that’s a good idea.” I hesitated. Hurt flashed in her eyes and through the bond for a second. “Why?” She questioned, frowning and stepping back a little. Why was she hurt over me potentially saying no? “Well, either, I won’t be able to get it up because I’m so distracted-” She raised her eyebrows at me. “When have you ever had an issue getting it up?” She said, genuinely shocked. “You didn’t let me finish. I was going to say, or you won’t be able to walk when I’m done with you.” I said with an evil smirk, running my hand along her face. “I don’t mind if I walk a little funny when we’re done.” She laughed. “Also, I’m sure I’ll be able to get you up with no problem. But first, let’s get in the shower. You’re pretty stinky, and we’re wasting valuable time.” She winked at me, then slowly started stripping in front of me. My guy brain prevented me from being able to do anything but stand there and watch. Every time she got undressed in front of me, it was like I was seeing her for the first time. She noticed I hadn’t undressed yet. Turning the shower on, she slowly sauntered to me and started undressing me. Pressing

her lips to mine softly, she kissed me while she pulled my shorts and underwear down my legs. Well, I didn't have to worry about the first problem I thought I'd have. My dick was already standing at attention. Aurora laughed, "Told you we wouldn't have a problem." She said cockily. She pulled me into the shower with her, and I felt my sore muscles release as I stepped under the hot water. I groaned at the feeling. She stood against the tiled wall, watching innocently as I washed up. Then we switched places, and I watched her. She took her time, posing for me every once in a while. Finally, she dropped her loofa on purpose, then bent over entirely in front of me to retrieve it. I lost all inhibition at that point. As she stood back up, I growled and slammed her into the glass. A little gasp escaped her, and then a sly smile spread across her face before our lips crashed together.

Our tongues collided and twisted around each other as I pushed my body against her as hard as I could. I needed to feel her skin on every part of my body. Reaching down, I slid my finger between her folds and growled against her lips when I found her wet and ready. I swirled my fingers around her nub as I kissed her harder. She moaned loudly and threw her head back. My cock was throbbing with anticipation, and I wasn't sure how long I could wait before sinking into her. She captured my lips again, and I bit her bottom lip, tasting blood and hearing her moan in pleasure.

We knocked over all the shower products as I flipped her around in the shower to avoid breaking the glass wall. It didn't phase me. I was only focused on one thing; her. She reached down and took me into her hands and started to stroke. Pleasure radiated throughout my body. "I need you," I said to her desperately. She looked me in the eyes, "Then take me, baby." That was all I needed to hear. I hiked her legs around me and grabbed her ass, digging my nails in as I slammed my cock into her. She cried out with wanton pleasure and dug her nails into my shoulders. I kissed her hard, shoving my tongue into her mouth and reaching up to grab ahold of her hair. I pulled harshly as I listened to her moans start to border on screams of pleasure, and I fed into it. She tightened around me as I picked up the pace and plunged into her harder. Leaning

down, I put my mouth on her breast and bit down hard on her nipple. She screamed in pleasure as she fell over the edge and came hard on my cock, pulsing around it and arching her back against the wall. Keeping up my furious pace, I kept fucking her through her orgasm. Me\* grunting with each thrust, her moaning sensually. “Come for me..” she moaned into my ear. It was like her moans were a lifeline to my dick. With a loud groan, I came fast and hard inside of her.

We were both out of breath and still connected as she pulled her head up to look at me. “That was amazing,” she commented, a massive smile on her face. Her lips were swollen and bruised. I felt a million times better than before we had started, so I guess that had been the release I needed. “Yes, it was.” I agreed, kissing her gently and setting her legs down. She wobbled a little bit before catching her balance. “You were right; I’m gonna be sore later.” She said with a seductive little smile. “You better have some energy left after you kick your father’s ass.” She tapped my nose with her pointer finger and winked. I just laughed as I snuggled my head into the crook of her shoulder and took comfort in her presence for a second. I wish we could stay like this forever. Instead, I had to go to a challenge that the entire pack was watching, and I had to kill my father. Talk about the shit end of the stick.

After we had gotten dressed, it was around five thirty, and we were both starving after our shower adventure. Aurora was currently cooking up some grilled cheeses, and I was working on dumping a can of tomato soup into a pan with some milk. Once it warmed up, we sat down and ate, discussing our challenge strategy. I was the only one allowed out on the field with my father, but Aurora was my mate, so she was allowed to stand along the fence and watch. This made it easier for her to see what I needed so she could send it through the bond. We needed to make it as unnoticeable as possible. We weren’t sure if what we were doing was allowed, but I also didn’t care. I likely wouldn’t have come out alive if I didn’t use this advantage. My father is ruthless and will cheat in any way he can.

Finishing up my food and dropping my dishes in the sink, I sat on the couch and pulled on a pair of socks. Then I put on the oldest pair of shoes I had, knowing they were going to take a beating today. I was also wearing a simple black t-shirt and some blue basketball shorts. After I was ready, I stopped and looked at myself in the body-length mirror on the back of the front door. I was not prepared for what I was about to do. *“You’re going to have to suck it up, Ryan. It needs to be done whether it’s done now or later.”* Zion said in a stern voice. He was right; even if I hadn’t stuck up for Aurora, I would still have had to challenge him for my spot as alpha. He was a stubborn prick; he wouldn’t just hand it over without a fight. Aurora walked through the door and wrapped me in a big hug. *“I think it’s time to start heading over.”* She gently said. I nodded, and we walked out of the apartment and to the car, holding hands.

We arrived at the football field, and even twenty minutes before the challenge started, the seats around the area were filled. Not only was our pack here, but Silvercrest was also among the crowd. I rubbed my hand down my face. Great, more of an audience. I wonder if the blood-thirsty rumors will continue after this fight. A couple of metal chairs were sitting close to the fence surrounding the field, and they were likely laid out for Aurora, our beta, and Silvercrest’s alpha and beta. The power-holders always got first-row seats to events like these, although they’re usually never this public. Leave it to father to try to go out with a bang.

*“You’re feeling feisty, aren’t you? Keep it up. The angry energy will help you.”* Zion laughed. I growled at him, and he just laughed harder in my head. Aurora and I stood close to the fence together and waited for it to be time. *“Are you okay?”* She asked, rubbing my shoulder. *“I’m not sure. I guess I’m just hoping father will concede before I have to kill him.”* I said, sad. She frowned at me, and I felt her sympathy for me through the bond. She just put her head against my shoulder and didn’t say anything else. Sitting down in one of the chairs by the fence, I shook my leg nervously. There were about 5 minutes now until the challenge would start. Father stepped out onto the opposite side of the field wearing sweatpants and



a muscle shirt. I also took that as my sign to get out onto the field. I hopped over the small fence and started walking toward the middle.

A loud blowhorn sounded, and someone started speaking over the loudspeaker. It sounded like the alpha from Silvercrest, Max. "We are all here to witness the challenge between the current alpha, John Ellis, and his son Ryan Ellis." He boomed over the entire field. I approached the center of the field and came face to face with my father. He looked at me with sheer hatred written plainly on his face. I stayed nonchalant and didn't give him the satisfaction of seeing my emotions. "You may begin. May the best man win!" Max boomed over the loudspeaker once more. The crowd cheered, and the challenge started.

# The Challenge

## Ryan's POV

I watched as my father advanced toward me slowly. He had a grin of malice set on his face like he had been waiting to do this for a long time. I kept my face clear of any emotion; he was undeserving of it. “Boy, do you know how much trouble you’ve caused since birth?” He asked. “I don’t think now is the time to air our dirty laundry,” I growled at him as I slowly stalked towards him. We started circling each other, waiting for a move to be made. *“If he’s not going to make the first move, you need to do it,”* Zion coached in my head. Stepping forward quickly, I swung my fist out pathetically toward him. He deflected it and laughed at me. “I know I taught you better than that.” He taunted. I was a bundle of nerves; there was no way I would get the upper hand like this. “Oh, is that your arm candy over there watching?” He gestured towards Aurora. “You and I both know it won’t last long. You’re not good at long-term things. It’s only a matter of time before you fuck it up.” He said, a beaming smile on his face as amusement poured from him. “She’s not my arm candy,” I said through clenched teeth. Suddenly a surge of anger came shooting through the bond. I glanced over at Aurora with my eyebrows raised. She smiled at me and kept strongly pushing anger through the bond to keep me focused. I turned back to my father with my confidence raised. The anger fueled me as I ran at him. Bracing himself, he watched with a look of delight. I slammed my fist into the side of his face quickly, feeling Aurora’s speed come through the bond into my body. He flew sideways as shock crossed his features. “You created a monster, father, and now I’ve come for my penance.” I said as I tackled him and started to punch him repeatedly. Spitting blood at me and snarling, he brought his knee up, and I blocked it easily. He still managed to hit me in the chest instead, knocking the breath out of me. He was then able to flip me over with the distraction and landed a solid hit in the center of my face. My nose snapped, and blood spurted everywhere. I gritted my teeth against the pain and worked to get the upper hand again as he blocked every one of my

punches. I felt another surge of strength through the bond and took advantage of it. I slammed my elbow into his throat and then into his jaw; the sound of him choking and the crunch of his jaw shattering followed immediately. I grabbed ahold of his hair and ripped him back into position under me so I could continue to pummel him. As he caught his breath, he said, "You're just like your worthless mother. She never knew when to stop either." This time my own anger flooded me at the mention of my mother. He leaned slightly toward me and whispered, "That's why she's dead." He laughed maniacally, getting cut off by me slamming my head into his hard. He squinted in pain as blood poured over his head like a waterfall. "Don't you ever talk about her again, you cunt. You don't deserve to have her name come out of your mouth." I yelled into his face. He looked up at me with an unhinged look. Anger was flowing through my veins, and I was ruthless. As I raised my arm to hit him again, I felt a searing pain hit me in my side and warm liquid running down my thigh. "*Weapon! He has a weapon. That's not allowed!*" Zion exclaimed in my head. Challenges were supposed to be non-weapon, close combat. Not even shifting was allowed unless both parties agreed to shift simultaneously. I knew he wouldn't play equally, but I didn't imagine this. I grunted from the pain and pushed my hand onto the wound to staunch the blood flow. I jumped off of him and ran backward, falling to my knees and looking around at the crowd to see if they had noticed him pulling a weapon. The crowd was silent and gaping; nobody noticed the penalty. Father laughed as he came towards me again. The wound in my side was deep and excruciatingly painful. There was a surge of heat along the side of my body and in the center of my chest. It felt like I was on fire from the inside out. Within seconds the wound was healed; the only thing noticeable was the hole in my shirt and blood down my side. I looked at it astonished, then felt my mind go fuzzy. "Get up and fight. He has a small dagger up in his right sleeve. Try to avoid it." Aurora coached through a mind link. It was her that had helped heal the wound on my side. I stood up quickly and bellowed a war cry. I then went running, slamming into father with my head bowed. We both tumbled to the ground. He swiped his right hand against my thigh,

flaying me open and spraying himself with my blood. The fire consumed my thigh and the wound healed as quickly as it had happened. Father looked at it, shocked, "How did you-" he started to say. I slammed my fist into his head hard, hearing something snap under it. He screamed in pain. "I guess we all have tricks up our sleeves." I sneered at him as I pinned him to the ground by his neck, cutting off his airflow. His eyes met mine and were as wide as saucers, veins blowing in them, making them bloodred. His fear was finally showing. He struggled hard, kicking and bucking under me. He swiped me with the dagger a couple more times, and more of my blood rained down on him. I ground my teeth together violently, trying to ignore the pain. No matter how much pain he was able to inflict, I refused to let go. Then, slamming his hand into my stomach, I felt the undeniable pain of being stabbed again. I had forgotten about the dagger in my concentration on not letting go. I cried out and lost my focus, falling to the side and releasing him as my stomach started pouring warm blood onto the ground. I curled into the fetal position, holding my hands to my torn stomach. He lay there for a minute gasping for air like a fish out of water. "I will kill you, boy, just like I killed your mother. Only now, I'll do it slowly so your whore can watch you bleed out on the ground in front of me." He snarled at me with a lisp since half of his jaw wasn't working. He stood up and walked menacingly toward me. The wound in my stomach had long since healed, but I stayed in the same position pretending to watch him in fear. "You scared, little boy? I thought I taught you not to show it!" He roared, kicking me in the side. I grunted, feeling one of my ribs snap. "I think it's time," I mind linked to Aurora as I looked over at her. She nodded grimly; this was the part she had hated. I then felt a heaviness in my chest as she pushed every extra ability she possessed through the bond. I could now smell someone's stinky armpits at the far end of the field. I could hear whispers from the bathrooms across the arena. Everything before me was crystal clear in ways I couldn't even comprehend. I felt stronger than I'd ever felt as I stood up and flexed. All my wounds had healed. I was unbeatable. Father stopped in his tracks and stared at me in panic. I walked towards him slowly, rage swirling in me, "I will put you under this ground for

everything you've put me through." I said, pure venom in my voice. He started backing up, but I was quicker, thanks to Aurora's speed. I grabbed ahold of him by his throat and lifted him into the air. I smiled vindictively as I slammed his body to the ground. Hearing multiple bones snap as he yelled obscenities. "Remember, you created this monster. My face will be the last one you ever see." I said, getting down on my knees next to him. He was lying crumpled on the ground, whimpering and shaking from the pain. Tears were slowly leaking down his face. I felt no remorse as I wrapped my hands around his neck and cut off his air supply again. He gasped for air and slowly started fading. Suddenly, he found the strength to tap the ground. Once. Twice. Three times. A whistle blew loudly, making me cringe. He was conceding. I had won, and I didn't have to kill him. That was probably the nicest thing he'd ever done for me. Who am I kidding? The coward probably didn't want to die. The crowd went wild, and Aurora came racing across the field toward me, pulling me into a tight hug. "I'm so proud of you; I knew you could do it." She gushed, kissing my face over and over again. I didn't reciprocate; I felt numb.

After the stationed ambulance had strapped my father to a gurney and taken off towards the hospital, Max came to talk to me. Clapping me on the back, he congratulated me for my win. "I look forward to doing business and working with you." He chirped as he walked off. The crowd was slowly filtering out and waiting in the lines of cars to leave. I stalked off quickly towards the car Aurora, and I had arrived in. "Can you drive?" I asked her as I got into the vehicle's passenger side, not giving her a choice. She slid into the driver's seat. "Are you sure you don't need to go to the hospital to be seen?" She clarified with worry in her voice, looking me over. "I'm fine. You healed all the bad stuff. I will heal the rest quickly." I said, monotonous. She put the car in drive, and we headed home.

It was Tuesday, a few days after the fight. I had gotten word that my father had a broken spine. All his ribs, at least five bones in each arm, the orbit around his eyes, the top of his skull, and his jaw were fractured. It should have made me

happy that he was suffering, but I could only feel numb. I didn't want to be the monster he was trying to make me into, but I had shown on that field that I could be. I had even admitted it to him and was not too fond of that. Aurora and I were sitting on opposite sides of the couch, watching TV together. She had been very depressed because I had been distant the last few days. I couldn't help it; I wasn't sure how to return to myself after that. On Friday, we would have the official ceremony to welcome us as alpha and luna. It would be strongly encouraged after the ceremony for me to propose and for us to get married. It was always better if the alpha and luna were bound in marriage because then it would be a better situation for our children in the future. The ceremony would consist of the entire pack getting together in the auditorium again while Aurora and I sat at the front, announcing who would be our beta and omega. Then everyone would bow and walk to the field for a small celebration. In our pack, we had people stationed who were good at organizing these events, so the alpha and luna never had to worry. They were the ones who had reached out, letting us know when the ceremony would take place, and inquired about our favorite foods and even our favorite type of alcohol. I wasn't even remotely ready to accept the alpha title, but time passed. It marches slowly forward no matter how things go.

Later that day, Aurora cornered me into our bedroom as I was getting ready for bed. "Why are you being so distant with me? I know you feel how much you're hurting me through the bond." She demanded harshly, glaring at me. I just shrugged and tried to sidestep her. I was good at blocking out her feelings from the bond. "Ryan, you are not walking away from me; we need to fix this." She exclaimed angrily. I looked her in the eyes; her hurt shining through clearly. Seeing her pain finally snapped me out of it and had me feeling some of the first bursts of emotion since the challenge.

I felt remorse for making her feel unappreciated and unwanted. "That's the first time I've felt any of your feelings through our bond since the fight." She said softly. "Yeah, I haven't been doing well. I couldn't feel anything for a long time." I told her. I pulled her closer and hugged her. "I'm

sorry.” She nodded against me. “I am here for you to talk to. Don’t forget that, no matter what goes on in your mind. You’re stuck with me.” She laughed. “We do need to discuss who our beta and omega will be.” I changed the subject quickly. She frowned at me, “I get a say in that?” “Uh, yes, you’re the pack’s luna now,” I said slowly. She frowned harder at me, “I don’t know how to be a luna,” she sheepishly said. “Well, you’ll have to learn as we go.” I teased, smiling at her for the first time in a while.

It was Friday, and we were on our way to the ceremony. We were expected to be dressed formally. Aurora had her hair braided down the side with silver hoops. She wore an oval-shaped pendant with little vines wound over it around her neck, and her backless burgundy dress stopped just below her knees, the front a halter neck. She had on her trusty black flats, stating that if she wore heels, she’d break her neck. Her makeup was done glamorously with silver and burgundy on her eyelids, wings on the ends, and completed with false lashes. She was stunning; I felt plain as I stood beside her in my black tux set with a burgundy undershirt. My hair was spiked in the front, and I wore a bowtie instead of a tie. She grabbed ahold of my hand as we walked into the auditorium, a united pair. I smiled as we walked past the filled rows.

I may not have been ready to take the alpha position, but I was determined to do better than my father had. Aurora and I had settled on the solution of naming my best friend, Milo, as our beta. Nathan, a friend from high school, would be our omega. We had also agreed that as soon as father was healed enough that he was no longer welcome in the pack, the same went for his beta and omega that had attacked Aurora. They would all become rogues and have to fend for themselves outside the city. We planned to unearth the entire story at the ceremony tonight, including what my father had done to my mother. I was nervous, but it all needed to come to light. As we approached the front of the auditorium, I noticed Alfred, our beta, and Lucas, our omega sitting in the front row glaring at us. We stopped in the front and turned to face the crowd as they cheered for us. I smiled and held up our clasped hands, “I am Ryan Ellis, and this is Aurora Isley. We are your new alpha

and luna!” I felt a tingling in my chest as the alpha titles rang through the auditorium and the alpha aura established itself. Heads started to bow throughout the room. I waited a few minutes, then I took a deep breath, “I have some bad things and bad news to break to you all, so brace yourselves.” I warned. Aurora looked over at me nervously as heads bobbed back up with confusion on their faces. The glares from Alfred and Lucas intensified tenfold. “*Well, here we go. Time to ruin his reputation.*” Zion said evilly.



# Celebration

## Aurora's POV

Ryan grabbed a chair for the both of us, and we sat in front of the crowded auditorium. This was my new pack, and the looks of warmth I was receiving from everyone made my heart happy. I was more accepted here than I was in my old pack. I listened and held Ryan's hand while he recounted the deepest, darkest part of his life to our shocked pack members. A few of them wiped their eyes at the sad story. He then changed gears and told them about how his father had tried to have me killed using his beta, omega, and one of the pack warriors. Immediately after he finished recounting that horrific night, a few other pack warriors stood at attention and grabbed ahold of the beta, omega, and pack warrior in question by their arms, hauling them to Ryan and I's feet. Ryan looked over at me and nodded. I stood up slowly, towering over the three men forced to their knees in front of me. When I spoke, my voice was more confident and amplified than I'd ever heard. "These three will now be rogue. They are no longer welcome in our pack for the offense of trying to harm their future luna. Their mates and children may stay, but they must go and never come back." I set my face in a determined scowl, trying to stay confident as gasps of surprise rang around the auditorium. "Once my father is recovered enough to be on his own, he will also be rogue and no longer welcome in this pack. If anyone disagrees with this notion, you will go rogue as well. From now on, this pack will see some positive changes, starting with weeding out those who are not loyal to their new alpha and luna. Those that are loyal will be rewarded." Ryan bellowed to the crowd of people. "Also, Milo Stohl will take over as our new beta, while Nathan Adler will take over the omega position." Applause rang out around us as most of the crowd agreed with that decision. "Now, let's go celebrate!" Ryan said, dismissing everyone and ignoring the few growls and mutters from the new rogues.

