

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 81

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"That is their choice.... you commanded them, they have every reason to stay and obey and nothing would happen to them. It's not what they want." Sierra interjects, still holding my hand and we patiently stand and watch every single wolf wait their turn to leave with a bow and respectful utter before walking away.

"Next time I lay eyes on most of them, will be at the rune border... What will Colton think if I let this happen?" I despair still, unable to let it go, imagining his heartbreak that I let his people suffer, but Meadow is the one to calm me with her logic and reasoning.

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"Do you really think he would object to the pack coming together to protect you. He loves his pack, but he would always put your life first. You're everything to him, and more now, even though he doesn't know.... He would do exactly this if this was his decision to make." Meadow moves her hand and smooths over my flat stomach, eyes misting over as her chin drops so she can gaze at the life we all know is in there.

I stare down at my stomach and try and pull myself together, knowing she's right. Colton always protects me, uses the pack to shield me when he thinks I need it. That's what packs are meant to do for the Luna. It's why she has her own guard when our world is in turmoil. The Alpha is the warrior, not the Luna.

She's the heart, hidden behind the rib cage and shielded in the warm, while the alpha, he's the fist. Driving out front to lead the way. The pack, they're the body... joined, connecting, working as one, but they get behind the fist and they always cover the heart.

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The shaman's words finally make sense to me. Words he uttered so many months before when he told me what my place in the pack was meant to be. Care for the people, listen to them, be the arms and the safe place. I finally understand what it is I am meant to be, and it was never a powerful force to tear down armies of vampires. The prophecy once said that I would conquer with love... not war.

Yet I know that tomorrow, love won't keep them safe. And I am not ONLY a Luna of the Lycanthrope.

Now they're mine. But I'm not going to let them down, not now they bound their lives to my own fate. Tomorrow I will lead, I will be the fist, even if it's not what I was born to do. I will take his place and make him proud of what I can be. I know it's in me. After all, am I not a princess of one world and a Luna in another. I'm

royalty, either way, and I was given these gifts for a reason. I was given my eyes, my power, and my story, so I could be more. I've been sheltered for far too long and it's time I stood up and put an end to this, like they said I would.

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I only hope to the fates we do this swiftly, and safely, and I don't have to bury any of them at the end of the day. I'll protect myself, my children, my people, and I will bring my mate home.

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The cold wind from the mountain moves in across my skin and bites down at me, causing me to shiver despite wolves never really feeling the cold. My heart pounding, my nerves taut and my head in chaos as I stand on the boundary and stare into the darkness awaiting the sun to start to show hints of rising. The eerie silence despite rows and rows of assembled wolves unnerves me and Leyanne and Meadow to my right, Carmen and Sierra to my left, stand solidly still, waiting, we're all just waiting.

Tension high, the stillness is painful and the quiet is deafening. I've never been more scared in my life and it's not just because we are on the dawn of the first war battle of my life. As if that wasn't bad enough. It's that our enemy are our loved ones and death blows will be dealt today to forever change everything in our world. No matter what side wins, we all lose the ones we care about most.

The plan is set.... We all know our place, our role, what to do, and we wait for the second before sun break before we run, right for that mountain as fast as we can. We are betting on timing, using the moments between dark and light to cover as much terrain as we can.

The witch is slower so she's to be carried by Meadow on her back, to get her to the mountain in the same speed we can. Sierra and Carmen with me, to distract the wolves and keep them down here with us. I'm stronger and so are they, so it makes sense for them to be my focus... for Colton to be my focus. I was born to match him in every way and only I can be the one to hold my own against his strength and skill as a warrior. He would kill anyone else and go after Meadow and the witch in the blink of an eye.

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Leyanne and Meadow, they and some of the stronger of the pack that we have so little of, their aim is the mountain and getting inside no matter what we encounter out here. They have their order to keep going, leave us behind to battle. To face off vampires while Leyanne finds the witch's and takes care of the spell wherever it may be coming from. We tried for an even split, but we know the wolves will be the harder battle and ended up with a seventy thirty uneven

decision. Wolves are the problem, not what waits beyond. Our wolves. Our warriors... our sub pack, our family, our mates.

My heart is racing, I can taste the fear and tension all around me as they all wait. My heart in my throat, my body cold and frozen in growing anticipation and fear. My head so bound up in the what if's I have had to stop myself thinking at all. My emotions clogged by the many so I can't escape emotion swirling around me like an eternal drain on my energy.

The ma**es are dressed in old loose clothing that will be shredded when they turn, save one wolf... me. I have to stay human, so I wore something Sierra made me take from the grimoire library. It's armor of sorts; silver, gleaming and more like a chain mail skirt over leather pants, but my abdomen is sheathed in a metal fitted bodice, held together at the back by chain and lace and a crisscross of binding. It belonged to a warrior witch ancestor and luckily, she wasn't that much bigger than me.

It doesn't offer much protection against wolves claws but given I don't plan on letting any claws get that close, it made Sierra feel better giving me something to protect my body. In case I'm thrown, I fall, or I'm hit in some way, when we all know that my belly is the place I need to shield the most. My most precious gifts are contained therein. I know Sierra intends to stay close, as does Carmen but in the heat of battle that might not pan out. It will be chaos, and we will need to fight hard and long to draw out the distraction for Leyanne. I'm prepared to be separated from them, because I know it will be inevitable.

The suns coming, be ready, turn.

Meadow's mind link to the entire pack sees a tremor erupt as bodies shred clothing and skin turns to fur all around me. My anxiety growing as human faces disappear and my pack arm themselves for what's about to come. Growling, snarling, pushing themselves to be ready as the glow of amber eyes lights the duskiness in front of their faces. Carmen and Sierra hold off beside me, waiting....

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"This is it.... No turning back now." Carmen whispers my way, one last focused look of her eye son mine, one tight squeeze of my hand as she nods her eyes and shows her respect. I feel her intent, her promise to shield me, before letting go and turning too, so I'm faced with softer orange eyes on a fawn wolf and she gracefully swoops to all fours to shield me from one side. Carmen made a vow to stick to me like glue, and somewhere deep down, I know it's what she will do as long as she can.

"Stay between us at all times.... Never stray. Use us as your protection." Sierra squeezes my other hand in hers, and dissolves before me into sleek black and grey fur. Much like Colton in a way, only smaller, with light patches, and yet her eyes are blue. As femmes, they are beautiful, both of them and that familiar show of almost feline, s**y, brown wolf, nudging Leyanne to climb on her back informs me Meds has changed too. I'm now the only other human apart from the witch and she casts me a look across the huge heads of our furry friends. Her eyes

meeting mine as she nods in a regal way, somehow wishing me luck for the fight ahead.

Leyanne gracefully hops onto the large back of Meadow, using her magic to help her with the unreal height. She moves astride, like she's sitting on a magnificent horse and tangles her hands in the thick fur at the back of Meadows neck. Making sure she gets a tight grip, because what's coming is sure to knock the wind out of her. Hyper speed can injure humans, so I know this witch will have done something to make sure she can endure it.

"Focus on the task. Leave the rest to me. Your boy will be back in your arms before you know it, Princess... or is that Luna? I guess either works now." She throws me that Scottish brogue and a confident smile, the cheeky oozing with her words. Knowing fine well in all his she is in no danger whatsoever. I can see it in her complete lack of care about what's happening.

She's immortal, powerful, and this is just a walk in the park for her. No matter the outcome today, she will live, unshredded and probably be telling this story in thousands of years to come. I envy her right now. For that lack of fear, that certainty of her own existence... her confidence comes from the fact she has no natural predators in the world, and nothing can physically kill her.

Luna, it's time... give the order. Meadow's mind link for me alone causes a sudden lurch of my stomach and I clench my fists to counteract the sweep of cold terror as I nod. Outwardly calm and in control for my people, yet inside, I'm shaking. I lift my hand high in the air to attract all eyes while I link to the pack, being sure to feel all minds as one and one word is all I need. In mind link it's clear and bold, whereas my own voice would have never been able to utter it at all.

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It happens so fast. The sweep of hyper speed, flying fur, and like a tide we pass the rune border in unison. Each of us protected from the fog by something Leyanne did and we enter and fill our lungs with its sour greenish heaviness, adjusting to the gloom so we can see ahead. I'm startled at the fact I can taste it, feel it invading my lungs like a dense smoke from a burning fire, yet it smells and tastes like a damp early dawn on the mountain as winter turns. Rotting plants and leaves giving it that earthiness while it slows down my breathing as I labor to push through it. It's cloying.

It took her all night to find a way to be sure that turning wouldn't remove any kind of protection and she did... seems the base of a foot is the one place on a wolf you can put a magical symbol and it stays. Who knew. Even in turning where we shed all human things, our feet keep enchanted paint.

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Every single wolf who showed up here an hour ago was tended to, marked, and she recited incantations over all present to protect us from the fog. She called them double measures, just to be sure.