We arrived at the football field and were shocked to see such an elaborate party setup. The planners had done their job, and they had done it well. It was bright and sunny, perfect

weather for an outdoor party. At least 20 tables lined the fieldside with various drinks, food, and desserts. The tablecloths were a deep burgundy to match our outfits, with silver confetti carelessly tossed in the center. Silver streamers hung everywhere, and chairs were sprawled out everywhere as well. Many people were already digging into the kegs at the end of the table spread. Music was playing through the loudspeakers. Ryan grabbed ahold of my hand and drug me out to the center of the field, away from everyone. “How are you liking being the new luna?” He teased as he leaned in, nibbling my ear. I let him take my waist, and we started swaying together with my head on his shoulder. “I’m not sure. My wolf very much enjoys the power. I am used to blending into the shadows, so it’s all new for me.” I admitted, honestly. He didn’t say anything as we just swayed together to the song that was playing. Once it was over, we made our way back to the central area of the party. Everyone had arrived, and the whole place was humming with excitement. Hands suddenly appeared on Ryan’s shoulder from behind as a slim, pale man with shocks of red, curly hair and freckles splattered all over his face and body spun him around, then pulled him into a bro-hug. “Hey, man! Congrats on the alpha title!” He said excitedly in a pitchy voice. “Congrats on your beta title, my dude,” Ryan replied, clapping the man on the back while laughing. “You must be Milo,” I said, smiling warmly at him. “I sure am, and you must be Aurora. You’re even prettier than we thought you’d be.” He countered. Ryan narrowed his eyes at him, “You’re the only person who could get away with saying that.” He joked. I just laughed and smacked him. Milo beamed a huge smile at him. “Hey man, what do you call a pig that does karate?” He asked randomly. Ryan rolled his eyes and shrugged, amusement written on his face like he knew what was coming. “A pork chop!” Milo burst out laughing at his joke and sauntered off to the food table. “He’s an interesting guy.” I chuckled. Ryan laughed with me. “Nathan is over there at the kegs if you would like to meet him as well,” he said, nodding in that direction. I nodded at him in response, and we walked over. Nathan turned around as he heard us approaching, gave us a huge smile, then yelled out another congratulation. Gorgeous was an understatement for

this man. He had deep dark colored skin, and black ink tattoos wove their way around every part of exposed skin. He was wearing a muscle shirt and a pair of jeans. He was insanely fit, muscles lining every aspect of his body but not in an obnoxious way. More natural than anything. His hair was close-shaven and black. “Hi, I’m Aurora.” I introduced myself, sticking my hand out. He grasped it gently instead of shaking it, “I’m Nathan. Nice to meet you.” He said, his voice deep. “Thank you for the honor of being the omega, Alpha Ryan.” He said, bowing his head at Ryan. “You don’t have to bow to me, Nathan. Or act formally; I’m still your best friend even if I’m alpha.” Ryan chastised him. He just laughed and held his drink up in farewell as he walked away to dance with a girl who was just as dark and beautiful as he was. She had tattooed the mate mark on her forearm in black and gold ink, so it shone like the sun. “That is his mate; her name is Erika.” Ryan clarified for me. I raised my eyebrows, “Would you be opposed to me tattooing my mate mark?” I asked seriously. It was intriguing, and I was thinking about doing it myself. “You can do whatever you want. I’m not in control of what you do,” He said. Leaning closer, though, he whispered in my ear. “I also happen to think tattoos are hot. And you with a tattoo? Whew, girl.” Leaning back up, he winked at me, then laughed at me as I felt my face start to burn. “Let’s party before we have to be official again.” He lightheartedly said.

A few hours later, I stumbled around, trying to find one of the flats I had mysteriously lost. “*Girl, you’re way too drunk. You need to find Ryan and go home.*” Raina said, amusement lacing her voice. “Shuuut uupp.” I slurred out loud. Raina’s giggle filled my head and sent me into a fit of laughs. I needed to find that shoe. Was it hot out here? I was hot. Where is Ryan? I couldn’t keep a coherent thought in my brain to save my life. I stumbled to the food table and started shoving my face with a strawberry cupcake, washing it with some more beer. My face was numb, and I was deliriously happy for no reason. I walked along the edge of the field and saw a little black box. What is this? I struggled for a few minutes wobbling back and forth as I squatted down. Then I worked to flip the box open, chuckling the entire time. Once it was open, a few switches were set to the off position. I flipped

a few of them over to the on position. Then heard screeches and screams coming from the end of the field as people ran from something. I had turned the sprinklers on. "Fuck yes!" I yelled and took off in the direction of the water. The ground reached up and hit my face about halfway to it, but I didn't care. I spat the dirt out of my mouth and got back up, running full speed again. I got to where the sprinklers were, and there was a heavy downpour of water around me. I laughed wildly as I danced and spun around in the water, everything immediately getting soaked.

I felt carefree and weightless. I closed my eyes and raised my hands to the sky, laughing even louder. "Aurora? Where are you, and what are you doing?" Ryan mind linked. I didn't answer him; I was having too much fun. If he found me, he'd take me home. Buzzkill Ryan's voice entered my head again with a growl. "Where the hell are you?" I giggled crazily again and sat down on the ground, water still pouring over me. He'll have to find me himself! It took him a while, but he finally found me.

The sprinklers had turned off a few minutes before then, and I sat there shivering, slowly falling asleep. "There you are," Ryan exclaimed angrily as he stalked across the field. He stopped in front of me, "How drunk are you?" he asked incredulously. "I mm vury drunkkk." I slurred at him, a huge sleepy smile on my face. He just sighed as he picked me up, anger turning to compassion as he slung me over his shoulder. I cackled, "I've been a bad girl; you've got to punish me now." I tried to say seductively, but it came out more like, "I been bad, punisssh me." He just laughed and slung me into the backseat of our car. I felt the car start to move and instantly felt sick. I groaned, and everything in my stomach violently lurched up at once all over the backseat of the car. "You're joking. You did not just spray the entire backseat of my car with puke." He said, gagging at the smell. "I sorry," I said pathetically. I laid my head on the puke-covered seat, thinking, this is comfy.

The next time I opened my eyes, it was morning. My head felt like it was about to split in two, and my stomach was rolling. I grumbled and turned over, finding Ryan's side empty.

My clothes from last night were crumpled next to the bed. I remembered nothing from the previous night besides dancing in the sprinklers. I ran my hands down my face in embarrassment. Pulling the covers off, I noticed I was only in my bra and underwear, not the ones I started the night out in either. I quickly covered myself back up in confusion. I hoped I didn't have sex with Ryan while I was that drunk; that would be mortifying. Just then, Ryan strode into the bedroom with a plate of toast and a cup of orange juice. "I thought I heard you in here grumbling." He said, smiling at me and handing me the plate, then the cup. My stomach rolled at the smell of the orange juice, and I gagged. "I don't think you even have anything left to throw up," he pointed out, cringing. He reached into his nightstand and pulled out a bottle of painkillers, fishing two of them out for me and handing them over. "Take those and sip on the orange juice. I'll be back to snuggle with you once I finish taking my car to be detailed." he started to walk out of the room.

"Wait!" I cried out, my voice hoarse. He stopped and turned around with his eyebrows raised. "We...didn't..?" I questioned pathetically. He laughed at me, "No, we didn't have sex. You were too drunk for that, although you were pretty spicy." He winked at me. "You also painted the entire interior of my car in puke. Hence why I have to go get it detailed." He said seriously. I groaned and shoved my face into a pillow, my head pounding hard and embarrassment swirling in my belly. I felt Ryan's weight sink into the bed next to me, and then his arms wound around me. "It's okay, baby. I love you no matter what; no need to be embarrassed," He whispered as he squeezed me tightly. "Now eat that toast and drink your orange juice." He ordered as he got up and walked out of the door.

Later that day, I was sitting on the couch covered with a throw blanket and watching TV when Ryan finally came back through the front door. My headache had subsided a little bit, and I was starting to feel hungry instead of nauseous. "You've been gone for a long time," I noted, annoyed. "Yeah, I had to get my car detailed and then go to a meeting to establish myself in the family business." He wearily said. "Family

business?" I questioned. He fidgeted with the bottom of his shirt. "Yes, father owns an accounting business across town; that's where most of our money comes from. Since I am alpha now, it has been transferred to me. I had to go down and do an inspection. It's in terrible shape, and I've got to fix it up, then start hiring reliable people." He flopped down on the couch next to me. "Oh, there's a meeting that you need to attend on Monday with me. It's with Max and his son, Milo, Nathan, and a few other important people I haven't met." He added like it was no big deal. I just raised my eyebrows at him, unsure about going to a meeting like that. "*You are luna now. You have to go to stuff like that. You had better get used to making bigger decisions than what you're having for lunch if you're going to be successful at all,*" Raina chastised me in my head. First time hearing her since the day before, and she was ordering me around. I rolled my eyes. What a bitch. She grumbled in my head. "Okay, but I'm hungry. Can we order food?" I asked, giving Ryan my best impression of puppy dog eyes. He picked up his phone, "Yes, what do you want to get?" "I was thinking tacos. I love tacos." I said enthusiastically. He laughed and started dialing Taco Pete's. "Also, I lost a shoe last night? Did you find it anywhere?"

# Down and Dirty

## Aurora's POV

“Get dressed; I have something planned for us,” Ryan said the following day as I sat at the table eating breakfast in my PJs. I stopped midway to my mouth with my fork and stared at him, my eyebrows raised in question. He was already dressed in black athletic shorts and a white t-shirt. “It’s a surprise.” He snapped, obviously cranky about something. I wondered if he was touchy about the meeting we both were required to attend tomorrow. “*He could be a little nicer about it, at least,*” Raina said, annoyed. I agreed; I was nervous about it as well. I pushed my chair back and stood up, “Word of advice, if you want me to do something you ask, don’t be cranky with me about it.” I snapped at him, walking out of the room to get changed. “Don’t wear anything nice. Dress down.” He called out. Dress down? What did he have planned that I didn’t need to dress nicely? I pulled on a pair of torn jean shorts, a cut-out pink tank top with braids down the sides, and a black sports bra.

I sprayed some detangler in my hair, brushed it out, and then scrunched some mousse into it so it wouldn’t be frizzy. “Are you ready?” Ryan called from the kitchen impatiently. “*He better stop being an ass, or we aren’t going anywhere with him.*” Raina huffed in my head. She was correct; I didn’t want to go anywhere with him while he acted like this. I stormed back into the kitchen, stopping before him and putting my hands on my hips. He looked at me, shocked. “If you’re going to keep being a jerk, I’m not going anywhere with you.” I angrily said, glaring at him. “Okay. Are you ready to go?” He dismissed me. “You’re not going to acknowledge what I said?” I shot daggers at him. “I heard you. Now let’s go.” He said, grabbing his keys and starting towards the front door. I stayed in my spot, holding my ground. He wouldn’t treat me that badly and then try to boss me around. “I mean it. I’m not going anywhere with you if you’re going to be an asshole toward me.” I repeated. He stopped and turned around. “Suit yourself,” He shrugged. “You’ll enjoy where we’re going, and it’ll make up for me being cranky.” He opened the door,

walked to the car, and got into the driver's seat. "*Maybe you should go with him? He planned something for you guys to do, regardless of him being cranky with you.*" Raina stated. I didn't want to break my stance, but I was super curious about what he had planned. I growled and took off, hopping into the car's passenger side. I sat there scowling with my arms crossed. He just laughed at me and pulled out of the driveway.

After about twenty minutes, he pulled up in front of a pack house. It was raining pretty steadily. "Stay here for a minute." He ordered as he got out and went inside. With Milo by his side, his hair big and crazier than the last time I saw him, it only took a few minutes for him to reappear. They were laughing and punching each other. "*Glad he can be in a good mood with him,*" Raina said, dejected, echoing my thoughts. I just slid further down in my seat as they approached. Ryan opened the door for me to get out.

"Come with us." He said. "Hi, Aurora! I hope you're well." Milo told me warmly. I smiled at him in response. "Well, let's go, you lovebirds. I hear I've got something you need," He singsonged as he walked around the house to the parking lot at the back. Ryan rolled his eyes, and we followed him. We got to the parking lot and walked through it, Milo stopping at a giant green truck. He tossed a set of keys, and Ryan swiftly caught them. "Thanks, man; I'll bring her back tomorrow." He said, clapping Milo's back. Milo smiled, "Have fun!" He winked and ran off to the front of the house. Ryan turned to me, "You hungry?" he asked. "Yeah, a little." I sheepishly admitted. The truck was so jacked up that I needed help climbing into the passenger side. I begrudgingly accepted Ryan's help as he boosted me up in the truck using my hips, squeezing my butt before he pulled his hands away. A smug smirk lit up his features as he crossed the front of the truck to climb into the driver's seat. "How about some Italian food?" He questioned. My stomach growled in response, and he chuckled. "I'll take that as a yes."

We sat in a dimly lit booth and had already ordered our food. Ryan had got seafood alfredo while I got chicken parmesan. We had already eaten through 2 servings of breadsticks and a whole bowl of salad. We sat silently for a



while, Ryan thoughtful, me brooding still. “I’m sorry for being so cranky. I was starving, and I am nervous about this meeting tomorrow.” He admitted. I grabbed his hand across the table, “Don’t be nervous; you’re alpha now. Whatever you say goes.” I reassured him. “I don’t want to be anything like my father. I don’t want to make the same mistakes he did.” He confessed as the waiter appeared with our food, setting it down in front of us. “You will never be like him. You are better than he is, and I will spend the rest of my life making sure you know that.” I vowed. He smiled affectionately at me, “I love you. I’m so lucky to have found you. You’ll love what I have planned; I know it.” I laughed at him and dug into my food. We ate in silence, both of us just enjoying the food. The check came, so we paid it and strolled to the truck with full bellies. Ryan was bouncing with excitement when we got into the truck. I side-eyed him as he drove, admiring how sexy he was.

*“You know, he can see you were checking him out, right?”* an unfamiliar voice filled my head.

*“Yes, we know. You must be Ryan’s wolf. What’s your name?”* Raina replied, curious.

Was there an entire conversation happening in my head? “Uh, Ryan, your wolf is talking in my head.” I awkwardly said. He looked over at me with one eyebrow raised.

*“My name is Zion; what’s yours?”* the voice said. *“Raina. You’re my mate.”* Raina said seductively.

Oh, heck no, that’s not happening. Raina scoffed at me. “What do you mean you can hear my wolf in your head?” He asked, puzzled. “I mean, Zion is talking to Raina, my wolf, in my head right now.” “I didn’t know that was possible. I’ve never heard anybody talk about it happening before.” He scratched his head. “Well, I guess there’s a lot of things we can do that other shifters can’t.” I joked. He shook his head, “This is weird. Maybe we should ask your old alpha about it when we see him tomorrow.” He suggested.

*“Yes, I am your mate, and you are mine. Your voice is beautiful; I could listen to it all day long.”* Zion said dreamily.

*“Aw, how sweet.”* Raina gushed, giggling.

I thought about what Ryan had said for a moment. Trying to keep my thoughts separated from what was happening in my head. “I agree with you. We will mention it in private tomorrow to him.” I concurred. “Also, your wolf is a straight-up cornball.” I laughed. Ryan turned to look at me fully with his mouth open and a look of disdain on his face. “You’re joking. He’s constantly an asshole to me.” I shrugged, “He’s being all romantic with Raina right now.” I told him. He furrowed his eyebrows and kept driving, turning down a dirt road and laughing at me as I grumbled with every bump. He took us down the road quite a ways until there was nothing but trees around us. Finally, he stopped and put the truck in park; I saw a giant mud pit ahead of us. It stretched across the road in all directions and had to have lasted at least half a mile down it. No way was he taking me mudding; how did he know I loved it? I looked over at him, elated. My cheeks felt like they were going to fall off. I was smiling so hard. He leaned in and kissed me. “I love seeing you happy and excited.” He pointed out. He put the truck back into drive and then floored it through the mud for the first time. He cut sharply and flung mud across the trees next to us. I was laughing so hard I could hardly catch my breath. He was laughing too, and I realized I’d never actually heard him laugh with no reserves. I loved it and wanted to hear it a lot more often. He hit the gas again, and this time we flew forward, getting stuck in the deepest part of the mud. The engine revved as he pressed the gas to the floor, splattering mud across the truck’s sides. One of the wheels found purchase and flung us forward quickly. He reversed, and the truck went through the mud again, getting stuck. We lurched through the mud back and forth until the entire truck was covered in a thick coat. Then, he took off down the road at full speed. I grabbed the handle at the top of the truck as he flew down the road. He was howling with laughter as he hit a speed of ninety miles per hour. Flying over turns and whipping down the dirt road. A couple of times, he hit bumps, and the truck was airborne for a few seconds. I was thoroughly enjoying myself. My chest hurt from laughing, and I was exhilarated by the adrenaline coursing me. We suddenly came around a bend in the road and were right back at the mud hole, Ryan slamming into it at full speed. The pit spewed mud

all over the truck from the front like a waterfall. We both looked at each other for a moment, breathing heavily. I unhooked my seatbelt and crawled overtop of him, straddling him. He ran his hands down the sides of my body until they came to rest on my hips, sending shivers through my body. I leaned down and kissed him hungrily, and he kissed me back just as hard. My heart was racing; we both were absorbed only in each other. He struggled to get my shirt and bra off in the tiny cab of the truck, but we managed. He whipped them over my head and pressed his lips to mine again. I could feel his dick pressed up against my most sensitive part. I took full advantage and started to grind myself against him. He moaned against my lips and pushed me down harder by my hips. Freeing my lips, he kissed down my collarbone and onto my breasts, my skin lighting up at his every touch. He took my nipple between his teeth and bit down, causing me to gasp with pleasure. He did that a couple of times with both of them before swirling his tongue around them. He had me close to coming just by doing that. He pushed me off of him abruptly, ripped his shorts off, then reached over to pull mine off. I smiled evilly as he pulled them down my thighs; his eyes widened. "You're not wearing underwear." He said, his voice husky. I shook my head and climbed back over him, sucking in a sharp breath as I rubbed my wet slit against his hard cock. The ache between my thighs intensified. He groaned as I covered him in my arousal, his cock twitching beneath me. He leaned in and pressed his lips to my throat, sucking the flesh there hard, marking me as his. I moaned breathily at the sensation. I put my hand under his chin and guided his lips back to mine. As I kissed him, I positioned him at my entrance. Biting his lip hard, I sunk onto him slowly, trying to adjust to his size. He growled and thrust himself further into me, stretching me to my limit. Crying out, I started to roll my hips at an unrelenting tempo. I grabbed ahold of the seat behind me and threw my head back, reveling in the pleasure of him being fully seated inside of me. He reached down and rubbed circles against my clit. I writhed against him as he brought me to the brink of ecstasy, then moved his hand. I whimpered at him, and he smiled wickedly at me as he grabbed ahold of my hips with one hand and my hair with the

other, whipping my head back. He jackhammered into me as hard and fast as possible, hitting the most delicious spot inside me. Pleasure built low in my stomach as my muscles tensed up and my back arched. Shockwaves gripped my body as I pulsed around him, milking him. He yelled as he finished with one last powerful thrust that had him emptying himself inside me. I toppled over onto him, my breathing erratic. I wrapped my arms around his neck as he hugged me closer, kissing the top of my head.

We pulled all of our clothes back on a few minutes later. Ryan had gotten out of the truck to see how badly we were stuck in the mud, mumbling about it not being that deep. I sat there reminiscing the last half hour or so. I'd never been that dominant before, and I had enjoyed it. I felt my door open slowly next to me, and suddenly I was being yanked out quickly. I landed on my ass in the mud with Ryan chucking next to me. "What's mudding without getting a little dirty?" He said, winking at me. I stood up, swiping a massive pile of mud into my hands discreetly. I innocently walked over to him and put my face on his shoulder. He turned his head to kiss my cheek, and I slapped the mud into his face and ran, shaking with laughter. He wiped it off and glared at me. Picking up his own pile of mud, he came after me, tackling me and rubbing it into my hair. By the time we were done play fighting and rolling around in the earth, we came back coated in it like a second layer of skin. Ryan got to work putting towels down on the seats of Milos's truck, so we didn't ruin the upholstery; then, we hopped in and started on our way home

# First Meeting

## Ryan's POV

**Beep. Beep. Beep.** It was still dark in our bedroom as the alarm on my phone went off at six am. I had set it early enough to get up, run, and get ready for the meeting that started promptly at 8. Beep. Beep. Beep. Suddenly a pillow slammed directly into my face hard. "Turn that damn thing off, Ryan, before I smother you," Aurora growled at me. "You need to get up too, you know," I said bitterly, swiping on my phone to turn the beeping off. I flipped the covers off me and reluctantly got out of bed. Aurora was already snoring away; the girl could sleep through a tornado. I rubbed my hand down my face and went into the bathroom; I'd already set out clothes the night before, knowing Aurora wouldn't have appreciated me turning on the bedroom light while she was sleeping. I changed into the shorts and muscle shirt waiting for me and ran out the door to start my morning run. The sun was beginning to peek up over the horizon but was blocked by clouds. It was drizzling steadily, and I wished I'd grabbed my sweatshirt before I left.

Breathing heavily and drenched in sweat, I made it back at precisely six forty-five. Just enough time to get in the shower, get dressed, and eat breakfast. However, when I walked in, I could hear the shower running and was immediately aggravated. "*You live with someone else now. You need to account for them as well.*" Zion reminded me. I opened the door, "Aurora, how long will you be in there?" I asked her crankily. She poked her head from behind the glass door and frowned at me. "I just got in. I haven't even gotten my hair wet yet," I growled, slammed the door, and then flopped down onto the couch. I wasn't in the mood to have to wait around to be able to shower in my own house. "*You're acting like an ass. Calm down, or you will have more issues that will stress you out before this meeting.*" Zion remarked in my head. He was right, but I didn't give a shit. The shower suddenly turned off, and I heard feet padding down the hallway toward the living room. "Ryan?" Aurora tentatively said. She appeared in the hallway with a towel wrapped

around her, looking troubled. “Did you want to shower first? You don’t take as long as I do. If it’s that big of a deal, I can wait.” I raised my eyebrows at her. “You were already in the shower; did you get out just to waste more time?” I spat at her. Her eyes went wide, and tears welled in them. “I got out to try to make things easier for you, but here you are, acting like a damn jerk.” She said as she stomped back down the hallway, slamming the bathroom door harder than I had. “*I told you so.*” Zion teased. The shower started back up and a stab of hurt prickled through the bond. Smacking my palm against my forehead, I stepped down the hallway and slowly opened the bathroom door. Aurora was sitting on the tiled floor of the shower with her head in her hands, crying softly. I felt horrible for making her feel bad enough that she was crying. I stripped and opened the glass door, stepping in and sitting next to her.

“Get out. I’m not in the mood,” she grumbled at me. I put my arms around her, “I’m not going anywhere. Talk to me; why are you crying?” I urged. She looked up and glared at me with red eyes, “Isn’t it freaking obvious?” she said, her voice quivering. I sighed and pulled her closer to me as she started to cry harder. “You have been treating me terribly for the last couple of days. The only time you didn’t was when we had sex while mudding, and even then, when we got home, you were distant and ignored me. I don’t deserve it,” she babbled on. “I’m sorry. You’re right. I shouldn’t be taking things out on you like this. I’ve never had a constant person, so it feels wrong to depend on you.” I admitted. She stared at me, astonished. “I’m your mate. I’m the one that was destined to be with you, and you with me. You’ve got to stop pushing me away when I’m here for you.” I nodded at her in agreement. “Let’s shower together. We don’t have much time before this meeting. We can finish this conversation later. I heard you, and I will try to treat you better than I have been.” I said, pulling her up with me and adjusting the water temperature.

After we formally dressed, Aurora was in a black dress and pink flats. Me in a button-down shirt and a pair of slacks. We ate breakfast and waited for people to show up, as everyone had agreed that the meeting would be held at the alpha’s house. Milo was the first to arrive in his giant truck.

He bounded through the front door, yelling a greeting and plopping down on the couch. Nathan was next, knocking on the door and respectfully bowing. Then Max knocked on the door, toting his son along behind him. "I believe three more people are supposed to be coming," Max announced as he stepped over the threshold. I nodded formally. He moved on and greeted Aurora fondly, hugging her. The small living room of my house seemed crowded; the only seating was the couch, so a few of us sat on the floor, politely conversing. A loud knock sounded at the door, and I stood up quickly. The scent coming from the other side was, unfortunately, familiar. "*You didn't tell Aurora your father was coming, did you?*" Zion barked. I opened the door slowly, and father stepped into the house, not saying a word as he bumped into my shoulder and scrambled into the living room. The only evidence of our fight was one single cast on his right arm. The rest of it must have healed quickly. I heard Aurora gasp behind me and growl, stomping away down the hallway and slamming the bedroom door. "*This should be entertaining,*" Zion said in my head, amused. I ignored him and followed her into the room, sighing loudly. She rounded on me the second I closed the door, yelling at me in a hushed whisper. "What the fuck is he doing here, Ryan, and why the fuck didn't you tell me he was coming?" I sat down on the edge of the bed. "You're right. I should have told you. I didn't know how to. I didn't get a choice in having him come; he is still part of the pack until I banish him today." I said, wearily putting my face in my hands. "Is he healthy enough to go now?" She asked. I nodded at her, and her mood lightened a little. "I am still pissed off at you for not telling me. But let's go out and get this meeting over with so I can see you get that much-needed revenge." She said, eyes twinkling with excitement.

Two other men were waiting when we stepped back into the living room. Both were dressed in extremely formal suits with ties and shiny black shoes. A man with red hair and brown eyes approached me with his hand extended, "I am the alpha of the Nightfall pack; my name is Jake. This is Damian, my beta." He gestured to the other suited man. The other suited man with dark hair nodded in response. "Nice to meet you two; welcome to our territory." I said as I shook Jake's

hand. "Is this your mate? Cherry told me all about her." Jake all but sneered. I smiled politely at him. "I do not tolerate disrespect in my home; if you are going to be disrespectful towards me or my luna, you are free to leave." The alpha aura snapped up around us, shutting Jake up as he leaned against the couch. "Let's get this meeting started, shall we, boys?" Milo piped up from his cross-legged position on the floor. I shot him an appreciative look, and he winked at me. "The first thing we need to address is not going to be easy." I warned. My father's eyes never left the floor he'd been staring at since he walked through the door. Aurora stepped to my side and took my hand, knowing I'd need the comfort. "Father, you have done disgusting things to many people in this pack. Everyone knows about them as I revealed them during the y. They have all agreed with Aurora and i's decision." Murmured agreements came from both Milo and Nathan. "Father, you are pretty much healed, aren't you?" I asked. "Mostly." He quipped, with his head still down. "Good, then you are banished from the pack. You are rogue and no longer welcome in this pack." I said with authority. Aurora smiled at me with warmth. Father's head snapped up, and he fixed his eyes on me with absolute outrage. "I'm your father. There's no way you will kick me out of my pack." I smirked at him, feeling no regrets at all. "That is where you're wrong. You're no father of mine. The second you cheated on my mom, you were dead to me. I've spent all these years just trying to get through your abuse so I could find my mate and banish you when the time came. That time is now, so get out of my house. You don't deserve to participate in any official pack business anymore." I sneered. He stared back at me in shock but stood straight with his chin pointed confidently up, then walked out of the door. Shifting as soon as he was out of the house and running into the woods. The entire room was awkwardly silent. "So, congrats on becoming alpha, Ryan! You, too, for becoming luna, Aurora!" Damian said, breaking the silence with his kind comment. "Thanks, man!" I said, smiling at him and brightening the mood. The meeting continued without a hitch; policies were implemented for the Nightfall pack to join in with Silvercrest and Midnight pack regarding opening the territories up so that people could find their mates more easily.



As the meeting progressed, Jake became kinder to Aurora as he realized she was better than his daughter had described. We all set up new business ventures along with new trade lines between the packs. I was optimistic for the first time in a while that I was capable of being alpha and leading the pack in the right direction. Aurora had gone into the kitchen to heat some frozen appetizers as everyone was getting hungry. “So, how is everything going with your new mated life?” Max asked me, and everyone in the room turned their attention to us. “It’s going well. I’m used to living alone, so it’s been an adjustment.” I joked. Everyone chuckled, “I thought you were going to be marrying my Cherry. It was your father’s idea, honestly.” Jake spoke up, and I looked at him with understanding. “My father is good at creating huge problems. He should have known that I wouldn’t be up to marrying a random girl I had just met. No offense to you or Cherry. I’m not even sure I’ll ever marry Aurora. Marriage scares me; I’ve been through many unfortunate things with women.” I said, rubbing the back of my neck and staring at the floor. When I looked up, everyone in the room was awkwardly shuffling around. Milo’s eyes were wide, “I uh tried to warn you.” He said uncomfortably. I turned around to see Aurora standing behind me with a food tray, tears welling in her eyes, and pain is written on her face. She set the tray down on the arm of the couch, grabbed her car keys, then walked out the front door without saying a word to me. “Ah damn it.” I exclaimed. “Yeah, man, that’s gonna be quite the mess to clean up.” Nathan commented.

# Surprises

## Aurora's POV

I drove erratically, unable to see through the tears pouring from my eyes. *"I think you overreacted, Aurora. He just said he was bad with commitment."* Raina said sharply in my head, trying to make me see sense. The only thing my brain could latch on to was that Ryan, my mate, had said he didn't want to marry me, which hurt beyond belief. I may not be a girly girl at heart, but a lovely, beautiful wedding was something I had dreamed of. I parked the car in a close-by parking lot and walked down a path cut through the trees next to it. The river ran furiously, swelling with the rain we had received yesterday. I sat on a large rock next to the running water and watched it bubble past me. How had my life been flipped upside down so quickly? How was I supposed to be stronger than I am?

*"There is no way for you to be stronger than you are. I know you can be hella strong no matter the circumstances."* Raina complimented me, and I smiled to myself. "Thanks," I said aloud, surprising myself with how calm my voice sounded. The water and nature around were grounding me and my unstable emotions. I dipped my fingers into the cool water, immediately having an intrusive thought to jump into it. I laughed and shook my shoes off as I waded in a little further, sighing as the cold water rose above my ankles.

I closed my eyes and raised my face to the sky, letting the sounds of the little forest around lull me. When I opened my eyes and looked across the riverbank, a solid brown wolf with pure yellow eyes stared at me furiously. I raised my eyebrows in confusion, slowly stepped out of the water, and sat back down on my rock. Refusing to let the wolf across the water scare me off. I was stronger than any wolves in the packs right now; I could take them down in a second if I needed to. I kept eye contact, waiting to see if whoever it was would attack me. I had the vague sense that it was Ryan's father, but I wasn't sure as I didn't know his wolf's scent. Those piercing yellow eyes never wavered as their owner

shook its head slowly and turned around to walk away. I gathered my shoes and started to get back to the car. I would sit there for a few hours listening to music until I was ready to go home and face Ryan.

As I sat in the parked car, it started thundering as it got dark. I could see flashes of lightning flit across the sky, and the loud booming thunder made me cringe and cover my sensitive ears with every clap. Once the thunder slowed, I pushed my seat back and laid down, pulling the blanket we kept in the backseat up and wrapping it around myself. I scrolled through my phone for a while, not keeping track of time. Not once did Ryan text or call me, which hurt almost as much as what he said.

I opened my eyes, noticing it was pitch black around me. I picked my phone up to check the time, three fifteen in the morning. I must have passed out to have slept through the rain that was now pouring down around me again. There were several notifications, some from Ryan starting angry, switching to worried, then moving towards the freak-out territory. Ella had also texted me, asking what was happening and where I was. The last text I received was around two forty-five am. I rubbed my hand down my face in exasperation. I didn't want to go home if it meant dealing with those two. *"If you don't go home, they will likely send the police out after you. Then the entire pack will know you and Ryan are having issues. Not good for a new pair of mates who were just given alpha and luna status."* Raina reminded me. I growled at her internally as I turned the keys in the ignition and heard the engine turn over. Having a weird feeling, I reached over and hit the automatic lock button on the side of my door to lock all of them. Suddenly the car lurched sideways as something barreled into it hard. Growls came from outside of my door as claws raked their way down it. My mind went fuzzy as someone mind linked to me. "You dumb bitch. You can't believe I'd take the chance of not getting rid of you when it's such a good opportunity? Little Ryan isn't here to save you now, baby girl." John sneered in my head. Anxiety picked up in my chest, and my breathing hitched as I slammed the car into drive and hit the gas, swerving around

the parking lot as I tried to make it to the exit. The entire time, John kept slamming into the car with his wolf form, the sound of metal crunching rang out each time. If I didn't get out of here soon, he would render the car useless, and then I would be out of options. Slamming my foot onto the gas pedal, I jerked forward quickly and squealed my tires down the road, listening to John's angry grunts and growls at me, having gotten away from him. My breathing was fast, and my heart was pounding as more tears tore down my cheeks. I sped home, not stopping at any red lights or stop signs in utter fear. Nobody was out due to the late hour, so it was easy to do.

I pulled the car into our driveway and bolted to the front door, finding it locked. I panicked and started to beat on the door, "RYAN, HELP!" I yelled desperately through my tears. The door opened almost immediately, and Ryan appeared in front of me angrily. I ran into him, wrapping my arms tightly around him while sobbing. My head felt like it was going to split into two pieces, the pain was piercing, and I started to scream.

Meanwhile, Ryan was holding me up and freaking out. The world around me blurred, and all of my senses were failing. I could only hear blurbs of Ryan yelling and of him calling 911. I clutched at my head, my throat raw and my nails digging into my scalp as I tried to will the pain to go away. Suddenly the pain intensified to the point where I was screaming my throat raw and curled up into the fetal position.

Ryan had gotten down in front of me and was shaking my shoulders, trying to get my attention. "Look up." an unfamiliar voice rang out around me. I kept my head down, afraid the pain would worsen if I moved. "Look up, dear child. Now." The voice ordered. It was angelic and echoed with each word. I slowly looked up and gasped at the figure that stood before me. She was see-through and shimmering, her long brown hair flowing around her while her blue eyes shone brightly. Her face emitted an unearthly, kind light. I stared at her, slack-jawed, and she laughed at me. "You are surprised to see me? Why is that?" She asked curiously. I squinted my eyes, still in unimaginable pain, "I have never seen an angel before." She kneeled in front of me and touched my face

gently. A light, cold breeze ran across my cheek where she touched me. “I am not an angel, dear girl. I am simply a spirit that has been able to cross into your world using the abilities you possess. Were you unaware that you could do this?” I shook my head, speechless at her words. “I need to go now, though. Now that you have seen me, the door will remain open. You need to figure out how to control what comes through it, or you will be in trouble. Not all spirits mean well.” She said as she faded in and out of view. “Wait! Will there always be this pain as a warning?” I asked as I reached toward her. She looked at me sympathetically and nodded. “It will get easier to control the more you use the ability. I was a white wolf, too, and it took me some time to get used to everything I could do. I will be around as often as I can to help you.” She replied as she waved goodbye, then disappeared quickly, leaving me in complete darkness.

When I came to, I was surrounded by paramedics quickly hooking me up to machines. I looked up at Ryan and mind-linked him. “I don’t need their help. I’m fine.” He furrowed his brows as one of the paramedics announced that my blood pressure was stabilizing and my breathing was normal again. “I don’t need any help,” I said loudly, my voice hoarse from screaming. “Young lady, do you know where you are? What is your name?” The paramedic in front of me asked. I rolled my eyes, “Yes, I am on my front porch. My name is Aurora, and my mate is Ryan, who is standing above me.” The paramedic looked at me bewildered, “You just had a grand mal seizure. We thought you had an aneurysm.” He said with wide eyes. “I’m fine. You were wrong. Please unhook me from your machines and get this IV out of my arm.” I gestured to the needle in my arm with annoyance. The paramedic scratched his head and ordered the rest around me to start packing up as he began to remove the machines.

Once the paramedics were gone, I settled in bed under the covers. I was ready to sleep the entire day away. Ryan came into the room and sat on the edge of the bed. He ran his hands down his face, “You don’t know how scared I was tonight, Aurora. You didn’t answer me for hours, and then you came home freaking out. Then you faint on the doorstep and

refuse medical attention. What the hell is going on?” He turned quickly to face me. “You said you would never marry me, which was upsetting, so I went to cool off. I didn’t want to fight when I came back. Your father jumped me and desolated the car.” I said, annoyed at having to recount the story before I could sleep; I was exhausted. Ryan gestured for me to keep talking, his eyebrows raised at me. “I didn’t faint on the front porch. I had a head-splitting headache that worsened until a spirit appeared before me. She was beautiful! She was tall with flowing brown hair and bright blue eyes. Her touch was gentle, and she was kind. She kept calling me dear-” I stopped abruptly as I noticed Ryan’s face go sheet white. “Y-you saw my mother?” He stuttered at me in complete astonishment. I was speechless; he was right. She was exactly as he had described when he told me about her. “How did you see her? Can I see her?” He demanded, grabbing my shoulder roughly. I shrugged him off and glared at him as he regained his composure. “Yes, I guess I saw your mother. She told me that the pain in my head would happen more often because a door to the spiritual realm was open around me. She also told me that she was a white wolf as well.” Now it was his turn for his jaw to hit the floor. “That can’t be. Wait. Yes, it can. She never shifted around me, so I never saw her wolf form.” I saw the gears turning in his head as he put two and two together. “That is why my father hates you so much. That is why he killed her without single remorse. She would have been more powerful than him. Why didn’t she fight back if she was stronger?” he was rambling. I gently put my hand on his cheek as tears sprung into the corners of his eyes; his gaze was stuck on the wall behind me. “Ryan, relax. I think this is something we need to put to rest until we both have gotten some sleep.” I said, trying to do something rational for the first time in the last twenty-four hours. He nodded at me, getting up to pull the curtains across the window and turn the lights off. He laid down next to me, and I snuggled up to him, my head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat. “Oh, and Aurora?” he said, breaking the silence between us. I looked up at him, “Uh, yes?” “I was wrong earlier. I had some time to think about it while you were gone. I would marry you. You are the only one I would ever consider marrying because when you are gone, I

feel incomplete. Like half of me is missing, and I never want to feel that way again. So, this life we have here? It will be forever because I am in love with you.” He said fervently, rubbing his thumb along the small of my back. I smiled, “Forever and a day?” I questioned. He laughed at me, “Forever and a day, silly. Now let’s get some sleep.” He leaned down and kissed my nose, then we both snuggled into the bed and passed out.

Sometime in the late afternoon, we were woken up by constant pounding on the front door. I sat up sleepily and rubbed my eyes. Pulling on my robe, I wobbled to the front door and pulled it open, the sunlight temporarily blinding me. A solid body pushed past me into the house, and then turned around. “Why the hell haven’t you answered my text messages or calls, Aurora? You have worried me since Ryan called me and told me what was happening. You don’t just go MIA when talking to me!” She yelled as she pushed me, tears rolling down her face. I rubbed my sleepy eyes again in exasperation, “I’m sorry, El. I will explain as soon as I make some coffee.” “You sure as fuck will. Bring me some coffee too.” She ordered as she sat on the couch with a glare and crossed arms. Just then, Ryan came out of the bedroom dressed and ready to go somewhere. “Where are you going?” I questioned. “Milo is coming to pick me up. We are going hiking.” He replied nonchalantly as he pulled on a pair of hiking boots. I shrugged and went in search of my coffee. I heard the front door slam just as I had finished making Ella and I’s coffee and made my way to the living room so I could say hi. “Hiya gu-” Milo started but stopped short as his gaze landed on Ella. Her head snapped up, and they met eyes. Milo practically bounced up and down on his feet; he exclaimed, “No way, you’re my mate!” Well, at least her lousy mood was about to be cured, I joked.

# Scared

## Aurora's POV

“No freaking way! This is awesome!” Milo gushed, giving Ella lovey eyes from where he stood in the doorway. Ella was stunned, sitting silent and wide-eyed on the couch. It took her a few moments to break from her stupor, “You smell so good.” She said finally. Milo grinned like an idiot and sat down next to her, grabbing ahold of her hand. “You’re even more beautiful than I thought you’d be.” Ella blushed and looked at the ground. Was this my best friend? She was usually the confident one with guys, and here she was, floundering around her mate. The chemistry in the room around us was palpable, making things awkward for Ryan and me.

“Uh, bro, do you want to postpone our hiking trip then?” Ryan questioned. Milo seemed to snap out of it for a moment, “Nope. Are you ready to go?” Ryan stared at him with his brow furrowed. “You just found your mate. You don’t want to go spend time together?” I noticed Ella sitting quietly, still looking at the floor. I tuned the boys out and walked over and knelt in front of her, and she looked up at me, fear written on her face. “Are you okay?” I asked as I looked at her with concern. She nodded, “Yeah, being mated scares me since my father rejected my mother the way he did. I don’t want to go through what I watched my mother suffer through.” Ella’s father had marked her mother and then rejected her when it led to Ella being conceived. When someone is marked and rejected soon after, they will get sicker and sicker slowly over time until it kills them. Ella’s mother had died when she was starting high school. It was the most challenging time in her life, so it was understandable that she would be scared. I felt someone put their hand on my shoulder and saw Milo crouched next to me. He put his other hand on Ella’s cheek as she turned to look at him, her eyes betraying her fear still. “I would never reject you. You could have murdered everyone on this planet, and I would still say you’re my beautiful but very problematic mate.” He said gently while chuckling and



caressing her cheek. She smiled warmly at him and covered his hand with hers.

The boys packed some snacks and took off for the rest of the day, excited to hike the mountains of Colorado. I was almost jealous. Hiking in this new pack territory was on my bucket list. Ella and I had heated some leftovers and sat at the kitchen table. I filled her in as we ate together. She got angry about the entire situation, and then her anger quickly switched to awe as she learned about the new ability I had opened up. “Do you know how to make it happen again?” She probed as she propped her head up on the table with her elbow, nibbling on a piece of lettuce from her taco salad that she had barely touched. “I believe it happens when I am stressed or feeling giant waves of emotion. I was scared out of my mind when it happened last time.” I stood up to put my dishes in the sink. “Can I take mine home with me?” Ella asked, her voice laced with anxiety. “El, you know you can always take food home with you. You don’t have to ask. What is going on with you? You just found your mate, and he told you he wasn’t going to reject you; why are you so anxious about it?” I pressed, trying to get her to open up. Looking down at the table, Ella pushed her food around her plate with her fork absentmindedly. “Is it because of your parents?” I pushed a little more. She nodded, and tears sprung to her eyes. I set my dishes down in the sink and then hugged her, squeezing her tightly. “I haven’t known Milo for long, but he seems like a great guy. I don’t think you have anything to worry about. You deserve to be happy, Ella. You can’t let your past define what you have going for you in the future.” I said to her gently as I sat back down in my chair. She wiped her eyes, “I have been training for half of my life to work at my father’s law firm. I have my whole life planned in Silvercrest, and now I have to uproot the entire thing and try to form a new one here. I am scared as hell that he is going to mark me and then leave me. It’s not something I can brush off, Aurora. I watched my mother get sick time and time again until her body finally gave out, and I had to watch them pull her life support plug. I had to watch her pine for my father every time he was around to visit me on holidays or just in general. It wasn’t easy to watch him be so cold towards her.”