We don't know if it will work as we are exposed for a longer length of time, but given she's the one who made the rune spell I don't predict it going wrong. As we leach out into the mist and run forward, I don't see anything that says it's not working am*** those who have raced ahead. Still moving fast, with their eyes on the prize, and I can feel the pulsing link of my pack staying connected to me while moving as one powerful body.

This is how a pack is meant to be. The body, the heart, and the fist, working in unison.... Even if we are only half of that.

The forest is dark and eerie and unearthly silent due to the early hour and the still rising dawn. All the wildlife is hiding, and the quiet swarm of fast wolves moving through like whispers on the wind are all I can hear in the air. A whizzing, fleeting flurry as I too, on foot, have to keep up in human form.

It's the calm before the storm and it's too late to turn back and rethink this. We're making distance, heading for the mountain in the far view and nothing is going to sway us from our path. We're easily two hundred, combined, more than I ever dreamed would come out here.

My pack never deserted me in the final hour, and I could have wept when they showed up strong in number and ready to die for this. Jasper is wrong about the Santos... if he could see them as I do now, he would know his enemy resides at the mountain and his numbers are few. These Santos they would never turn on their own, kill off a bloodline and imprison their Luna... they're nothing like him and were oppressed by his rule for far too long. Colton didn't just stand up against all the wrong, he freed a people and gave them back their will to be what they once were. A proud pack, one worthy of so much more.

We make it miles in a flash, covering the distance as we race against the sun and know that this close to the rise, the vampires would already have retreated to the darkness. It's only a matter of time before the wolves come out to meet us as and we need to get as far as we can until that moment.

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I run until I feel like my chest is going to explode with the effort, my limbs aching, burning too, as fatigue is quick to follow me and I internally curse that the effects on my body are more severe than even I thought they would be. Only a month back, I ran farther than this with Colton, around the perimeter and without even a twinge of tiredness or pain. Now my body fails me, and this is more effort than even the first time I ever trained with the sub back at the valley, so long ago.

My breath becomes labored and my run slows enough that I spot the two wolves flanking me drop back and glance at one another, worry evident in their demeanor. I know they realize I'm slowing, and I can feel their hesitation. I have

to be faster; I have to get ahead of the pack and lead. I need to show them I'm here.

Get on me.

Carmen commands in that tone that's uniquely her, breaking into my chaotic thoughts, running into my side so I'm flipped over her without a choice and have to grab her fur to pull myself on properly. Straddling her the way Meadow's being rode by Leyanne ahead of us and yet Carmen barely breaks her momentum.

I shouldn't be doing it like this

I mind link her back privately, ashamed of my own lack of worth at something this basic, but silence is all I get as she ignores my protest. Stubborn to the core, for once though, I'm glad she's the way she is.

We speed up, and within seconds she overtakes everyone who was before us and catches up to Meadow, sliding up, side by side, to carry their riders up front and proud. She knows the pack need to see us there to focus and not lose faith when we hit the first wave of our own. A sense of urgency cloaking us, and the tension somehow increases the farther we get. The sun breaks over the distant horizon and the fog starts thinning as we move from the border, so seeing becomes easier, right until the moment we spot them.

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Like a black wave of ants coming out of pores of broken wood. In the distance a sea of fast-moving terror comes our way at speed, like inky black spill on the sea. Our own wolves realize they are being met almost halfway to the mountain and are on the aggressive defensive and coming like bats out of hell, snarls and howls echoing around us in a blood curling way.

Faster... close the gap, don't let them get far

I link and push the pack onwards, knowing I'm asking them to run harder, to ignore their own fear, when they're probably already at full pelt. I need to make sure we get closer than this, but they're coming at us sooner than I thought they would.

Like seas thrashing, storm fronts meeting; it only takes seconds before the wall of them, and the wall of us, crashes into one another in a dramatic collision. Meadow leaps over the coming forms with impressive skill and height, flying overhead at the unsuspecting wolves who are too busy looking forward. She carries on, as we planned, trying to pull her section of the pack onward as the ones staying with me round on the concentration of the wolves meeting us dead on. The aim is to keep them here, distract them, so none follow Meadow's small group but that's not as easy as it seemed.

Claws clash, teeth rip, and bodies collide all around, as wolf meets wolf, and a full-on vicious battle erupts all around me. Noises drowning out everything else. The gnashing of teeth, ripping of skin, howling, growling, cries, and chaos.