Her shoulders were shaking by the end of her speech as she sobbed quietly.

I didn't know what to say to comfort her because she was right. Milo just became Beta of the pack; he wouldn't be eager to give his position up to rank lower in a new, unfamiliar pack. She pushed up from her chair and went to transfer her salad into the Tupperware container I had set on the counter for her. She kept her back to me as she tried to compose herself. "Ella, you know that no matter what happens, you will always have Ryan and me. You will never be alone. I'm sure I can find a law firm for you to work for on our territory so that all the training and college courses aren't wasted. We will work this out. Things won't be as bad as you think they will." I consoled her. She turned around, giving me a tearful smile. "So, tell me about him," she said, a girly giggle escaping her lips. "Well, he is for sure goofy, but he is genuine. You guys will make cute ginger babies." I said, winking at her. She heavily rolled her eyes and walked into the living room, "Let's go be couch potatoes until they get back." I couldn't agree more.

When the boys returned, it was well past dark. They walked in, joking around and punching each other, and the smell of sweat reached me before they spotted me. I wrinkled my nose at the pungent smell. Ella turned her head when Milo walked in, and their eyes met briefly. "I'm gonna hit the shower," Ryan shouted, suddenly in front of me and gesturing with his eyes to follow him. I took the hint and got up, winking at Ella once more, leaving the room, and heading for my bedroom. When I walked into the room, I thought Ryan had entered the room before me, but it was empty. Suddenly, a hand went over my eyes, and the other grabbed my shoulder and flipped me around, startling me. I screamed as I slammed into the wall in front of me hard. "Sshh, Aurora," Ryan whispered in my ear as he removed his hand from my eyes and placed it on my throat roughly, holding me in place. A mischievous grin lifted his boyish features as he grabbed ahold of my hair, yanking my head back hard and feathering kisses down my neck to my chest. Breathly moans escaped me with every gentle brush of his lips on my skin. My body reacted

with fireworks whenever he touched me, and I loved every second of it. He nipped my skin, and I jumped, gasping with pleasure. “I must go shower now, baby. Don’t miss me too much.” He let go and was gone as quickly as he entered the room, leaving me horny and confused. Frustrated, I threw myself onto the bed and waited for him to return. I could hear him laughing in the shower, but he didn’t know I would get him back. I will get my revenge somehow.

When Ryan was done in the shower, we returned to the living room to find it empty. I grabbed my phone and headed for the bedroom again, unlocking it and finding a text from Ella.

Ella: See you later. ;) Going back to Milo’s tonight!

I smiled like an idiot, feeling more than happy that her mate was a good guy. Ryan entered the room at that moment, smiling at me. “Your smile is beautiful; I love when I get to see it more often.” He flirted. I rolled my eyes at him, “You’re a cheeseball.” I grumbled through the blush spreading across my cheeks. “Funny, my wolf seems to think the same thing,” he said, laughing hard. I jolted in surprise when he mentioned his wolf. I had not heard Raina since earlier in the day yesterday. My head had been silent when usually she would have been making sarcastic remarks constantly. Worry filled me, and my stomach sunk to my knees. Noticing the sudden change in mood, Ryan came over and pulled me into his arms. “What’s wrong?” He inquired, concern lacing his voice heavily. My voice quivered as I spoke, “I have not heard Raina in a long time. My head has been radio silent.” Ryan was silent for a moment as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Maybe what happened last night pushed her out of your head for a little while. Maybe give it a couple of days to see if she returns?” I shook my head, “She has never been this silent. Something is wrong.” I said in a pitchy voice. Anxiety was making my chest tight and my breathing shallow. Ryan pulled me closer to him and squeezed me hard. “It will be okay, Aurora. She will come back; what happened yesterday was probably a big shock for your body and mind.” He said, trying to comfort me. We laid together in bed, and he rubbed my back until I calmed enough

to sleep. As I drifted off, I felt him gently kiss my head. “I love you, beautiful.” He whispered.

I grumbled as Ryan shook me awake. “Aurora, you have to get up. We have to work out with the rest of the pack this morning. Today starts the new regime.” I threw my pillow angrily at him and turned over. “Don’t make me do it.” He growled at me. I grunted in response, and he sighed. “Alright, you asked for it.” He lifted the entire side of the mattress off the box spring, making me slide off it onto the floor hard. “You asshole. Can’t you take a hint?” I said furiously as I got up off the floor. He just laughed at me, “Get dressed. We need to leave in 5 minutes.” he ordered and walked out of the room. I groaned and threw on a crop top and a pair of shorts. I then threw my hair into a high ponytail and tossed on an old pair of sneakers. I heard the car start outside and bounded out the front door, grabbing a bottle of water on my way out.

We were about halfway into our workout when Milo and Nathan approached us with a police officer in tow who resided in our pack. “Alpha Ryan and Luna Aurora, we need you to come with us to the back room,” Nathan said seriously. We followed them into the backroom of the gym, where the extra equipment sat. The police officer had a solemn look on his face as he pulled a few papers from a folder and handed them to Ryan. His hand flew to his mouth, and his eyes widened in shock at what he saw. I also leaned over to see the first page and gagged at how gory it was. It was a picture of what used to be a person. They were mauled beyond recognition. Blood was splattered everywhere; body parts were ripped off, and innards had been spread around them everywhere. “That’s not the only one. Keep going,” the officer urged. Ryan flipped through at least 5 or 6 pieces of paper, all with the same scene but different people. With each page flip, his facial features grew more and more disturbed. “What happened?” I inquired. “I believe it was a wolf who killed these people. They were all found within the last 2 or 3 days. Most were found in broad daylight. The police department has played it off as possibly being wild animal attacks since they were all found in the woods. When I looked at those pictures, I knew it was one of our kind that had done that.” Milo spoke up, looking quite

green. “You’re right. It was one of our kind, but how will we be able to figure out who? There are quite a few rogues around the city, plus the ones that travel through occasionally. Scents are always too mixed to differentiate,” Ryan said inquisitively. Nathan bowed his head respectfully, “Maybe we could set up patrols around the forests that line that packs territory?” he said. Ryan rubbed the back of his neck and nodded in agreement. “Great idea. Milo, can you take care of that? Get at least two pack warriors per forest. Make sure they know to stay hidden. Have them switch shifts, one shift during the day and one during the night.” Milo put a thumb in the air and bounded off. The police officer smiled, “I will help as often as possible; I will bring you as much information as you need.” Turning on his heel, he exited the room, leaving us alone with Nathan. “Alpha, I have an awful feeling about this. Something is wrong. We have never had attacks on regular people like this, let alone murders. Do you think we should shut the borders down?” Nathan anxiously said. I shook my head at that question, “I don’t think shutting the borders down will stop it or even setting guards up. If someone wants to kill another person, they will find a way.” Both men looked at me with their brows furrowed at the darkness of what I said. I shrugged at them, “What? It’s true.” “Let’s go back to our workout now; they are more important than ever.” Ryan urged as he left the room. I had a bad feeling about everything too. I knew those wouldn’t be the last dead people we saw.

# Macabre Signs

## Ryan's POV

Over the next couple of weeks, things were at a standstill as guards went into the forest around our pack territory. Life was all but simple for Aurora and me, with constant meetings regarding pack safety, secrecy about our shifting abilities, and guard shifts. We weren't exempt just because of our statuses. We were exhausted, both physically and mentally. We barely even had time to cook in our own house, most of the time opting for take-out because it was easy and convenient. We also had no time to be intimate, and I was tired of my right hand. *"Well, your hand will be your best friend for a while. Being alpha is not an easy task. Especially when things are going bad within the pack."* Zion reminded me, and I growled internally at him. I was sitting on the couch in the living room with my head against the back of it and my eyes closed, awaiting my next guarding shift. Everyone in the pack was tired because of the extra effort we had to make. Although the people who had been murdered before were humans, they easily could be one of us if we did not guard our territory. The door opened sharply, and my head snapped up, but it was just Aurora walking through with bags of food in her arms. She shut the door with her foot and hurried off into the kitchen. I stood up and followed her, curious about what food she had decided to get this time. Although, knowing her, she had probably gotten Taco Pete's. I laughed to myself. *"That girl could live off those shitty tacos,"* Zion commented, echoing my thoughts exactly. I walked over and enveloped her in a tight hug that she returned eagerly. She kissed me quickly and started taking food out of the bags and making a pile in front of each of us. I burst into laughter along with Zion. She had indeed brought Taco Pete's home. She looked at me seriously, with her eyes narrowed. "What?" She accused. I just shook my head and grabbed my pile of food to take to the kitchen table. She followed closely behind me, mumbling about how we didn't have much time to eat and that she was tired. We ate our food quickly and then branched off to get dressed. Our shift tonight was the first one we've had together since they started.

I was eager to spend alone time with her so that we could have a whole conversation. It had been weeks, and I was beginning to miss her, even with her right next to me.

It was pitch black in the woods around us as we walked together with our hands intertwined. “It’s been a while since we’ve had the chance to talk to each other.” I pointed out. Aurora nodded at me and smiled, “It has been. How are you?” I just shrugged my shoulders, the words falling out of my mouth quicker than I could stop them. “I’m tired and overworked, just like you. But what choice do we have? We have to protect the pack and the people around us.” She looked at me concerned, “I can do the shift myself if you want to go back home and sleep a little bit?” She asked sincerely. The thought appealed to me, and I almost took her up on her offer. The image of her being one of the people in those pictures stopped me in my tracks. “I’ll be okay. I don’t think we have any plans tomorrow, so we will be able to spend the day relaxing together,” I air-quoted the word “Relaxing” and winked at her. She raised her eyebrows at me and laughed. “I’m down for that. It’s been too long.” She agreed, and we kept walking.

It was around three am when we stumbled upon a scene that nobody should ever see. I stopped walking and started retching into the trees next to me. Aurora was a few paces behind me but ran to catch up when she heard me throwing up. “What’s wrong-” She stopped and started heaving, her hand over her mouth. I wiped my mouth and looked back at the scene in front of me. A body lay on the ground in front of us, mutilated beyond belief. Its abdominal cavity was flayed open and empty, displaying the person’s spine. The nose and mouth were ripped off, nowhere to be found. A drop of rain hit the side of my face just then, and I furrowed my brows, holding my hand out to check for more rain. It wasn’t supposed to rain tonight, was it? “Ryan,” Aurora whispered, pointing to my cheek. I raised my hand and touched the wet spot running down my face. I pulled it away to find blood all over my fingers, and again I gagged and almost threw up again. Suddenly Aurora’s scream lit up the entire forest as she looked up into the trees above us. My mouth dropped open as I

followed her gaze to the treetops. There were innards scattered throughout the treetops. Intestines were strung like Christmas lights across tree branches. Other organs were impaled on the ends of them like ornaments. Aurora slowly sat down on the ground and hugged her knees, rocking back and forth with her eyes shut tightly.

I pulled my phone out and dialed the police officer we had been in correspondence with, who had revealed to us that his name was Ben Morgan. He picked up on the first ring, muttering hello in a sleepy voice, despite it being almost three-thirty in the morning. “I am on the night guard shift with Aurora tonight in the forest along the river. We found something..disturbing, to say the least. Could you come down here?” I said quickly, wanting to get the words out before I had my own freakout moment. “Disturbing?” the officer questioned, still half asleep, not getting the big picture. “Yes, officer Morgan. Another body, this one more mutilated than the rest. I’ll send you my location; make sure to bring a paramedic with you; I think Aurora is in shock.” I replied and ended the call. I pressed a few buttons and sent my location to the officer, and then I went over to sit next to Aurora, who was pale-faced and staring blank-faced ahead.

“Are you okay?” I asked as I gently rubbed her back. She didn’t reply, just continued to stare. “I called officer Morgan, and he is on his way here,” I informed her and tried to pull her into my arms, but she resisted and pushed me away. Hurt wound through me, but I tried to be patient with her. She had never been exposed to something like this before. I sat with her in silence for about fifteen minutes until officer Morgan found us with a paramedic and the coroner by his side. The paramedic was carrying a bag of supplies and a blanket. She strode over to Aurora and started to ask her questions as she laid the blanket across her shoulders. She gestured for me to talk to the officer and coroner, so I met them in front of the macabre scene.

They were both standing there slack-jawed at the mess in front of them when I got to them. “Woo boy, you didn’t tell me it was this bad. This is going to take a long time to clean up.” officer Morgan said as he scratched his head in frustration.



Meanwhile, the coroner was kneeling next to the body, looking for identification and examining the wounds. “Uh, Ryan, could you come closer?” He tentatively asked. I took a giant deep breath and steeled myself to get closer without freaking out. I stepped up next to the body, and the coroner looked solemnly at me. “Didn’t your old beta have a dagger tattoo on his right bicep?” He inquired. I nodded at him, and he reached over and moved a torn piece of fabric to show one of the patches of skin that had not been shredded. There sat an intricate tattoo of a dagger dripping blood. My eyes went wide.

No way, this was Alfred. “That’s not the only thing.” The coroner added. He moved another piece of torn fabric on the other side of his chest, and I saw the words “We are coming.” carved into his chest. “What does this mean?” the coroner asked me curiously. The realization suddenly hit me, “It means the city is in more danger than we thought it was. Whoever did this isn’t playing around anymore. The first few bodies found were just child’s play compared to this. They know how to hide their scent and the noise they make well because Aurora and I have been all over this forest all night. Neither of us smelled or heard anything. Aurora is a white wolf, and her abilities are heightened, so it says a lot that she didn’t hear or smell anything.” I replied, crestfallen. The coroner just stared at me, not knowing what to say. “Ryan!” the paramedic called, gesturing for me to come back over. I bounded over and found Aurora looking worse than she had when I walked away. “I think it is best if you take her home. She won’t respond to me, and she won’t move. Her stats are great; her blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen are all normal, so she is fine to go home. Please bring her to the hospital if she starts to get worse, and we will admit her for observation.” I nodded at her and picked up Aurora, cradling her in my arms and starting towards our parked car about half a mile across the forest.

Getting back to our home, I noticed Aurora had passed out in the backseat. I sighed and carried her into the house with my arms burning and my back soaked in sweat. She wasn’t heavy by any means, but carrying her for an extended period through the forest had done it for me. I laid her gently in bed and started to strip her clothes off for her. Throughout

all of this, she did not move or wake up once. I covered her up and crawled into bed next to her, pulling her into my arms as I quietly let my tears fall. I hadn't seen anything remotely close to that since everything happened with my mother. All I kept seeing were flashbacks of that day. I cried until I couldn't cry, and my eyelids started drooping.

We both woke up around the same time later in the day, around two. Aurora got up and stumbled into the bathroom to shower while I got up and went out into the kitchen to cook something for us to eat. In light of everything that had happened, it felt like a typical day since we didn't have anything planned for once. I decided to try my hand at grilled cheese and failed horribly, burning one side of each sandwich I attempted to cook. *"Didn't Aurora teach you how to make these several times? You still can't get it down?"* Zion bullied me. I scoffed at him and kept trying. I was on the last sandwich when Aurora finished her shower and joined me. She looked a million times better than last night, and I was thankful she was strong enough to get through what had happened. She smiled at me and leaned in to kiss me before pouring herself a large cup of coffee and adding a pound of creamer and sugar. "Thank you for getting me home and in bed. I appreciate it." She said between sips of her life-giving nectar. "You don't have to thank me. I am just glad you're doing better." I replied and put two sandwiches on her plate with the burned sides facing down. *"She's still going to taste that, you know. You can't just hide it."* Zion pointed out. I rolled my eyes and internally told him to shut the hell up. "Wow! You got it this time!" Aurora said excitedly as she picked up a sandwich and took a huge bite. Her face went from excited to a poker face quickly as she tried to hide how bad it tasted from me. I stared at the ground, embarrassed. "You did better than the last time. Cooking isn't linear, baby; keep trying until you get it right." She encouraged and continued to eat her sandwiches like the burnt side didn't taste like the rack of a burned-out grill. "You don't have to finish those; we can order something if you'd like." I offered. She shook her head at me, "Nope. You did your best to cook these for me; I'm going to eat them. I appreciate you more than you know." I smiled warmly at her. "And I love you more than you

know.” Boy, was I in love with this girl; it almost made lying to her about hiking with Milo worth it. Well, it wasn’t a lie. We hiked. We just made a few pit stops at a few jewelry stores beforehand. I laughed and choked down my sandwiches and a cup of coffee. “I love you too.” She replied, a little puzzled as to why I was laughing. I waved her off and went out the front door to check the mail on the side of our house. A box was sitting off our porch’s side, closed and sealed with tape. I picked it up and brought it inside, not thinking anything of it, setting it on the kitchen counter. “Oh, I wonder what that is?” Aurora said as she grabbed a knife and cut the tape on top of the box, pulling the flaps open. I was over by the table sorting mail when her piercing scream hit my ears. The knife hitting the floor was the next sound I heard as I flipped around and got to her as quickly as possible. She had backed up into the wall behind her and pointed at the box with a shaky finger. Looking inside, I breathed in sharply at what it contained. There was a cat inside, mutilated. The poor thing’s eyeballs and innards were cut out and laid in a perfect heart around its body. A piece of paper sat on top, with words scrawled out in pure blood. “Your mate will be next—Mark my words. Revenge.” it read. A chill ran down my spine as all the blood drained from my face. I think I finally knew who was doing all of this, and if I was right, we were in for a world of hell.

# Petrified

## Aurora's POV

I stood against the wall, terrified, as Ryan approached the box and looked at the contents with a look of pure horror. Taking a moment to compose himself, he cautiously checked on me. I was frozen, breathing heavily while trying to fend off the incoming panic attack. It was futile, though, since the smell of the dead, rotting animal had reached my nostrils. I was immediately seized in more panic that I couldn't control. My chest started hurting, and tears ran from my eyes like a waterfall as I sobbed hard. Sitting down next to me, Ryan began to rub my back. Gradually a pain started in the back of my head, and I groaned loudly, knowing what was unfortunately coming. "Ryan, don't call 911. Just sit with me and wait for me to come out of it." I said, warning him before the pain started to intensify slowly. He stared at me, puzzled, but nodded in agreement. Curling up in a ball on the floor, I anticipated the pain that was about to have me in its chokehold. Ryan continued to rub my back gently. I lay there and waited for the pain to worsen, but it never did. Ryan's mother appeared in front of me, and this time I could be coherent and not scream in pain. She smiled warmly at me, still just as beautiful as before. A warm, yellow light shone from her billowing hair and dress, illuminating the room around us. "You are a strong woman." She praised, squatting in front of me and rubbing my head while running her fingers through my hair. Like last time, I didn't feel her hand there, just a cold breeze where it should have been. My heart felt warm and fuzzy at her compliment. "It took me years to get used to the pain of interactions like these, but here you are handling it like a champ only the second time we've met." She added as she stood up and practically floated closer to Ryan. I watched as longing and love fought a hard battle in her eyes while she stared at him disheartened. "I'm sure you know who I am now. I miss him more than anything. He

didn't deserve anything he's had to endure in his life. It's my fault he ever had to in the first place." she said sadly, hanging her head. "It wasn't your fault," I said. Ryan's head snapped up next to me as he heard my voice, staring at the space in front of me with pure anger, like he knew what his mother had said. He opened his mouth like a fish out of water, trying to find something to say. I knew him, though; I knew he would say something regrettable out of anger, so I willed him to keep it to himself. "Such a handsome man, isn't he? Even when he's angry." She said, chuckling to herself. "He's always angry," I replied, and we laughed together. "He never told me your name. What is your name?" I hesitantly asked her. She came closer and once again smiled at me. "My name is Willow. I was hoping this time I could try to teach you about being a white wolf since I don't think you have a mentor." She stopped speaking abruptly as a dark shadow started to erratically circle her, startling her. It stopped next to her and started to materialize into a giant, disfigured shadow form. Fear was visible in Willow's eyes as she turned to me and started to yell, shocking me that her gentle, kind voice could reach that volume. "This is what I warned you about with our first meeting Aurora. You have to get out of here, snap yourself out of it. It will feed on your fear, and that will make it stronger. Quickly, you have to go!" "B-but I don't know how!" I stuttered at her, fear paralyzing me as well. She started to drift in and out as she looked around with a panic-stricken look. The shadow beside her started to laugh maniacally, a loud, scary high-pitched laughter that was spine-chilling. It shifted to another form quickly, taking the form of Ryan's father and stalking me slowly. All the while, it was growling and baring its teeth at me. Eyes wide with fear, I started to scramble backward away from whatever this creature was, but I couldn't move fast enough. It grabbed my ankle and yanked me toward it as I screamed. Ryan was shaking my shoulders and yelling my name at me on the other side. "Aurora! Aurora! Come back to me, please! Baby, come back! Please!" I heard him say; it sounded as if I was underwater. "No one can save you

now, baby girl. You are all mine, and I will enjoy killing you slowly.” The creature rasped at me, its breath smelling like pure sulfur. I gagged as it let out another crazy high-pitched laugh. Leaning towards me, its face changed shape again and turned into a blank head with a gaping mouth that took up its entire face. Rows and rows of teeth were lined up inside of it. I was petrified, anxiety taking hold and paralyzing me. I whimpered as it got closer and closer to me when suddenly, he was thrown from in front of me, and Willow’s face appeared in front of me. “Sweet girl, think about getting back to your mate. Let that be all you can think about but do it quickly. I don’t know how long I can hold him off.” She said to me sternly and then turned to face the monster again with a look only a mother could pull off. She looked fiercely protective, as if she would go to war for me at the drop of a hat. I prayed she would be okay as I closed my eyes and focused on returning to my house and to Ryan, who was vigorously shaking and pleading with me. I felt as if I was falling for a split second, and then all was calm, and I could hear Ryan begging me to come back clearly instead of muffled. I opened my eyes and started to take shallow breaths as I started to sob again. Ryan held me close, my head against his chest as he shook with fear, and I was wracked with sobs. “I thought I was going to lose you.” He said, his lips pressed against the top of my head as he gripped me tightly. “You almost did.” Was all I could reply in a broken voice before darkness hit me like a train, and I slumped in his arms.

When I opened my eyes again, I was sprawled out on the couch with a million blankets. Ella sat in front of the sofa with Milo at her side, with Ryan at Milo’s other side. They were all silent, just scrolling through social media on their phones. Attempting to sit up, I groaned at the pain in my head. I was relieved that it wasn’t nearly as bad as the last time, but man, it still hurt like a bitch. Ryan’s body whipped around at the sound of me trying to sit up under my mountain of blankets. He was by my side in seconds, grabbing hold of my arm to help me sit up. “I didn’t call 911 as you asked me to, but Milo trained to be

an EMT for a while, so I called him to come over and help us. I brought them up to speed while you were passed out.” He informed me. I looked over at Ella and noticed she wore a huge, proud smile. Immediately I looked down at her forearm, and sure enough, she had been marked. She saw me look at it and smiled even wider at me. I just nodded my head at her, winking, and she rolled her eyes in response. “Did we witness a silent girl conversation? Didn’t that break the laws of physics? Women are never silent; what is wrong with you two?” Milo said as he lifted Ella’s shirt and stuck his head inside of it, pretending to look for something wrong. She swatted at him and giggled. A big goofy smile lit up his freckled face as he sat back down on the carpet, pleased with himself. “Hey Ryan, could you grab me some medicine for my head? It feels like my brain is going to explode.” I asked dramatically. He nodded and went into the bathroom. The room was awkwardly silent as we waited for him to enter the room again. When he did, I took the pills he handed me. “Now, Aurora, tell us what the hell happened. Don’t sugarcoat it. I heard every word you said during it. I don’t know why you were screaming and why you almost had a heart attack in my arms.” He demanded with a touch of anger in his voice. “*Why is he angry? What happened? What did we do?*” A melodic voice filled my head for the first time in weeks. I almost jumped up off the couch in surprise at the sound of Raine’s voice.” *What the hell happened? I was here, but I couldn’t talk. It was like I was paralyzed; it was scary.*” She retorted. “Raine is back,” I announced to the room, and everyone turned to look at me collectively. Ryan nodded, “That’s great. I’m glad to hear it, but tell me what happened.” He sat next to me and took my hand, rubbing circles on the top of it with his thumb. “Your mother was there; we were talking, and suddenly, this shadow creature showed up and tried to kill me. It took the shape of your father, and then it took the shape of a monster with a million teeth. It was feeding off of my fear. That’s why I almost had a heart attack.” He furrowed his brows at me, “You can’t do that again,

Aurora. I will not risk losing you again. When you passed out, you had no pulse. Your body was cold, so you woke up under a mountain of blankets. I did CPR on you for a few solid minutes until you came around.” I was shocked to see tears forming in his eyes. I cupped his cheek with my hand and kissed him, “I will try not to let it happen again without being more prepared.” I promised. He looked at me seriously, “I hope so because if you die because of something stupid, I will find a way to bring you back to life so I can kill you again.” he threatened as a single tear rolled down his cheek. I wiped it away quickly for him. Everyone in the room laughed at his supposed joke, but I knew he wasn’t joking. “Your mother said you were handsome. Even when you’re angry.” I teased him, sticking my tongue out at him. He laughed, “Of course, she would say that.”

Ryan refused to let me move from the couch for the rest of the night with the excuse that I needed to rest after my near-death experience. Which, to be frank, he was probably right about. He had called a couple of pack warriors to the house to guard all entrances so that we were safe after the dead animal was delivered to our porch earlier. We had ordered Chinese food and were all sitting and watching a comedy show to keep the mood light. Milo was popping random jokes here and there, and Ella was laughing as if her life depended on it, completely smitten with his stupidity. It was adorable, and I was happy for her. After we had finished eating, Ryan and Milo cleaned up our mess and were in the kitchen goofing off. “If Mr. Bossy lets you, do you want to go shopping with me tomorrow? I heard about some new stores in this territory that I haven’t been to. Not to mention, Milo’s apartment is a little drab.” She asked, winking at me. I laughed at her; it was typical that the first thing she would think about doing after being marked and moving to a new pack was shopping. “Yes, we can go shopping. I’ll help you sabotage your new apartment.” I agreed. Everyone was tired, so we decided to call it a night. Ryan started working on pumping an air mattress up for Milo and Ella, so they didn’t have to sleep



on the floor. I tried to sneak to the bedroom alone, but as I stood up, the floor rushed to meet me, and I cried out. Before hitting the floor, a pair of strong arms caught me and hoisted me with a growl. I was met with an irritated Ryan, "I told you to rest." He reiterated to me. "I am tired and want to go sleep in our bed," I said, throwing a mini-tantrum. He raised one eyebrow and cradled me like a baby as he carried me to our bedroom. "Is this what you wanted, you crybaby? Should I sing you a lullaby, too?" he quipped at me, and I growled in response. "You're an asshole." I spat at him. He chuckled and set me gently down on top of the blankets. "I will be back after I get those two lovey shitheads settled in." He said as he shut the door and left. Wiggling my way under the blankets, I got comfy, sprawling across the entire bed. "*Ryan is going to wake you up when he pushes you to your side,*" Raina said, amused. "You know, you're a bitch. But I did miss you when you weren't around." I said out loud. I heard her laughter sound in my head. "*I missed you too. It was weird not being able to comment on stuff.*" She replied. As my eyelids grew heavy and closed slowly, the only thing I could see was that terrible monster, and I knew I was in for a rough night.

# Accident

## Aurora's POV

The following day, I was woken up by Ryan snoring. I wrinkled my nose and turned around, grabbing my phone off the end table. I felt Ryan stir behind me and come closer, pressing his hard self against my ass. I rolled my eyes and looked back at him as he winked and suggestively wiggled his eyebrows at me. There was never a time I would say no to sex, especially morning sex, so I turned back around quickly and pressed my lips to his wildly. He stopped for a moment and looked at me in shock like he was surprised I had jumped him, but I immediately started kissing him again. He wordlessly gave in and matched my intensity, pulling me over top of him. He ran his hands along the curves of my body as our tongues collided. I could feel how hard he was through the thin boxer shorts he still wore as I started to grind myself against him. He groaned and reached to grasp the top of my delicate, purple night dress, "Don't you dare-" I started, but the sound of cloth ripping interrupted me as he ripped the dress right off me and flung it in the opposite direction. "That one was my favorite," I whined at him. "You being naked over top of me is my favorite." He countered in a husky voice, and I sighed. Leaning down, I nibbled on his ear as I continued grinding on his hard length, simultaneously hitting both of our sweet spots. I threw my head back and relished the feeling. "Fuck, you're so wet I can feel it through my boxers," He growled and flipped us over, so I ended up pinned underneath him. I smiled evilly at him and slowly pulled his boxers off for him. Reaching down, I started to play with myself, circling my clit and plunging my fingers inside. Watching me, he bit his lip hard, barely controlled lust filling his eyes. With my hand adequately lubricated, I reached up and started to stroke his dick, hard and fast. He moaned loudly before he could stop himself. "You drive me literally crazy, Aurora." He said in between grunts and noises of pleasure. I captured his lips with mine again, and he deepened the kiss, slowly reaching down to circle my clit with his fingers. My breath hitched, and I moaned into his mouth, losing focus on stroking him as I

desperately ground myself against his hand. He noticed and stopped, eliciting a whimper from me. He grabbed my hand and kissed the top of it, "You don't have to keep going. It's your turn." he whispered as he moved from overtop of me, opening my legs and settling in between my thighs, running his entire tongue up my slit with no warning. My hips bucked as I cried out. He circled his tongue around my clit, licked, and sucked every part of me until I could feel my legs shaking. I grabbed hold of his head and pulled it up, stopping him. "I want to cum with you." I forced out through clenched teeth. He laughed at me, his chin and lips slick with my wetness, "Oh you will, beautiful. Don't worry." then he continued his magic until my back arched against the bed, and I saw stars. Breathing heavily, I urged him back over the top of me and started to kiss him sloppily, tasting myself on his tongue. He lined himself up with my entrance and slammed into me. I gasped and dug my nails into his back at the sensation of being full of him. He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against mine. He started fucking me forcefully, pumping into me repeatedly until I was screaming and quivering with pleasure. The sound of him grunting and groaning joined my cries, and the sound of smacking flesh echoed around the room. He stopped for a second, pulling out and flipping me over, so I was on all fours in front of him. He plunged into me from behind as he reached out, wove his fingers through my hair, and then yanked violently, snapping my head back. His lips met my exposed neck, and he kissed down my back and around my shoulders. Pain mixed with an insane amount of pleasure rocked through my body as he bit my shoulder hard. I fell over the edge, screaming my release and milking his cock inside me as I came even more furiously than the first time. He followed seconds after, calling out my name and filling me up with his hot cum. We both sunk onto the bed, breathing heavily and satisfied. Ryan pulled the blanket up around us as I snuggled into his arms, enjoying the feeling of being against him. "I love you." He said, kissing the top of my head. "Forever and a day," I replied. I felt the rumble of his laughter as I lay against his chest. "Forever and a day," he repeated.

We decided to shower together, a bad idea since we couldn't keep our hands off each other. What was supposed to

take fifteen-twenty minutes ended up taking an hour. We were thoroughly satisfied, though, as we got out and dressed. "I'd like to think we are making up for the lost time." Ryan teased me as he came over and ran his hands all over my body again. I laughed at him, pulling his hands off of me and sticking my tongue out at him. "We have already spent most of the morning wrapped around each other. If we keep going, I won't be able to walk, and I have plans today." He pouted at me and crossed his arms in front of his chest. "Oh now, who's the crybaby?" I mocked. "Not a crybaby; I just want my mate whenever I can have her." He replied, pulling me closer and kissing my neck.

I chuckled and pushed him away. "I mean it. I have plans to go shopping with Ella today. I don't want to spend it waddling around like a penguin." "Alright, Alright, I'll stop. I'm sorry." He said as he laid his head on my shoulder and wrapped his arms around me. "Take one of the pack warriors with the two of you when you leave, please. You need to have some security around you wherever you go. Do not go off on your own, Aurora." He lectured. I rolled my eyes at him, but I agreed, or he wouldn't let me leave.

We walked into the living room and met with Ella and Milo cuddling on the couch. The air mattress had been deflated and folded up and was sitting in the corner of the room, blankets they had used folded neatly on top. "So, did you guys have a fun morning?" Ella said with a sly look my way. Milo chuckled to himself and shook his head. "I thought you weren't going to tease her? We were supposed to pretend like we didn't hear anything." Ella shrugged, "The entire town probably heard them." Ryan and I looked at each other awkwardly. I couldn't believe we had forgotten they were still here. He winked at Milo and walked over for a high-five. "Good going, bro. If the whole world can't hear your girl when you please her, then you ain't doing it right." Milo said as their hands collided and then turned into a fist bump. Ella laughed hard as I felt my face get hot. I must have looked like a tomato with how hard I was blushing. "*Why are you so embarrassed? Everyone has sex, you idiot.*" Raina commented in my head. "So, what do we have planned for today?" Milo

said loudly as he got up to rummage in the refrigerator. “Aurora and I are going shopping together here. I’m so excited to check out the stores on this territory.” Ella said excitedly as she bounced happily in her seat. I nodded and smiled at her warmly. “Are you driving, or am I? I’m ready to go now. We can grab breakfast on the way there. Iced coffee sounds fantastic right now.” The keys to my car suddenly smacked me in the back of the head. “You should drive Aurora; the pack knows your car best,” Ryan suggested through peals of laughter as I glared at him. “Sounds good to me.” Ella agreed as she pulled her converse on. We both gave our men a hug and a quick kiss and set off on our little shopping adventure.

We stopped at a small coffee shop on the way to a nearby Macy’s. We made quick work of the bagels and iced coffee we ordered; Ella was too excited to sit still. We had a jacked pack warrior following our every move discreetly; only he was terrible at being discreet. I could see his bulky form next to the window outside of the shop we were in. It was amusing, to say the least. We threw away our bagel wrappers, grabbed what was left of our coffees, and made our way to the car. I had ordered a bagel for our security guy, so I returned to him and held it out in an offering. He looked at me and then down at the bagel in shock, like he hadn’t expected the kindness. He took it and mumbled a quick thanks as he bowed his head at me. “You don’t have to bow to me. I may be your luna but I am a normal person. Just be respectful; that’s all I ask.” I said kindly to him, and he nodded, smiling at me warmly. We got into the car and took off to our first shopping destination.

My phone rang in my pocket loudly with the ringtone I had set for Ryan as we parked in the store parking lot. This couldn’t be good. “Hello?” I answered suspiciously. Ella leaned closer to me to hear, so I hit the speakerphone button. “Where are you guys? Milo and I are going to go do our guard shift and wanted to ensure you were alright.” Ryan replied, concern lacing his voice. “We are fine; we just pulled into Macy’s parking lot. We are about to go inside to shop.” I said, trying to keep the frustration out of my voice at having to report to him.

“Is Jack still with you guys?” he questioned. “Is that his name? Yes, he has been following us the entire time, pretty badly, though.” I said as Ella started to chuckle next to me. I swear I could hear Ryan rolling his eyes on the other end of the phone at me. He was quiet for a moment, and I listened to another man’s voice in the background. “Ryan, is everything okay? You don’t usually have me check in like this.” I said with worry. “I don’t know. We got another box today, only this one had a live human heart in it, along with another note about you being next. I don’t want to spoil your girls’ trip, but I’m worried about you being out.” He confessed, and I nodded to myself. I knew something was up. He usually left me alone when I was out with Ella.

“We will come home after we are done with Macy’s since we are here already.” I told him, and I heard him sigh with relief as he said, “Is that okay with Ella?” “Of course, we can always go home and online shop together.” She chirped into the phone speaker. “Okay, we won’t be here when you get back. But send me a text when you do so I know you’re home safe. Love you, Aurora. Be safe. Bye,” he said quickly, and the line clicked as he hung up.

We spent a few hours in Macy’s, and somehow, I ended up with an armful of new clothes Ella had talked me into. She had about the same amount as I did, including some new perfume she had wanted to try. We tried all our clothes on to ensure they fit and went to check out. We were laden with bags leaving the store, but we were happy. “So, it looks like we may be having another sleepover tonight,” Ella said, winking at me. I smirked at her, “You’re probably right; both of our mates are way overprotective.” Ella shook her head at me, “They just love us and want us to be safe. It’s the bond that pushes them to be that way.” I nodded in agreement, not having anything to say back to her. We loaded our bags into the backseat and got into the car. “You know, Aurora. You’re like a sister to me. I’m so glad we can still go out and have fun like this. I love you more than you know.” Ella said sincerely to me, her eyes shining at me with love. “I love you too. The same goes for you; you’re the only one I’ll ever go shopping with.” I teased, and she laughed at me. We pulled out of the

parking lot and merged onto the highway that would take us home, Jack following closely behind us. I kept my eyes on the road and Jack at the same time.

Just as I registered the bad feeling starting to swirl in my chest, Jack was cut off by a black van swerving erratically into our lane between us. It sped up, rode my bumper, and I grew increasingly uneasy. “Aurora, what’s going on?” Ella asked me in a pitchy, scared voice. I ignored her and focused on finding a side road to lose the van. My brain is in full fight-or-flight mode. I hit the Bluetooth button on my radio and said, “Call Ryan” I listened as it dialed and rang. Ryan picked up on the second ring. “What’s going on? Jack just called me too.” He immediately said.

“The van is up on my bumper. I will try to find a side road to turn onto to lose him.” I informed. “No, Aurora. Stay where Jack can see you. Do not go off on your own.” He frantically yelled at me. I didn’t say anything, but I followed his command. The back windshield shattered behind us as we heard the discharge of a pistol, scaring us and causing me to swerve a little. “Aurora! Talk to me!” Ryan’s voice yelled through the speaker. Another bang sounded around us, and this time the van was right next to us in the other lane. Pain exploded through my side as I heard my window shatter and felt warm liquid start to soak my shirt slowly. Ella screamed and started to cry hysterically.

“Aurora! Are you okay? Oh my god, there’s blood. There’s a lot of blood.” she reached behind her, grabbed one of the various clothing pieces from one of the bags, and pressed it to my side to try to staunch the blood. “Aurora! What happened?!” Ryan’s voice once again boomed through the speakers. I was starting to feel faint, but I gritted my teeth and sped up, trying to get us home and away from the van. Jack had caught up to us at this point and was attempting to run the van off the road away from the car, but it was futile.

I looked up at the van next to me and saw the pistol pointed directly at my head through the window. Ella saw it, too, and whimpered, “Aurora, I don’t want to lose you. I’m so scared.” I calmly pressed my foot down on the gas as Jack

finally managed to push himself between us as the gun discharged once again, only this time the bullet found its way into Jack's head, and he slumped forward as the car swerved dangerously towards ours. I tried to swerve out of the way to avoid it, but he struck us, sending our car flying in the opposite direction into the opposite lane. He had hit my side, and I had felt the bones in the right side of my body break upon impact. I barely had time to react as a car slammed into us from behind, lurching us completely forward and out of the road. The sound of metal crunching and glass shattering reached my ears. The last thing I remember before I blacked out from the unbearable pain was feeling the car roll repeatedly as Ella screamed in sheer terror and despair.



# LOSS

## Aurora's POV

When I opened my eyes, there was a lot of commotion around me. Sounds of saws buzzing and metal crunching around me invaded my ears. Agonizing pain radiated throughout my body. The car was on its side, and grass poked through the window next to me. The seatbelt was locked and holding me in place, so I had not moved from sitting in my driver's seat. The entire inside of the car was coated in blood, the metallic smell assaulting my nose intensely. The windshield was shattered and covered with dirt and stray pieces of greenery. *"I don't know how we survived that; we are lucky,"* Raina said. Not out of the woods yet, I couldn't feel the entire right side of my body. I looked around me and saw Ella in her seat, contained by her seatbelt, but she was not moving. Panic set in as I noticed she was slumped sideways, blood pouring from a giant gash in her head, and her arm bent in the opposite direction.

I screamed her name repeatedly until my throat was raw, trying to get her to wake up until I was too weak to use my voice. I kept fading in and out, everything around me sounding like I was underwater. *"Aurora! They're cutting you out now, baby. Stay with us."* Ryan's frantic voice came through the mind link. I was too out of it to answer him, unable to remember how to use the mind link. I was tired, and all I wanted to do was close my eyes and sleep. *"Aurora, you've got to stay awake. Please don't fade away; we have an entire life we need to live. Don't you dare close your eyes and give up!"* Raina's voice pleaded with me. My eyes were starting to get heavy and hurt with the effort of keeping them open. Everything in my body hurt terribly. *"Aurora. Don't. You. Dare."* Raina screamed in my head, making me cringe in pain. Everything around me went black as my eyes finally fell shut, and I didn't have the strength to keep fighting.

The next time my eyes fluttered open, my seatbelt was cut, and I was pulled from the car by a firefighter. Pain exploded through my body, and I screamed. *"Ella. Get her*

first.” I said weakly. “We got her out, honey, don’t worry.” the man in the bright yellow suit said gently as he laid me down, and a paramedic ran over to assess my injuries. Ryan’s smell entered my nose in seconds, and he appeared by my side. The paramedic noted my injuries, saying them out loud to Ryan as she checked me out. Each time she spoke, Ryan’s face dropped more and more. Everything muffled around me; I still felt like I was in a bubble. I tried to sit up and look for Ella, but the paramedic had started to strap my lower body to the gurney, and I was rendered immobile. “Ella.” I repeated, my voice weak and barely audible. “Baby, don’t worry. You are going to the hospital now. You will see her soon.” Ryan reassured me with a shaky voice. I turned my head, looked to my right, and saw her. Paramedics and firefighters surrounded her; one was positioned over the top of her body doing compressions on her. Her body moved violently with each compression like a rag doll. “Get her out of here and into the ambulance; she doesn’t need to see that!” Ryan bellowed to the people around us. The paramedic finished the straps, securing my head next, so I was completely immobilized. Then suddenly, I felt myself being hoisted up as my entire world shattered around me. Tears fell from my eyes as I cried silently, too far gone to mourn my best friend properly. Ryan’s face appeared above mine after I was loaded into the ambulance and hooked up to various machines. He wiped the tears from my cheeks and swept my bloody hair back from my face. “She will be okay, Aurora. Try not to think about it.” he said, sadness written all over his face. The paramedics finished their job and monitored me for a second. I was once again fading in and out on the verge of consciousness. *“I promise if we make it out of this alive, I will stop being such a bitch.”* Raina whined. I stared at the metal ceiling above me as words came to me here and there in my little bubble. One of the paramedics was talking about whether I was stable enough not to be life flighted to the hospital instead of driven. Another was marveling at how I was still even awake because of the extensive injuries I had sustained. I closed my eyes and lay there, trying to ignore the earth-shattering pain running through my body. I wished they would put something through the IV to stop it. Ryan’s voice bellowed throughout the ambulance as he screamed at the paramedics

still inside to get out. They protested, but he screamed again, using his alpha aura, and they scuttled off quickly. As I opened my eyes again, I felt pressure against my shoulder as he laid his head on it, and I cried out in pain. He quickly moved away from me, curse words tumbling from his mouth. He put his head in his hands, “How could I have let this happen? I’m supposed to protect you.” He said disconsolate, more to himself than to me. “I can’t lose you. I can’t.” he whispered, then he lost it completely, letting out a loud sob and slamming his fist into the side of the ambulance. He pulled it out of the dent he had made and turned to face me again with tears rolling down his cheeks. “If you pull through, I will spend the rest of my life protecting you. Nothing bad like this will ever happen to you again.” He vowed fervently. “I-” I tried to speak but couldn’t get the words out. Tears once again fell from my eyes without my control. I hadn’t seen Ryan cry the entire time we’d been together. I had been told before I met him that he was emotionless, and nobody had ever seen him cry. I tried to speak again, and only a gurgle came from my mouth. “I love you,” I forced out, barely audible. “I love you more than anything, Aurora. I’m so sorry.” He sobbed, kissing my cheek as gently as he could. I tried to speak again so that I could console him, but only another gurgle came out. This time my eyes went wide as I suddenly couldn’t breathe. “Aurora? HELP!” Ryan screamed at the top of his lungs. Machines around me started alarming and screeching as I started to gasp like a fish out of water, and fear seized me. I could taste blood as it rose out of my throat, filling my mouth and spilling down my cheeks. I struggled for what felt like forever, but it was probably only a few seconds before one of the paramedics shoved a tube down my throat. The last thing I remember was Ryan screaming in fear before I blacked out.