We're not running any further because this wall of fierce and fury has stopped us dead and we have met the ground where some of us may forever lay. I leap off Carmen and wade into the fold, mind blank when instinct takes over and adrenalin drowns the last ounce of doubt away. Throwing wolves back, left, right, and center, as I'm surrounded by violence.

It's a frenzy, a mix of friend and foe and hard to pick out who's with us and who's not. Every time a wolf comes at me, teeth bared flying in a leap to take me down I use my power to throw them back, swipe them aside and try not to hurt them. It's too fast to figure out who they are and I'm sure radar is one who comes at me twice, only to be hurled thirty feet back as I lash out throwing them away. His is the upper hand that I have and why I was so sure I could handle this. My powers mean I can keep everyone around me far enough away without having to physically battle. My babies will be protected in the bubble of my vampire gifts.

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My ears and eyes are tuned into the others around me, watching out for them intent on safeguarding. Anytime I spot one of the pack losing the advantage I extend my energy and save them for a moment, shielding them and pushing them to a clearing alone. Giving them space to regroup, heal their wounds, and fly back to fight. Our numbers are an advantage and as I lose sight of Meadow and her group, we are surrounded by feral forms, intent on taking us down.

Carmen rolls into me from behind, almost wiping my legs out from under me because I was so focused on the ahead that it startles me and realize how stupid I was for that's second. She yanks me down, hauling my body under her brutally as a large tree; trunk, roots, foliage and all, flies past my head from the rear. It misses me by mere inches and I blanch and gawp in the direction of one very large, very angry, black alpha, ripping out another to take down the human in his sights. It seems he spotted me giving my wolves an advantage and I riled his fury to become his target.

Colton.

I gasp in the mind link and am met with that wall of silent closed door to our mate link, even still. My heart thudding through my ribcage and I can't formulate the thoughts about how I feel.

Throwing trees? Really..... he's throwing f***ing trees?!?! Do you think he finally sussed that out after we got the truck home safely? a**hole!

Carmen snaps, her temper flaring and her glare aimed at him with deathly intent. She pushes me down as another flies over head, but with a wrist flick, I send it spiraling sideways away from the group of feuding animals behind me. It seems he also doesn't care about mangling the ones fighting on his side, so consumed with the need to destroy us.

Sierra leaps over us and goes straight for the throat of an approaching wolf, appearing so suddenly from behind me that I didn't even know she was still close. She takes it down with her in a bite, colliding body to body with a massive thud, and rolls around, grappling with it fiercely so that I almost cry out in terror. I yank them apart with my energy directed between them as precisely as I can and throw it back, so sure this time the returning grey is Radar. I can't be sure without his telltale scar over his normally white eye because the black is shielding it like this, and his fur is so matted and unkempt from forest dwelling that it covers what might be on his face. I can't believe Radar would fight Sierra in this way, try to hurt her, but then Colton just threw half a forest at me.

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It's like Colton senses something is up with us staying put and fighting our ground, and as I pull myself to my feet to take him face on, he stops and turns and looks towards the mountain where Leyanne and Meadow headed. A glimpse at me again as if watching for a response, or reassuring his suspicion, and an almost smile like snarl. He turns, howling into the air, signaling his pack and takes off after them. He goes off in hot pursuit and I react instinctively.

No! s***.... He's going after the witch. I have to stop him. Colton will kill whoever gets in his way.

I abandon my post, pull myself away from Carmen and high tail it after him, finding my feet and fire once more and making good ground in his wake. Carmen and Sierra follow, hot on my heels as I leap a fallen log into a clearing and realize my mistake right away. that I fell for his trap like a complete idiot.

He's waiting for me over the first mound, and as I fly through the sky, I'm caught with a clawed swipe that thrusts my momentum downward and I'm powerless to avoid it. His nails piercing my thigh in excruciating agony as I'm dragged out of the air, and into a violent roll as he drags me through the undergrowth with the weight of my body crashing against his. My delicate human frame against hot hard wolf, his fur smothering me and claws flailing around to get a proper hold on me. I'm too small like this and he misses me completely with those long bulky arms.

I'm winded with the fall, and we roll apart as we collide with forest floor and rake through bushes and debris. The intense burning puncture wound of my leg causes me to stifle a cry as it's opened further on impact and I try to jump up to face him before he regains his own posture and comes again. My powers don't fail me, and without getting to turn around in time I manage to sense his lunge and throw him over the top in one easy maneuver.