My body felt weightless, like I was floating in complete darkness. I could see a light in the distance growing closer and closer to me until it was right in front of my face. I shielded my eyes at the brightness, and when I looked again, it had materialized into a woman’s figure in front of me. “Oh sweet, Aurora. I hate to see you this way. I hate to imagine the loss you will mourn over.” she said in a kind voice as she raised her arm, cutting the darkness like a piece of paper. A vision

was shining through the cut. It showed me in a pristine hospital bed, broken and battered, with Ryan sleeping in a chair by my side. His closed eyes were puffy from crying and lack of sleep; he looked terrible. The cut closed, and the features of the woman in front of me solidified. Willow stared at me, her eyes full of concern and motherly love. "I have never seen my son cry over anything the entire time I watched over him. He grew a hard heart when I passed away. But sweet girl, he has done nothing but watch over you and cry. He beats himself up for not being able to protect you." She revealed solemnly to me. I stared at her, speechless, as the power and truth of her words washed over me. Ryan loved me more than I thought he had. "You must choose now whether you want to stay or go," Willow said. "Stay or go?" I questioned, finally finding my words. "Yes. Stay or go. Die or live. I know it is not your time yet. But if you choose to go, I will not fault you for it." she explained, her expression beyond serious. I thought for a moment about Ella and how I didn't want to live in a world without her. "Ella is alive. She made her choice; now she must fight the long battle it will take for her to be herself again." Willow said cryptically, like she could read my mind. What did she mean by me mourning a loss if Ella was still alive? It was suddenly apparent that my choice was blatantly staring me in the face. "I want to live, Willow. I want the life I'm supposed to have with everyone I love," I said, startled that my voice was somehow magnified when I spoke those words. Willow beamed at me proudly, "I knew you would make the right choice." Reaching out to touch my nose, light exploded all over my body and shot out of me until I was blinded by it.

I woke up numb, with stars still dotting my vision from the light. I couldn't feel my extremities, nor could I move them. I groggily stared at the white ceiling above me. I assumed I was still in that hospital room, hooked up to a million machines since I had a tube down my throat. I felt it mechanically breathing for me and started to panic over not having control over my lungs. Machines began to alarm around me, "Sshh. It's okay; you needed a little extra help breathing. That's why the tube is there." Ryan's worried voice reached my ears. I couldn't move my head to look at him, so I

continued staring at the ceiling, counting the little specks all over it.

A nurse told Ryan she was pushing some more anxiety and pain medicine through my IV. Calm fluttered over me, and I relaxed, not even realizing I had been tensed up. A doctor made their way into the room, “She went without oxygen for a long time. We aren’t sure what the damage will be.” he said. “The entire right side of her body was crushed; she was in surgery for over twenty-four hours for us to fix it, but it’s still likely she may not recover the use of that side of her body. With her being a shifter, she may heal perfectly. But we don’t know. It’s all a big waiting game,” the doctor added. I continued counting. The doctor left, Ryan shuffled around for a bit, and then my eyelids drooped shut.

Someone stroked my arm gently, arousing me from the dreamless sleep I had been in. “They just took your breathing tube out. Everyone is shocked you are breathing on your own.” Ryan’s face appeared in front of mine as he spoke. He was right; I no longer had a tube shoved down my throat, just a line of oxygen around my nose. I also had an entire body cast on most of my body and a catheter inserted. I didn’t care about any of that. “Ella. Where is she?” I rasped, not recognizing my voice. “Uh, why don’t we talk about that later?” Ryan skirted awkwardly around my question, but I was tired of everyone ignoring me.

“Where the fuck is Ella. How is she? I want to know if my best friend is dead or alive, damn it.” I shakily said in my ugly hoarse voice. Ryan sighed and pulled a chair over to sit next to my bed. He took my uninjured hand and spoke gently to me, “You need to worry about getting better yourself, and then we will go see her. She is alive, but you need to wait until you are better to hear the details. Stress will make you worse.” I just rolled my eyes at him and turned my head to the opposite side, pissed that nobody was giving me answers. He laughed at me, “I’m glad to see you still have your fire even in the midst of your almost dying.” I glared at him, not in the mood for his jokes. “You shouldn’t have survived, Aurora. The entire right side of your body was shattered to oblivion. You had multiple brain bleeds and massive internal bleeding from being shot. It

is a miracle you are here.” He said to me seriously. I didn’t know how to respond to him because I wasn’t sure if what had happened with his mom was real or some drug-induced hallucination. A doctor walked into the room, “Ah, you’re awake. How are you feeling?” He asked me; I recognized his voice from the last time I heard him speaking with Ryan. “I’m okay, I guess. My throat hurts.” I replied. He nodded at me, “Yes, the breathing tube will make you raspy for a while. It will go away slowly.” He turned to Ryan, gesturing for him to follow him outside the room. It didn’t matter if they went halfway across the hospital, I could still hear their conversation, and I was listening.

“Have you decided if you will tell her about the baby or not?” he asked Ryan severely. “*Excuse me, what? Baby?*” Raina commented, echoing my thoughts exactly. The pain medicine was making my brain foggy and slow. “Will the stress hurt her if I tell her? Like, will it make her worse?” Ryan asked. “No worse than she already is; we have counselors here she can talk to if she needs to.” The doctor replied. “I will tell her then. She deserves to know.” Ryan said and walked briskly back into the room. “Ryan, what does a baby have to do with this?” I implored him. The doctor walked behind him and placed his hand on Ryan’s shoulder. “Aurora, before the crash, you were pregnant,” Ryan told me

# Distressed

## Ryan's POV

I watched Aurora's face go from confused to hurt to angry, all in milliseconds. "I was pregnant? How is that possible? I'm on birth control, the shot. I got the first one right before you marked me." She said to me, the gears starting to turn in her brain. "You were five weeks pregnant. It must have happened a few days after I marked you." I knew exactly when it had happened as we stopped using condoms a few days after I marked her. When I told the doctor that information, he informed me that we should have been using condoms for two weeks after getting the first shot. "Wait. I'm not pregnant anymore?" She asked, looking at the doctor for clarification. "You are not." He looked down a little.

"While your seatbelt prevented you from being ejected, it caused a lot of trauma to your stomach. Trauma that a developing fetus couldn't withstand. We performed an ultrasound a couple of days ago before we started your reconstructive surgery and found that there was no heartbeat. We have been watching for miscarriage signs, but you have not expelled the fetus or even started bleeding. If you do not start soon, we'll need to do a D&C, so you don't develop an infection," the doctor explained with a sympathetic look. I went over, brushed the hair out of her face, and ran my fingers through the rest of her hair, trying to comfort her. I looked at the doctor, and he nodded, "I'm sorry for your loss. Have a nurse page me if you need anything." he said as he briskly walked out of the room. I pulled a chair up next to the bed and sat beside her as she cried softly, trying to hide it from me. "You don't have to hide your feelings from me," I told her. She shook her head and started to ramble, "How can I be so upset over something I had no idea about? Like, us having a baby was something I hadn't even thought of yet, but here I am crying over losing it." She said in a shaky, hoarse voice. We were nowhere near ready to have kids yet; we had to get our life settled first. We had to get used to being alpha and luna and learn how to balance that with our lives. We had to ensure things were safe before we could even think about that

possibility. All these things ran through my head as I realized how upset the loss made her. “Aurora, we aren’t ready for a baby yet. We have to get stuff in order and learn balance in our lives before we can think about having a baby.”

I said to her gently but rationally. Before she could answer me, her mother walked into the room. “Mom! Hi!” Aurora called out, her mood changing in an instant. Her mother had been visiting daily, sometimes with her husband, but Aurora hadn’t been awake to see them until now. “Hi, honey. How are you feeling? I’m glad to see your eyes open and a smile on your face. You had us worried for a while.” She replied as she bustled in with a vase of flowers in her hand, setting them down on the little table next to the bed and busying herself with moving Aurora’s blankets around. Aurora furrowed her brows at her mom being extra, “I’m fine, mom.” “Hi, Ryan. I hope you are well.” her mother said to me, nodding her head as she spoke.

I smiled warmly at her, “I am now that your daughter is doing better, thank you, Mrs. Isley.” She chuckled at me, “Oh sweetheart, call me Lilah, please. You are mated to my daughter; the formalities aren’t needed.” Lilah turned to Aurora, “Your father is stuck at work today. He is going to come by tomorrow with me.” she informed her, leaning down to kiss her forehead. Aurora looked up at her mom, smiling happily. “Uh, I am going to go down to the cafeteria to find some food,” I said awkwardly, figuring Aurora would want to tell her mom privately about what we were talking about before she walked in. I gave her a quick kiss and left the room.

I wandered around the cafeteria, not knowing what to do with myself. I wasn’t hungry; I had barely eaten since everything had happened. Too much stress put my stomach in knots constantly. Nathan reported to me whenever he could about patrol details. They were heavier now, with groups of pack warriors stalking around always. No part of the woods or territory lines was going unguarded. Jack’s death had shaken the whole pack; he was a hell of a pack warrior and a giant teddy bear with his mate and kids. I spotted Milo slumped in a corner booth with an untouched food tray in front of him. He and I had bonded more than I ever thought we could through



this experience. I felt for him, though, as his mate was in rough shape, and nobody even thought she would pull through. He had a reprieve from pack duties. Something father would never have approved, so he was able to lumber around the hospital most of his days. I slid in next to him and tapped his shoulder gently; he looked up at me with the sad eyes he always wore nowadays. “Hey, man.” He said as he pulled his tray closer to him so I’d think he was eating; I knew he wasn’t. “You don’t have to pretend around me, Milo. I’m here for you and know what you’re going through.” I reassured him and saw him visibly relax. “How is she?” I asked gently. Tears filled his eyes, and he looked down at his lap, “There is no change. She’s still in a coma; they don’t know when she will wake up. They are testing her today to make sure she isn’t braindead.” His voice shook with the force of emotions he was feeling. Ella had been injured terribly during the accident, had multiple brain bleeds, a fractured skull, and numerous broken bones throughout her body, and had been halfway scalped by a piece of glass from the shattered windshield. She had lost so much blood they almost couldn’t bring her back. Doctors had stitched her scalp and hair back down; it was healing faster than they thought it would.

I threw my arm around him and rested my head on his shoulder, “I’m sorry, dude.” He sniffled in response, grabbing a napkin off the tray and blowing his nose loudly. “Aurora is awake. She has asked about Ella, and I avoided it because I know she will freak.” I added slowly, not wanting to boast about Aurora’s good progress in light of Ella’s bad. “That’s great! I’m happy she is doing better.” Milo said dejectedly. “Aurora’s mom is in there with her. Do you want to get some actual food? Not any of this healthy hospital crap, I’ll pay.” I offered.

Shaking his head at me, “I can’t leave her here alone.” “She won’t know you’re gone; she’s asleep. You need to take care of yourself too, Milo.” I chastised. He nodded as he agreed with me, running his hand through his greasy, unkempt hair. “Do you think we could swing by your house for me to take a shower? It’s closer to the hospital than mine.” “Of

course. Let's go so we can get back as fast as we can." I said, grabbing his arm and pulling him from the booth.

Stopping at a fast-food place, we grabbed a ton of food to drown our sorrows and headed to my house. As we pulled into the driveway, an unfamiliar car was sitting there. Immediately I was on alert, and Milo followed right after me. I unlocked the front door and stepped in slowly, ready for a fight. Instead, I was met with a disheveled Cherry sitting on the floor against the couch. She had no makeup on, she was in tattered clothes, and her hair was all over the place. Her eyes were red like she had been crying for a long time. "Ryan! I'm so glad you are here. I didn't know who else to go to. I need to warn you about what's coming!" She exclaimed as she hopped up off the floor to hug me. I held my arm out to deflect the hug, and she bounced off it. "Oh yeah, you have a mate now," she said, annoyed. "Who is this?" Milo questioned suspiciously. I sighed and turned to Milo, "This is Cherry. She is the daughter of the alpha from the Nightfall pack." I deadpanned. Not excited at all that she was here since the last time she had visited. She'd caused problems then too. "Ryan, my father is dead," Cherry spoke in a shaky voice, tears rolling down her cheeks. I turned quickly and looked at her, eyes wide. Milo looked at us all with a confused look. "What do you mean he's dead? Tell me what happened." I ordered, a little too harsh. "Nobody knows what happened to him. He was found hanging from the streetlamp outside of our house. All of his insides had been cut out and strung around the pole. There was a note found in his pocket when they autopsied him." She reached into her pocket and handed me a folded piece of paper. Quickly opening it up, I read the words with a pit of dread in my stomach.

*"I am coming and will take over your pack when I arrive. Anyone who fights me will be put to death immediately, and anyone who flees will be banned from the pack for the rest of their lives. See you soon, my boy."*

I took a deep, shaky breath, "How long ago did you get this note?" I asked. Zion was growling in my head, making it hard to concentrate. "That is why I'm here. The person who wrote that note was your father, Ryan. He has taken over the

entire pack and brought another “pack” of rogues into our territory. He has dictated that they are now a part of the nightfall pack.” Cherry said, the words falling out of her mouth quickly. Milo stood behind me, his jaw practically on the floor. “He has been making plans, evil ones. He is coming for you and Aurora. He will decimate your pack and Aurora’s old pack so that all of the territories will belong to him, and he will be, in his words, the ultimate alpha. He kept saying that revenge wasn’t enough. He needed to take everything you ever loved from you. I ran and almost got killed. He made some of the rogues shift and attack me.” She rambled as she started to sob, snot running from her nose like a faucet. Stepping closer to her, I awkwardly rubbed her shoulder. She looked over at me with her brows furrowed. “You don’t have to do that,” she said sadly. “What are we going to do, dude?” Milo interrupted loudly. “I don’t know. The only thing I can think is to start rigorous training schedules so we can bulk up and be ready.” I rubbed my chin thoughtfully. That idea wouldn’t work unless I took all the guards out of the forest and off the territory lines. *“Making them do all that will be too much for them to handle. They may be shifters, but they are also part human.”* Zion commented. I nodded attentively and flopped down on the couch. Milo grabbed the fast-food bags and sat down next to me, “Our food is getting cold. I don’t like cold fries.” He started shoving his face as I sat there and thought. Cherry watched him eat with disdain. “If you’re hungry, you can have my food. I’m not hungry.” I said as I offered my bag to her. She hopped up and grabbed it from me, stuffing her face like she hadn’t eaten in days. “How long have you been without your pack?” I asked curiously. “A few weeks. I got to your house two days ago, but I didn’t want to take food from you without asking, and you never came home.” She replied, shrugging. “The bedroom has a closet and a dresser full of clothes. Feel free to take a shower and get into something clean. You can use any products in the shower and eat whatever you want.” I told her, trying to extend some kindness for her risking her life to save ours.

Once they had finished eating and Milo had showered, I still hadn’t gotten far in my head on how I wanted to address the incoming war. I needed Aurora here with me; she was my

voice of reason when I needed it. My head suddenly went fuzzy with an incoming mind link, “What are you doing? Why are you feeling such terrible feelings?” Aurora asked me through the link. Shit, I had forgotten she could feel what I felt through the bond. “I’m at home dealing with some pack business. I will tell you when I get back to the hospital.” I linked back to her. Milo looked at me with amusement, “You’re not going to tell her, are you?” He knew me well, so I chuckled and threw a wadded-up sandwich wrapper at him. “Do you have any ideas?” I asked, starting to feel desperate. He nodded, “Not a good one but a solid one.” “Shoot,” I told him, leaning forward to listen. “Well, we could use some other pack members that are strong enough to defend themselves to be a kind of “Lookout” along territory lines, so we know whether they’re infiltrating or not. The pack warriors would have that time to start to train to get ready for a fight.” He said, as though it was the most straightforward idea to come up with. It probably was; recent events frazzled my brain. “I think that will work,” I said as I stood up. Cherry had fallen asleep under a blanket with her stomach full and a safe place to sleep. *“Aurora might kill you if she finds out you let her stay here while she isn’t here. That will be fun to watch.”* Zion teased.

Milo’s phone started to ring in his pocket, and he picked it up at lightning speed. He listened intently for a second, and then the phone dropped from his hand, shock displayed on his face. I picked it up quickly, putting it on speakerphone. “Who is this, and why is Milo a statue of shock right now?” I asked. A weak but familiar voice on the other end of the phone spoke, “I’m awake. The doctors say I’ve been out for a while. Is Milo still there?” Milo grabbed his phone out of my hand and hung up, grabbing my arm and dragging me to the car as fast as he could. Ella was awake, and I was thankful I didn’t have to deliver bad news to Aurora. *“Well, at least not bad news about her best friend,”* Zion said grimly.

# Hospital Stay

## Aurora's POV

Ryan walked back into my room carrying a tiny, purple teddy bear and a get well soon balloon. “Could you be any cheesier? I rasped at him, smiling from ear to ear. “Well, I had to get you something for not dying on me.” He joked, setting the teddy bear next to me and kissing my forehead. “How are you feeling? Don’t lie to me either.” He pointed his index finger at me and narrowed his eyes. I laughed and winced, “I am hurting, but it is getting better every hour. I started to bleed earlier, so the doctor thinks I will pass everything normally. I am restless, and I want to go home.” Ryan nodded at me, “The doctor said you are healing faster than any shifter he’s ever treated. Must be one of the perks of being a white wolf.” I rolled my eyes as he winked at me. It was time to turn the conversation into something serious. “How is Ella?” I questioned, staring straight into Ryan’s face and rendering him unable to back out of telling me now. He sat in the chair my mom had left next to the bed, “She is still in the ICU, but she is doing better. She was in rough shape and had just come out of a small coma. The doctors didn’t know when she would wake up, so it was a miracle that she was awake now. I was with Milo a little bit ago when she called him. You should have seen his face; I didn’t know he could move that fast.” He told me, rubbing the back of his neck and chuckling. Relief flooded my whole body because she was alive and on the road to recovery. “She was dead, Ryan. I saw her lifeless body when they were working on her, and I was being loaded into the ambulance. I don’t know how she is awake and alert now.” I said as I shook my head in disbelief. He shrugged, “I’m sure we will find out more from Milo soon. He never leaves the hospital, so he knows everything that is going on twenty-four-seven.” I stopped briefly, “How long has it been since the accident?” Ryan’s face was serious when he replied, “A week.” I looked at him, incredulous. There was no way I had been in and out of it for an entire week. Although the state of my hair was a clear indicator that he wasn’t lying, it was matted up and gross behind me. “Did Jack-” I started, but he

interrupted me harshly. “Yes. Don’t worry about that right now. It’s not your fault.” Tears pricked my eyes at his tone and the terrible information, but I nodded in response. “Is there anything else I’ve missed that I should know?” “Nope, you’re pretty much caught up.” He replied in a simple tone. A stab of emotion flitted through the bond, remorse. I raised an eyebrow at him in a clear question, but he avoided looking at me. *“He is hiding something. That’s not good.”* Raina commented angrily in my head. “You’re lying to me.” I accused. He shook his head at me and sighed wearily, “Not now, Aurora. I don’t want to fight with you.” Hurt swirled in my chest at how he could easily dismiss me like that. “I’m going to go to sleep. These meds are making me tired. You should probably go home to clean up and eat something.” I announced quickly, wanting him to leave. “I was at home with Milo, and I’m not hungry. I will curl up on the pull-out couch and read or something,” he replied, throwing a suspicious glance at me. I hit the button on the remote for the lights behind me with the arm that was free from my giant cast and closed my eyes. *“Girl, he better tell you when you wake up, or we will fight him.”* Raina chastised me. I chuckled; how would I fight when I couldn’t move half my body? *“You’re right; there may be a problem,”* Raina replied awkwardly. Yeah, you think?