Colton's huge form is tossed up and over me in a magnificent show of power, my hands throbbing with the effort as my energy expands and blows him into a rolling fall. Thrusting him some thirty feet in front of us so he crashes face first into standing trees and I flinch and shrivel at what I just did to my mate. My two femmes clear the log between us and land nearby to shield me once more by flanking me at both sides. Panting from the chase and I realize how far we came with what just happened.

Your leg, you're bleeding

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Sierra's words ring in my head, pulling my aching heart from the sight of him, back to my physical pain and I try and ignore the hot warm mess rolling down inside and outside my clothes. The pain making me wince as I try to carry on. We don't have time to stop and deal with it, he won't stay stunned for more than seconds.

Colton isn't down for long and he turns and comes right back at me with the speed of a blink. Angrier than before and I extend my hands to throw him back, pulling everything I have in me to make sure he travels three times as far with my next blow, only nothing happens.

Hands out, energy building inside of me, yet it fails to release and instead feels like it deflates and fizzles away, like a puncture balloon, before it even reaches my wrists. I have to plunge sideways to dodge his furious attack, my two femmes s***tering too as Carmen tries to push me away from him with one paw and I roll into the undergrowth.

Carmen pounces on him from behind, but she's no match to his strength, his skill, or his speed, and he catches her by the base of her neck and bodily slams her to the ground, over rock, so a crack vibrates through the air around me and she howls in sheer agony. Sierra latches onto his arm in desperation, aiming to protect Carmen, sinking her teeth in while trying to encompa** him in blue glow and I have no idea what she's doing.

Whatever it was, it fails, and Colton throws her off effortlessly. Like tossing away a rag, roaring aggressively so the trees around us shudder and I try to pull myself back together and get back in the fight.

I try to breathe though crushed lungs, breathless and sweating. I try to center my frantic thoughts, figure out what just happened to my powers.

You're other gift..... absorb, deflect.... You can do it. Use the wolf in you, those gifts might be stronger still.

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Sierra's words filter in; a moment of hope rising inside of me that she might be right, and I still have ability to take him. I still have that untapped resource in my arsenal as my hybrid side fails me. I recoil as he turns this way, ignoring the blood loss and weeping pain from my leg as he comes right at me once more, still intent on getting me it seems. Knowing that to absorb, I have to take from him by getting close enough to do so. I have to let him get near.

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I muster enough of my dwindling energy to stop him short, but I can feel it failing even as I grasp at it and tug it into my palms. There's no building of it, no ball or orb and I feel like I'm grasping at air and nothing materializes like it should. I feel like I've gone back to that time in the woods when I didn't know how to pull it to me or control it, but this is all wrong. My powers are failing me, and I don't understand how or why or..... What the hell the fates are doing to me.

It's faster than I thought. The witch said they would weaken in time, not completely die the second I need them, so this can't be the babies. I can't have come out here to be a deadweight of useless and stand in the face of mate so he can strike me down. This isn't the g***** plan.

I stumble backwards as both femmes tag him, sensing something is wrong with me. One each side, teeth to throat, both bravely surging in and latch on. Trying to help me by dragging him down between them and give me time and space to move away. I have no other option but to turn and run as I fail to muster anything at all, so I make a move, but weariness and dizziness start to kick my a** and panic floods my body with the knowledge that I'm completely powerless. It's like being human. I don't know what's happening to me. I try to mind link them and even that seems impossible as I'm met with darkness, and I wonder if the fog has started to affect me too.

I need to recover my power first, before I turn back on him, because I'm literally useless and practically pointless in this state. I stumble, and trip, and roll into a ditch, my hand instantly damp with the way I fold into myself and end up in a bedraggled heap. It causes me to look down to see why I'm so wet and it dawns on me why my gift is failing.

The pain in my leg is nothing compared to reality of the injury I can see through torn fabric and torn skin. Judging by the amount of blood seeping through my clothes, staining the ground even where I just landed, I'm literally bleeding to death... fast. My skin is pale, my hands are trembling as icy coldness sweeps through and I panic as I look out, hoping Sierra is close enough to help me. My inner wolf is restless and scr***** inside my head, trying to turn me and I have to fight myself to remain as I am. Her inner need to heal me, my survival instinct suddenly ferocious now I realize the depth of my injury, yet I hold it still. If I turn, they die, so I can't sacrifice them, even if I'm this close to death. I calm my breathing, focus all I have left and put all my energy into one little mind link.

Sierra...I need to be healed. I'm dying.