I opened my eyes to a pitch-black hospital room as the sound of Ryan’s snores reached my ears. The familiar feeling of being stuck in my cast and needing to bend my limbs was back, and I immediately felt uncomfortable. I was glad Ryan was asleep, though, so that I had some time alone to think about everything that had happened. I hadn’t been alone since I had woken up. There was always someone here. Sure, he was hiding something from me, but I was also hiding something. I don’t know how he would take knowing that his mother is responsible for me being alive. *“Don’t tell him until he tells you what he’s hiding. Maybe it will make him tell you sooner.”* Raina suggested. I scoffed at her, that was a petty way to go about things, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to be petty. Raina scoffed back at me and then was silent. I lay there staring at the dark popcorned ceiling above me, reminiscing on the circumstances of my car accident. Until now, the details were

blurry to me, like a memory I couldn't quite reach in my brain yet.

The squeak of the hospital room door interrupted my thoughts, and light flooded the room, making me squint my eyes in pain. Wheels on the tiled floor sounded along with footsteps. I couldn't move to be able to see who was coming because of my cast, so I lay there waiting for them to go into my line of sight, anxiety weaving its way through my chest. A black wheelchair entered my line of view, and I couldn't believe my eyes. There sat Ella, smiling lopsidedly at me with Milo behind her. His hair stuck out everywhere like he had just woken up and jumped straight out of bed. I giggled at his appearance and immediately stopped when I saw how Ella looked. Half of her head had been shaved, and stitches lined her scalp all around her head. Her face was severely swollen on the shaved side, which is why her greeting smile had been crooked.

Multiple body parts had casts on them. She had a bandage on her neck, and her head was supported at the top of the wheelchair. I looked at her, unable to hide how guilty I felt. "Don't you dare start with your pity bullshit. None of this is your fault," she said in a weak, hoarse voice. Of course, she knew how I was feeling. She was like my sister. "We don't have much time; a nurse snuck her into a wheelchair for this. The doctors told her she wasn't supposed to leave her bed, but she insisted." Milo interrupted with an annoyed tone. Ella just shushed him nonchalantly. "We look pretty beat up, don't we?" She joked as she winced in pain from chuckling. "Yes, we do. You more so than me." I agreed. "I'm so glad you are still alive, Aurora. I don't ever want to live in a world where you're not in it." She wholeheartedly said, her expression softening as tears shone in her eyes. "The same goes for you, El. I almost didn't come back because I thought you were dead, but she told me you weren't." I replied, tears threatening to fall from my own eyes.

Realizing too late that I had let out the information I wasn't trying to share. I listened intently for Ryan's snoring, but I knew he was awake and listening. Ella raised her unswollen eyebrow at me in confusion at my statement as

Ryan came over and put his hand on my cheek, “You will be telling me later what you mean by that.” he said in a harsh tone. “I think it’s time we went back to our room,” Milo interjected awkwardly. “You’re right, snookums. I’m tired and ready to go to sleep,” she said slowly, her energy leaving her quickly. Milo turned the wheelchair around and walked out of the room. “I’ll be back whenever I can! I love you!” She called out as loudly as possible, sending herself into a coughing fit. I heard Milo start to scold her as they started down the hallway.

Ryan swarmed me the second they were out of earshot, “What did you mean by that?” he asked me with an annoyed tone. I groaned loudly, “I’m not going to tell you a thing while you have an attitude with me like that.” I replied as he narrowed his eyes at me, “You are lying to me, and you expect me to be all peachy and kind with you?” he bitterly said. I just ignored him, not bothering to respond to him. His face appeared above mine, “So you’re just not going to tell me?” I glared at him, “Nope, not while you’re acting like a child. Now get out of my face.” I grumbled. He scoffed at me and walked out of the room, huffing and puffing, still acting like a child. “Oh yeah, I know you’re lying, so don’t act like your slate is clean!”

I called after him. I heard his footsteps stop for a moment out in the hall and then continue less harsh than before. “*The nerve he has acting like you need to tell him everything when he’s not doing the same for you,*” Raina growled in my head. I agreed with her, but inside I was hurt that he was acting the way he was. It was like he was mad I survived or something. Why did he mark me if he didn’t want to be with me? Why did he keep telling me all the spruced-up lies whenever he tried to be romantic? All these thoughts made my head spin; I hit the nurse button on my remote and waited. A young girl in scrubs with her blonde hair slicked back in a bun entered the room. She had the familiar pack smell emanating from her, “What’s up, honey?” She asked me, concern lacing her voice.

“I know you’ve already given me my meds for the night, but I have horrible anxiety, and the pain is getting worse,” I replied in a whiny voice. I was lying about the pain, but I



wanted her to give me something substantial to knock me out. She nodded, "Let me go ask your doctor if I can give you anything else." She turned the Tv on for me to listen to since I was awake and started to walk out of the room; stopping abruptly, she looked back at me, "And honey? You don't have to lie to me about the pain. Your casts are scheduled to come off tomorrow, so I know you're not in pain. Be honest with me; I'll help you with anything you need, even if I'm not supposed to. You're my luna; I'll do whatever I can." She added seriously. Then continued to leave the room before I could answer her. I sighed as I stared at the ceiling, listening to the wheel of fortune playing in the background. I was desperately trying to keep an anxiety attack from brewing.

The nurse scanned my hospital bracelet and shot something through my IV site. Calm instantly flooded me, and I breathed out in relief. "There you go, that should help you fall asleep as well. It was a double dose of Ativan as us shifters seem to burn through it quicker at our body temperature." She informed me. I looked at her and smiled, "Thank you. You don't know how much you've helped me." She smiled back, "I have anxiety too. I know what it's like, and I could see how hard you held an attack back in your eyes. If you need more, press the button. I have one more dose I can give you before I can't give you any more." I nodded at her and said thank you again. She bowed her head and left the room briskly. My eyes quickly grew heavy, and I fell into a dreamless sleep.

Ryan never came back after he had stormed out, and it made my heart hurt more than anything that he was mad enough to stay away that long. I had mind-linked him multiple times, enough that any regular guy would call me desperate. But receiving radio silence from his end was making me anxious. It was the next day, after breakfast time. I was waiting for the nurses to come in and cut off my cast for another X-Ray. If things were healed well enough, I wouldn't need the cast put back on, and I desperately hoped that was the case. I was uncomfortable and tired of being unable to stretch or move my body. Not to mention how itchy I was under all of this plaster; it drove me insane. "*You're gonna be smelly when*

*they cut that cast off, girl. You've been sweating up a storm. You should be glad Ryan isn't here to smell you.*" Raina pointed out, making me feel insecure. I narrowed my eyes at her comment. A team of nurses swarmed my bed, a few with rotary saws. "You ready to be free?" One of them asked me, and I muttered in agreement. It took a while before the cast was utterly cut off, and Raina had been right. I smelled horrible; with my heightened senses, I was practically gagging from it. The nurses were polite, never once mentioning how stinky I was. One of them helped me sit up for the first time. As my body bent from a rod-straight position, the amount of relief I felt was unmatched by anything in my life. I groaned in pleasure as I moved and stretched the rest of my limbs from the position they had been stuck in. The nurses stared in awe at me. All of them were part of our pack, so the secret about my accelerated healing was safe with them. "We've never seen anyone heal as quickly as you have. It's insane!" One of them, a brunette with heavy makeup, blurted out at me. I laughed nervously and just shrugged my shoulders. "Would you like to shower before we take you to X-Ray?" The same nurse asked. They laughed at me because I couldn't nod my head fast enough. They helped me get undressed and into the standing shower, sitting me on a shower chair under the free-flowing hot water as they pulled the curtain around me, leaving me to do my business. My hair was a giant matted ball behind me, and tears threatened to fall as the thought of shaving my head entered my mind. I wasn't sure how I was going to get it out to be able to wash my hair by myself. The door to the bathroom creaked open, and the shower curtain wiggled back a little as Ryan peered at me from behind it. "Hi," he said, embarrassed. "Hi," I replied, my voice shaky. The gritty sound of my voice had gotten better, and slowly, I was starting to sound normal. Ryan stared at me, a disturbed look in his eyes. I followed his gaze down to my naked body and gasped. Bruises lined almost every inch of my body and were in various stages of healing. It was a scary sight, seeing myself so unrecognizable and beaten up. He seemed to snap out of whatever he felt as he held up a brush and a handful of tiny bottles of hospital conditioner. "The nurses said you might need some help with your hair." He said, pointing to the rat's nest on my head. I nodded at him

slowly and then looked at the ground, embarrassed. “You’re beautiful to me, no matter what you look like, Aurora. I’m sorry for being an ass.” He gently said as he stripped his shirt and jeans off, stepping into the shower in his underwear. He squirted a generous amount of conditioner on my head as he started to speak, “Let’s get your hair untangled. While we work, I will tell you everything. Nothing sugarcoated or left out. Okay?”

# Crazy

## Ryan's POV

As I sat down behind Aurora to brush out the mats in her hair, I almost couldn't take my eyes off the rest of her body. She was bruised beyond belief. Over half of her body was covered in bruises in various healing stages. She was like a bruise-colored rainbow of green, blue, purple, and yellow. "Are you going to tell me what's going on?" She snapped, breaking me from my trance and thoughts, and I sighed heavily. "*You have to tell her regardless; she is the pack's luna. She can't be kept in your safety bubble. Not that she would stay there anyways.*" Zion pointed out. I agreed with him for once, but I couldn't bridge the gap in getting the words out for some reason. I took a deep breath and braced myself for the imminent explosion.

Aurora hadn't reacted the way I thought she was going to. She was surprisingly calm as she listened to me recall what had happened with Cherry and the news she had brought. She hadn't interrupted at all. I slowly brushed out her hair, alternating between the brush and conditioner. "We should have just killed your father." I heard her say darkly. Shock settled in me as I stopped brushing and furrowed my brow at her response. "Aurora, are you okay? Like really, okay?" I questioned with concern. She didn't answer, keeping her eyes trained on the floor before her. I finally got her hair to the point where I could run the brush through it with minimal snags. "I can get the rest." She flatly said. Respecting that she didn't want my help, I moved my chair back and stood up a couple of feet away from her. I watched as she attempted to raise her arms above her head to dump shampoo in her hair. When she realized she lacked the strength in one of her arms to squeeze the shampoo bottle, she flung it angrily. It hit the wall beside me with a harsh **THWAK** that echoed around the bathroom. "*She isn't alright. Something is off.*" Zion whined in my head. I slowly picked the tiny, now cracked and leaking, shampoo bottle up off of the ground and walked over to her again. I lathered her hair with shampoo as I thought about how to initiate the conversation again. I needed to understand what

was happening in her head to help her. After I rinsed the shampoo, I dumped the rest of the little conditioner bottle I had used into her hair, massaging it gently. “Aurora, what’s going on in your mind?” I asked her bluntly, figuring that getting straight to the point was better than avoiding it. “It doesn’t matter.” She tried to stand up, but her right leg failed, and she sank back down. She growled loudly as she covered her face in frustration. I moved, so I stood in front of her and kneeled, so my face was level with hers. Gently pulling her hands from her face, I replaced them with mine on either side of her cheeks. “Aurora. You have got to talk to me. What is going on with you?” She met my eyes briefly, then went back to staring at the tile again. “You have been hiding things from me. You left me here alone and didn’t bother to come back. Your father is why I was as injured as I was and lost our baby. I’m sorry if I’m not fitting your narrative on how I should be acting.” She snapped at me furiously. Moving my hands from her face to my side, I worked hard to school my expression to keep my anger from showing. None of it was my fault, and I hated that she thought it was, “I understand. I’m sorry.” She looked at me, anger flashing in her eyes. “Get out.” was all she said. I shook my head at her, “I’m not going to leave you in here when you can barely stand on your own two feet.” I said, incredulous. “I’ll manage somehow.” she deadpanned. Raising my eyebrows and ignoring her, I grabbed a washcloth and the soap bar next to us and lathered her up. Making sure to wash every part of her body slowly and thoroughly so that the wicked smell her cast had left mainly was gone. Then I looped my arm under her and helped her out of the shower, towel-drying her off as we went. Every minute she was gaining more and more strength; now, she could stand on her own and pull on a hospital gown with minimal help. I had taken that time to tug my clothes back on, sans underwear, since they had gotten wet in the shower. As I bent down to help her pull on the mesh underwear the hospital had given her, the metallic smell of blood hit my nose sharply. Looking down, I found the smell’s source was on the floor in front of me and running down Aurora’s inner thighs. “Uh. You’re bleeding.” I pointed out as my cheeks pinked up from embarrassment. Awkwardly standing up, I took a step back from her. I had no experience

with these things as I had no siblings and was only raised with my shithead father. If she had any reaction, her face didn't betray it. I hit the nurse button on the call remote, and we waited, the silence and tension between us palpable. A male nurse made his way to the room, stopping in front of us, taking in the smell and seeing the blood on the floor. He nodded, "It was bound to start sooner or later, honey. I will send one of the ladies in. They will be better suited to help you," he said as he briskly walked out of the room, calling for another nurse to come in.

The nurse settled Aurora into bed after helping her line her underwear with a couple of heavy-duty pads, giving her some more pain medicine, and explaining how the whole miscarriage process would go. Aurora stared at her with a blank expression on her face the entire time, and I was seriously starting to worry about her. It was unlike her to be so impersonal; seeing her be that way made me feel uneasy. "Are you hungry?" I inquired, and she nodded at me. "I don't want hospital food. I want gross, greasy fast food." I smiled at her; seeing a little bit of her old self shining through gave me some hope she was doing better than I thought she had been. "Taco Pete's?" I said, chuckling. She smiled at me, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Yes," she responded. Grabbing my keys, I hugged her and kissed her cheek before I swept out of the room. As I got to the doorway, though, I heard a quiet "I love you." come from her. "I love you too," I called back to her. I hoped she would open up to me more after I brought her favorite food.

Sitting on the driver's side of my car, I pulled my phone out to check for updates. I had given Cherry a burner phone and told her to text me if anything was wrong. I had no texts or calls, so I assumed everything was okay on her end. I quickly put a mobile order in for Taco Pete's and then sped off to pick it up.

After Aurora had eaten, she perked up quite a bit. While I was gone, they took her for her final x-ray to ensure her bones had no lasting effects from the accident. I had walked in on the tail end of the doctor explaining to her that her bones were denser now from having been broken, so if anything,

they would be harder to break in the future. He took his leave, bowing his head to me as I unpacked the food from the flimsy paper bags. Currently, I was perched in the chair next to Aurora's bed, holding her hand while we watched her favorite show, "Charmed." I would give my right nut not to have to watch this stupid show with her, but if it made her happy, I'd do anything. It was getting late, however, and I was urging her to get some rest so she could continue healing.

"It's only eight pm, Ryan. Only old farts go to bed this early," She snapped, glaring at me. "It was just a suggestion, baby. I want to see you get completely better. The pack needs its luna." I gently told her, trying to remind her that getting better wasn't just for herself. "I know that you're right. But I don't want to deal with any responsibilities just yet. I need my brain to heal from the trauma first." She admitted. I nodded, agreeing with her. "*You don't have to do anything until you're ready to.*" Zion scoffed in my head, "Here's to hoping that nothing major goes on while she's not doing anything," the snarky asshole said. I pictured myself punching him, and he growled at me but remained quiet. Aurora yawned loudly, "I guess I am an old fart." she chuckled. I laughed and kissed her hand, "Ready for bed then?" She nodded again and looked down at her hands that she had tangled in the blankets with her anxiety. "Will you sleep with me?" she asked in a small, shaky voice. I squeezed into the bed beside her and pulled her head onto my chest. "Of course, I will, beautiful." As I listened to her soft breathing, I found myself dozing off.

Loud sobbing abruptly woke me up. I groggily sat up and looked around, trying to find where the noise was coming from. To my surprise, it was coming from Aurora. She had turned away from me and had somehow curled herself into the fetal position. She was wailing, despair emanating from her. "Baby, what's wrong?" I asked in confusion, still half asleep. She didn't respond to me, and worry slammed into my chest, quickly waking me up completely. "Aurora!" I shook her shoulder, trying desperately to turn her towards me. A nurse came running into the room, her long blonde hair was swept up into a bun on the top of her head, and she wore pink scrubs. She had concern etched on her face as she flipped the lights

on. She walked over to the side of Aurora's bed and kneeled, rubbing her back softly. "My name is Cindy. I have been the nurse working nights since Aurora was admitted. She has been struggling very hard the last few nights. I thought having you here with her might help, but it hasn't." I just stared at her trying to make sense of what was happening. "What is she struggling with?" Cindy looked over at me incredulously, "Are you joking? She was in a giant car wreck and saw her best friend's dead body. The trauma from that alone would drive a sane person crazy, and to top it all off, she is going through a nasty miscarriage. Nobody is strong enough to withstand all of what she has gone through." As it fully sank in, I had no reply. She was right, and I had been selfish not to realize that. Cindy was still kneeling, whispering to Aurora. "You're going to be okay, honey. You are a strong, beautiful woman who will get through this. Ella is alright, Ryan is alright, and you are alright. Just breathe, honey." Adding my hand to Aurora's back and rubbing in circular motions, she turned around to face me. I nodded; Cindy then mouthed at me that she would be right back. I took in Aurora's puffy, red face and immediately softened. Wrapping my arms around her, I pulled her close to me and squeezed. She took a giant deep breath as she snuggled into my chest. The tears that remained on her cheeks soaked through my t-shirt, and I felt their moisture against my chest. Cindy returned to the room with a tiny vial of medicine she was sucking out with a small syringe. Raising my eyebrows at her in question, she ignored me, stuck the needle end of the syringe into Aurora's IV tube, and pushed the plunger down. "Ativan. Push the button if she needs more," she informed me and quickly walked back out, shutting the door behind her. Immediately Aurora relaxed even further into my arms, and I marveled at how quickly that medicine worked. "I love her. She's so nice and caring," she said dreamily, her words muffled as she passed out against me. "*We have to get her to talk tomorrow. She needs to, or I have a bad feeling that this will get worse, and we are out of our element here.*" Zion commented. I just wished he'd shut up and stop reminding me about things I already knew about. He growled at me in response.



The next morning, I was in the car returning to our apartment. Aurora had asked me to go pick up some comfy clothes and some of her underwear. She was growing tired of being in a backless hospital gown, and with the mesh underwear being see-through, that didn't help either. I had been checking my phone for the past few hours, surprised to see I hadn't gotten any texts from Cherry. I was sure she was sleeping and hadn't remembered to text me beforehand. Leaving the car running, I jumped out and bounded quickly to the door. This would be a quick trip. Just check on Cherry and grab clothes and toiletries for Aurora. I started to make a mental checklist of the stuff I was about to grab as I went to unlock the front door. However, I was puzzled when I turned the doorknob and found it already unlocked. Why was the door unlocked? Cherry was supposed to keep the door locked and only answer it for me, Milo, or Nathan.

Every hair on my body stood up with the awareness that something was wrong. Opening the door, the strong, acrid smell of death assaulted me. Dread knotted in my stomach like a heavy weight as I braced myself and stepped inside, having to pull my t-shirt up over my nose to be able to bear the smell. The lights were still on, the TV was still on, and the bouncing screensaver was showing. There were flies all over the walls, but they were the worst on the couch. Stepping closer to the couch, the smell overpowered me, and I started to gag. I rounded the corner quickly, trying to get this over with. I covered my mouth in horror at the gruesome sight before me. A very dead, very naked Cherry was sprawled out on the floor in front of the couch, her face contorted in a permanent scream of pain and terror. Her pelvis to her stomach had been flayed open, and all of her organs were torn out and laid next to her in various piles. Her breasts had been cut off, and there was blood everywhere, in puddles, stickily splattered across surfaces and walls. Her body was littered with cuts all over the entirety of her limbs, and her fingernails had been torn off as well. The smell had me retching at that point as I made my way outside to vomit in the grass.

Wiping my watery eyes with my sleeve, I pulled my phone out and speed-dialed officer Morgan. He answered on

the first ring with a shaky voice. “Uh, hello, Ryan.” “Hi, officer Morgan. I have a little issue here at my apartment. Can you come down here?” I asked him. “Um, sure I can. But Ryan, I have a small issue here on the territory line you may need to come to resolve before I can get there.” He replied before I heard a slight struggle, and a familiar voice invaded my ears. “Hi, son. Have you been getting my little presents?” My father asked in between crazed laughter.

# Bloodlust

## Ryans POV

My mouth dropped to the floor, hearing my father's voice. However, I didn't have much time to be surprised because he spoke again. "I'm at the territory line closest to the hospital. I know your dear Aurora is there now, my handiwork, I might say. You can get here and talk, or I will have every one of my warriors storm that hospital, and they won't hesitate to kill everyone in their path. You've got twenty minutes." he threatened. The line clicked, and the call abruptly ended. I sighed, "*I guess that nasty site in the apartment isn't getting taken care of any time soon.*" Zion commented with disgust, and I nodded solemnly. Cherry had been growing on me; the girl was like an annoying little sister. I was shocked at the deep sadness I felt gnawing at my chest for her, oh, and anger. Immense anger at my father. I fumbled for my keys, grabbing them from my pocket and sliding into the driver's side.

*"You promised Aurora you wouldn't keep anything else from her."* Zion reminded me as I turned the key, and the car's engine rolled over. He was right. I picked up my phone and clicked the call button on Aurora's contact. She picked up on the third ring, "Hi! Where are you? You weren't supposed to be long; I've been worried." She said, concern in her voice. I took a deep breath, "Do you remember when I said I wouldn't keep anything from you?" Her reply came quickly, "Yes, why?" I rubbed the back of my neck with my free hand, "Well, I walked into our apartment and found her, um, dead." Radio silence met me from the other end of the phone, so I continued, "I tried to call officer Morgan, but he was dealing with something on the territory line closest to you. That something is my father, and I'm not sure if he is bluffing or not, so I am heading over there now to take care of it." Silence still greeted me until she spoke slowly and with intent. "Call Nathan, Milo, and all of our pack warriors and have them meet you a few minutes after you arrive. Tell them to stay hidden, and I will also meet you there." "Aurora-" Click. The call ended before I could tell her to stay there.

She is not ready to be in a battle, let alone to get out of the hospital. Fury filled me at the thought of her getting hurt again. I slammed my fists into the steering wheel until they ached and repeatedly screamed until my throat was raw. Then, not believing what I was about to do, I picked up my phone and dialed Max's number. He picked up instantly, and I didn't give him a chance to say anything, "I need your help; bring your pack warriors to the territory line near our pack hospital, please." I desperately said, hoping he wouldn't turn me down. There was quiet on the line for a few seconds, "We will be there." he finally replied. I pulled out of the driveway with five minutes to spare.

Walking through the woods, I could smell Aurora before I sensed where she was. I cursed under my breath, even more, pissed off that she was here. Milo felt my anger and put his hand on my shoulder. "The pack warriors are around the perimeters. Silvercrest is also around the perimeters of their side of the territory. We got this, bro, I promise." he mind-linked me. I turned and smiled at him, thankful that he was always good at comforting me. The feelings I was picking up from my bond with Aurora were also worrying me; she was slowly but surely losing her mind, and I didn't know how to help her. My thoughts were abruptly interrupted by a loud voice ahead of us; I rolled my eyes. "Well, well, well, I didn't actually think you'd show, son." my father's voice boomed as he stepped out from behind a large tree.

### **Aurora's POV**

"You can't leave the hospital yet; you're not recovered enough," a nurse said to me snidely. She had long brown hair pulled up into a high ponytail and large, square metal framed glasses. I don't think she remembers that I am her luna and not her equal; I would have to pull the rank card. "I'll do what I want; don't forget who I am. I'm your luna; show some respect." I said with authority, and she bowed her head in response, cowering. "Are there any clothes I could wear that aren't a hospital gown here?" I asked her. Nodding, she quickly took off down the hall. I hated making people feel that way, but I wanted to kill the bastard who did this to Ella and me. If that took being a royal bitch to get there, I would do it.

There was no question I would be the one to end him. I stood up from my bed, my right leg shaking under my weight but holding me up. Gritting my teeth, I forced it to move to take small steps in front of me until I was confident in my ability to walk. The nurse returned with a heap of folded clothing, “I snatched these from the break room from some of the other nurses.” I nodded, “Do you have a bag? Preferably one with a drawstring?” Turning around, she grabbed a hospital bag from the closet. As she handed it to me, she asked, “Do you need help getting dressed?” I shook my head, motioning for her to leave. She bowed her head and wished me good luck, then she took her leave, walking briskly from the room. I could hear her gossiping about the current situation with a few other nurses as I pushed a pair of leggings and a tank top into the bag. *“It’s going to hurt like a bitch when you shift. Your bones are still healing.”* Raina reminded me, likely preparing me for the incoming agony. I closed my eyes and shifted. The awful sound of my bones cracking filled the air, along with my screams. It hurt more this time around than it did for my first-ever shift. Once I had shifted into my complete wolf form, I bent down and took the bag into my mouth as I bounded out of the hospital room. The right side of my body seemed to have difficulty cooperating with the rest, but I forced it forward. Nothing was going to stop me. I slammed into the hospital’s front doors and continued my ascent into the woods next to me. *“Let’s do this!”* Raina said, urging me on.

Dropping my bag next to me, I stayed in the back. Hiding behind trees as I watched Ryan, Milo, and Nathan walk through the small clearing. Not only could I smell our warriors in the trees behind me, but I could also smell the foreign smell of another pack. I would only approach when it was time. My mouth stayed in a permanent scowl as I growled softly. I would not be weak this time. I will never be weak again as long as I’m alive. Ryan looked over in my general direction, and I heard a stream of expletives fly out of his mouth softly. I chuckled, pleased that I could do something for myself for once. Milo looked at him, and my head suddenly went fuzzy as I heard him mind-link Ryan. I was shocked to learn that Silvercrest was also here to back us up. My attention was caught by John stepping out from behind a tree. He started to

leer and taunt Ryan, and fury hotter than the sun filled my body quicker than ever before; I involuntarily snarled. “Don’t call me son.” Ryan spat at him, to which John laughed in response. “Oh, but don’t you realize? Your blood says otherwise, even if you deny that you’re my son. You will always be like me in some way. Not even your idiot mother could help with that.” “I will never be like you. I have spent my entire life trying to be the complete opposite of you, and I always will.” Ryan replied, furious. John laughed again, this time evilly, as he made a “come forward” motion. Men and women of all shapes, sizes, and colors started to step out from behind trees. Each one had a wicked smile and raised scars covering most of their bodies, marking them as rogues who had to fight for their spot on the totem pole in the rogue world. If Ryan was surprised, he didn’t show it. He stood tall, glaring at his father, immovable, “What do you want?” “Boy, you know what I want. Why do you think I let Cherry get to you to tell you? You really don’t think she would have escaped from me if I wanted her dead? I needed her to get information to you, nothing else; she was just a useless pawn.” he replied, amusement lacing his tone. When Ryan didn’t respond, he continued, “I want you to step down as alpha and hand the pack over. You will help me take over the Silvercrest pack then I will publicly execute you and your whore of a mate. I could use you for fighting; you’d be a great temporary asset.” Ryan and I both growled simultaneously, “Don’t call her that. I will never step down; you’re deluded if you think I would ever give up my pack to you. You don’t deserve it. You never did, you worthless fuck.” John raised his eyebrows and smirked, “I didn’t want to have to do this. I wanted you around to help me rise to power, but if this is how it has to be...” he trailed off and raised his hands in the air in an obvious signal, ordering his warriors to attack. Obediently they followed their orders and started to rush the three men, who instantly got into fighting stances. Two men, his new beta and omega presumably, came to John’s side, and I listened intently as he gave them orders to get into the hospital to kill me. “Spare nobody until you get to her.” he finished. I bellowed with wolfy laughter. He tried this before and got nowhere. Why is he trying again? Taking off running, they didn’t realize I was

crouched nearby as they ran past me. I took chase as they picked their pace up, fear taking hold of their expressions as they realized I was faster than them. The excitement of hunting someone down took over as I tackled one of them to the ground. He smelled like adrenaline and sweat as he shook from fear. The strong smell of urine assaulted my nose. He had pissed his pants. I gave him a sinister wolfy smile before I tore his throat out with my razor-sharp teeth and left him bleeding out in the dirt. His cowardly friend had gotten a head start, so I ran after him at full speed, blood running down my chest and staining it bright red. Exhilaration and adrenaline burning through my blood. Catching up to him, I took him down as well, only noticing that he had a dagger when he swiped my ear with it, and I growled at the sharp pain. He screamed as I went in angrily for the kill, tearing his throat out viciously. He started gurgling and gasping for air as he thrashed until he bled out, and the fight left him. Satisfied, I turned and bounded back to the clearing, where I could hear the indistinguishable sounds of fighting. The monster in me was satiated, for now. She wanted to kill more and express her power. Raina whined in my head, *“This isn’t good, Aurora. Bring yourself back; you’re slipping further and further away.”* I ignored her.

I returned to the clearing, finding that every warrior was fighting while John sat guard in front of his tree. Some were shifted, and some were human and going hand to hand. Ryan was fighting with a rogue about two times his size. I shifted back to my human form behind the giant tree I had been hiding behind and pulled on the clothes I had brought with me. I was already stronger than when I had left the hospital and was ready to spill more blood. With a battle cry, I charged into the fight and fought side by side with Ryan. We dropped four men in succession together when a fifth came up behind me and punched my right side. Grunting with the pain, I turned to face him with speed unmatched by his. I grabbed him and placed him in a chokehold while Ryan ran up and slammed his fist into his face. A loud crunch accompanied a significant spurt of blood as he was knocked unconscious, slumping quickly to the ground. I kicked his head over and over again until he was unrecognizable. A bloody piece of rogue meat, I laughed maniacally at the comparison.

“Aurora! Stop! He’s dead! We aren’t trying to kill them. STOP!” Ryan screamed at me, grabbing ahold of me and pulling me back from the body, breaking the trance I had been in. I met his eyes briefly and saw genuine concern in them. I didn’t care. The more blood that was spilled, the better. There needs to be retribution. I pushed away from him to look around the clearing. There were fights all around us, and everyone was engaged in one. More of John’s men lay in the dirt than ours, which seemed promising. “Where’s Max?” I shouted, surprised by how strong my voice sounded. Ryan scanned the clearing and found him quickly. He fought with a more diminutive warrior and had the upper hand.

We started to jog to him when I was suddenly whipped back by my hair. I gritted my teeth as I felt it come free from my scalp. Raina whined in my head loudly at the sudden pain in my scalp. Flipping around to see who had grabbed me, I wasn’t shocked to see John standing there with a massive portion of my hair in his hand, rubbing it like a pet. I watched in disgust as he brought it up to his nose and took a huge whiff, “You smell just like my old wife. Crazy, actually.” he said, unhinged. “I will kill you. Mark my words, you useless piece of shit.” I spewed venom in my voice and spit at him. Suddenly Ryan came running at him, barreling into him and knocking him down. He pulled out a dagger and unsheathed it quickly but carefully. The smell of wolfsbane smacked me in the face, and my eyes widened in excitement. Ryan took the knife and carved it down his father’s entire left side as he struggled against him, starting from his forehead down to his ankle. Not deep enough to kill him, but enough to hurt like a bitch. John grunted from the effort of holding his screams back. Wolfsbane causes more pain than usual and it took longer to heal. I looked behind me at the fight around us, and I laughed, “Looks like you’re running out of men, dear father-in-law.” I sneered. He frantically looked around at who he had left fighting for him.

“Retreat! We haven’t won today! Save yourselves and meet me at pack headquarters later.” he yelled desperately. Men around us dropped everything, shifted, and took off in opposite directions. The clearing was now littered with torn



clothes and the bodies of the fallen men, most of whom were only unconscious. I raised one eyebrow at him, acting puzzled. “Who said you were leaving this forest alive?” I could feel myself starting to slip further and further away from sanity. Ryan looked up at me, puzzled by the feelings coming through the bond. That moment of distraction was enough that John could slam his fist into Ryan’s chin and knock him off balance. I laughed crazily as he got up and took off, shifting mid-run. I laughed, crazed, then shifted. It was time to hunt. “Aurora! Wait!” Ryan called after me, but I didn’t hear him over the bloodlust in my brain. I had gone Feral, and I was going to make sure John paid the price for what he had done to Ryan and me. I would tear the motherfucker into pieces.

# Fire and Fury

## Aurora's POV

I ran after John with a fire burning through my veins, no longer hearing any sense or reason. Froth lined my jowls and flew off as I ran. This man was responsible for all the loss I had almost endured. He was responsible for Ryan's shitty childhood. This man was cancer to the whole world, everything he touched turned to shit, and I wasn't going to miss the opportunity to cure it. Running blindly, I relied on my senses to tell me where John was going. He was quite a bit ahead of me, and I could have caught up with my extra speed, but I was lazy. I wanted to play mind games and make him think he was winning by letting him gain some ground. "*Aurora, you have to reign yourself in. This isn't who you are.*" Raina pressured me in my head. I growled at her and picked up the pace. I could hear his breathing picking up and smell the adrenaline starting to run out. He was getting tired, and it was only a matter of time before the old man would give up. I let out a sinister wolfy laugh, letting the excitement of the hunt take over me again.

The sun was high in the sky as time passed by. I was surprised that we were still going. At this rate, he was bound to drop soon. Then it hit me; his scent was gone. Completely wiped out. I quit running abruptly, my paws skidding in the dirt under me until I completely stopped. Looking around in confusion, I tried to pick his scent back up again. I sniffed around trees and in the underbrush around me, and it was gone. I snarled and started digging at the earth beneath me furiously. Where could he have gone? How could he have escaped me? I shifted back and sat crouched and naked, trying to think of ways he could have run. Another wave of intense anger hit me as I stood up.

A tree that had the misfortune of being in my path took the brunt of it as I slammed my fist into it repeatedly until I heard the bones in my knuckles snap, and there was a hole in the tree. Wait. A hole? I circled and found that the tree was hollow, moss lining the entire entrance. Crawling in, I curled

up into a ball, hugging my knees. The pain in my hands brought a sense of relief, something else to focus on besides how angry and hurt I was. “Aurora, where are you?” Ryan mind-linked me. Grabbing my head with my bloody, mangled hands, I ignored him. I wished I could turn it off and everyone could leave me alone.

Ryan didn’t mind-link me again, but I could smell him searching for me. He also had some familiar smells that I couldn’t place because my mind was so bewildered. Slipping out of my hiding place, I climbed the steep hill that lined our territory. This hill eventually leveled out and had been turned into a sightseeing place since it overlooked a giant river. Dark thoughts littered my brain, telling me everyone would be better off without me. I planned to jump from the ledge into the river, praying that it would end everything quickly. Ambling to the top, I heard Ryan shout my name. Shit. He had found me. I wouldn’t have as much time as I thought to complete this. I took off running up the hill, slowly but surely making my way to the fence lining the top.

### **Ryan’s POV**

I spotted Aurora after looking for her for hours. My heart was jumping in my chest as I started to run towards her, calling after her parents to follow. They yelled back and started running behind me. Aurora was going to the top of the overlook, and I knew in my heart that she had bad intentions. It scared me beyond belief. I don’t think that I have ever run so fast in my life. I was at the middle point of the hill when Aurora reached the top and disappeared from view. Please, please, please let me get to her in time.

I reached the top of the hill, out of breath and sweating like crazy. As I crested the top, I found Aurora sitting on the other side of the railing, naked and dangerously close to the edge. Her knuckles were bruised and bloody. “Aurora, baby. Talk to me. What’s on your mind?” I said as I cautiously took a step towards her, and she inched further away from me and even closer to the edge. “Don’t come any closer. I’m only sitting here waiting for you so I can say goodbye,” she replied impassively. My eyes went wide as I realized what she was

saying. “Aurora, don’t do it. I love you. We have our whole lives to spend together yet.” She shook her head, “You don’t want me. You can find someone better than I am, stronger.” Just then, her parents crested the top of the hill, and her mother gasped and then a sob as she took in the scene in front of her. She held her arms out and looked at her daughter desperately, “Aurora, come here and stop this nonsense.” Aurora was quiet as she took in the sight of her terrified parents, but she made no move to come over to the other side of the fence. “Aurora. Please.” Her father begged with his hands covering his eyes, trying to respect her nakedness. Aurora’s resolve was slowly crumbling, and I could see it on her face. Tears started to cascade from her eyes as she reached out her arms.

“Mommy?” Lilah reached out and walked towards her, grabbing her hand, “Yes, baby girl. I’m here. Come here.” Relief filled my chest as Aurora started to climb back over the fence, but it was short-lived. Out of nowhere, someone came running out of the forest to our left and slammed into Aurora. Everything seemed to move in slow motion as I heard my father’s evil laugh and felt Aurora’s piercing fear through the bond mixed with my own. Terror shone in her eyes as they locked with mine just before she toppled over the cliff, yelling my name. My heart stopped in my chest, and I fell to my knees with grief. “Ryan, I need your help!” Lilah screamed, snapping me out of my stupor. She was leaning over the fence, her face red and strained. “You idiot, get the hell over here and HELP ME!” I ran over, seeing that Aurora was holding onto Lilah’s hand with everything in her. “I was wrong. I’m not ready to die yet.” Aurora said, sobbing, the side of her face bleeding from having scraped the rocks as she fell. As I helped pull her up over the cliff’s edge, her mother took her into her arms. They both shook with fear and sobbed as Lilah rubbed Aurora’s hair.

It was then that I turned to face my father. Aurora’s father had been sparring with him a few yards away and got a few good punches. This was my fight, though, and I intended to take it. I ran over, pushing her father out of the way, then started to pound mercilessly on my “father.” He laughed and spat blood in my face, “You think you’re going to win today?

You're sadly mistaken." Sharp pain flooded my stomach as I felt a familiar warmth trickle from it. The smell of wolfsbane hit my nose just as the pain intensified. Reaching into my pocket, I realized my dagger was gone. I looked down and found it lodged in my stomach. The fucker had stabbed me with my own dagger. I fell onto my side next to him, gasping and yelling in agony. He stood up with a dark smile as he towered over me.

"If I remember, this scene looks familiar. It would help if you had learned from our multiple training sessions that you would never beat me. You've never been strong enough," he said, kicking my side, causing the dagger to slide in deeper. "You see, John. That's where you're wrong." Aurora's voice came from behind me, solid and unwavering. She walked with purpose towards him, like a naked warrior, "He may not be strong enough alone. The point of having a mate is that you are the strongest together, not alone. The universe chose him for me and me for him. We WILL defeat you at our strongest, together." As she was talking, she walked menacingly toward him, making him step back closer and closer to the overlook fence. "You are worthless, cancer to the world. Willow deserved a hell of a lot more than you." With those last words, she slammed her fist into his face, grunting at the pain it caused her already mangled knuckles. Losing his balance, he toppled over the edge of the overlook, screaming as he plummeted into the water below. I saw her come towards me with concern in her eyes before the world spun around me, and I blacked out.

"Ryan, my dear sweet boy. Wake up." A warm voice called to me through the darkness. Opening my eyes, I saw a woman with long, flowing blonde hair. It was so bright it was almost like she was shining. She had a kind, loving face. *Mom*. I ran to her and hugged her tightly. She hugged me back fiercely. "I am so proud of you; you have no idea," she said, glowing tears glistening on her face. I looked at her with tears welling in my eyes, "I'm so sorry I didn't help you when he-" She put her hand up and stopped me, "I never want to hear you apologize again for something you couldn't control. I have heard you apologizing for years, Ryan. It was not your fault." I

nodded, knowing that I had the same resolve as her and that we'd be here forever if I disagreed. Not that I would have minded, I've missed her. "We don't have much time here, it is taking me a lot of energy to be here, and it will run out soon," she said as I nodded. I had researched spirits before, and I knew the facts. "I have some important stuff to tell you. First off, Aurora is NOT okay. She needs help. Get her that help." She continued, but I stopped her. She gave me an annoyed look but let me talk. "I thought I was dead?" I questioned. She shook her head, "No, son, you aren't dead. You're in between it, but you aren't going to die. This is more like a dream, which is why we can touch. Now, your father isn't dead, Ryan. He shifted before he hit the water, which helped him avoid the rocks. I wanted to give you a warning since I won't be able to help much more than that. I'm sorry that I haven't been there for you." Tears started to roll down her cheeks even faster. Reaching up, I wiped a tear from her cheek and looked at her with emotion. "You don't ever have to apologize for anything, mom. You were taken from me way too soon. You protected me for as long as possible, and I am thankful for that." She closed her eyes and smiled, "I always knew you'd turn out better than your father. I love you, baby." Her light started to dim, and she slowly started to fade away. "I love you too, mom." I choked out between my tears as she smiled wider and disappeared entirely. An immense feeling of love and pride filled my chest at the thought of her being proud of me. The idea of meeting my only goal in my life made me want to jump for joy. I would never turn out like my father.

I groaned as I opened my eyes and saw a blinding white ceiling above my head. My stomach was rolling with nausea and pain. Aurora sat in a chair next to my bed, her head resting on the side of it, and she was fast asleep. I shifted to try to stretch a little bit as my limbs were sore from being in the same position for so long. Aurora jumped awake, standing up and instantly going into freak-out mode. She fired out questions at me fast as lightning, "Oh my god, you're awake. Are you okay? How are you feeling? Do you need anything?" I chuckled, sending pain up to my chest. "Aurora, I'm fine. Relax." She stopped and stared at me. Dread filled my chest, but I knew I had to tell her what my mother had revealed.

“Aurora. My father isn’t dead. He shifted and missed the rocks at the bottom of the overlook.” Anger took hold of her expression as she screamed and punched the wall beside my bed. “How many times do we have to kill this motherfucker?!” She exclaimed. I could see her slowly becoming unhinged again, and I wondered how we would ever get through all of this without falling apart.

**END OF BOOK ONE**

## Thanks to my beta readers,

Just wanted to quickly shout out a huge THANK YOU to my beta readers, Jacalyn, April, and Catharine.

You were all a giant help in making sure this book was perfect every way that it could be.



## About The Author

**Sarah Boggs**



Sarah Boggs is a mother of two crazy toddlers and the author of the new novel, “Our Feral Love.” She spends her free time weaving new stories from her overactive imagination, reading spicy romance books, and keeping tiny people alive.