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I call to her, but the chaos of wolves rolling around and the addition of more to what I left, makes it hard to tell who is who, and Colton is seems to be

surrounded by multiple grey wolves hauling him down. It's no longer one against two like it was a second again, but many on top of their own Alpha, subduing him.

I blink as I realize the pack of wolves swarming him and coming to our aid, taking down their own to protect the Luna, are the land dwellers and our most peaceful. They heard Carmen's cry to shield me and they did what a pack is meant to do. Protect the heart! I want to cry with the swelling it causes inside my chest.

I'm here, I'm here.

Sierra startles me from behind as she lands in the ditch beside me and instantly turns to naked human, pulling my leg to her and gasping at the crimson clothing that tells her all she needs to know. Her hands shake, her face pales, and she takes a moment to collect herself before instinct kicks in.

"Jesus Christ, Lorey. You would be dead in a few more minutes, maybe even seconds. This is why you should never have come. This is too dangerous, he's too strong for you this way." She yanks my thigh into her abdomen, her hand glowing blue as soon as she touches me and places her warm palm flat on my leg where his claws made multiple incisions. It's only now I see he got my femoral artery with a nick, and it's that wound that's literally killing me. My powers were fading because I was losing all the blood I possess. Vampire and wolf alike, so neither was prevailing.

The gentle healing power works quickly, and I watch in fascination as skin closes up like reversing in time and my pain begins to dimmish. Sierra may have been losing her gifts these past months, but she heals me with speed as though she has re-found her abilities.

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"I wasn't careful enough... I lost focus.... I won't make that mistake again." I tremble the words out as my body heals fully, relieved as my internal low temperature starts to warm and the invading darkness of my vision begins to retreat. Sierra grimaces at me though, not looking as relieved as I am.

"The blood loss takes longer; we need to stay low while I recover all you lost. You are not going to be stronger until then." Her words fade out fast as three wolves come trundling through the undergrowth, swiping us out of our hole accidentally, and sending us both flying across the ground in shock as I try to regain equilibrium. We were run over and thrown apart by our own side, such is the chaos of what's happening around us. Sierra turns and flies to me with a leap, transforming back to wolf, and shoves me over into another ditch with her nose before rounding on a suddenly invading brown Lychan as it leaps at us.

Pressed into a hollow that caught my body snugly, still weak, but slowly regaining my energy, all I can hear are howls, wails, and ripping of wolves on wolf. The stench of their blood in the air catches in my nostrils, and the cries of distance battles as we try to control our own kind without killing them. My heart shatters as the pain of my pack filters through, and the loss of many rips up through my stomach and into my soul. I can feel their life essence leave as it happens, and as mother to all, their pa**ing breaks my heart.

I take a deep breath, organizing my thoughts and push down the emotion the best I can, because I know it will only hinder me. A tug in instinct pulls me mind left, sensing Colton through the dark and misery... somehow, I can feel him coming closer, and I know he's looking for me. For some reason I'm the target he wants.

I don't know if it's because I stick out as a human and the alpha wants to be the one to take it down, or if somehow our bond is the reason, I'm the one he wants to kill most. A craving in love to be together, is like an urge in hatred to rip me apart. Maybe on some level, as the leader of his side, he senses that I am the leader of mine, and maybe it's only instinct that pushes him to be the victor. To take down a Queen when he seems to know he's King of the opposing side.

I peek out and see him sniffing the air where he stands, looking for my scent in the many, and I gasp and recoil back, holding my breath as my heart rate increases. Suddenly afraid, because I know like this, I am no match and until my strength recovers, then my gifts are all but gone. I frantically panic and push myself into the snug of this space, looking to find something as a weapon while concealing myself. My body trembling and reminding me that I was never worthy to lead this fight, I was too stupid to realize it when I had the chance to stay back.

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He's pushing debris and rocks aside, searching for me, ignoring the ongoing battle between Carmen, Sierra, our pack and his wolves, between him and I. Covering the space between us, yet his focus goes beyond them and through. He seems uninterested in the fight and as I zone out the world, the noise, and the chaos, I lock onto that imposing figure turning my way as he seems to find what he's looking for.

He catches the scent of my blood; I see it in his changing expression, the sudden pause, his growing taller as he latches on, and my skin goosebumps all over. My body freezing, as my gut tells me I have nowhere to run and I know deep down he has found me. From where he's standing, from a drop of my red fluid I must have left in my trail, he's locked onto me now and knows exactly what to follow. He stops to inhale, like savoring the moment and a snarl of pure menace crosses his face, increasing the sheer terror on mine. He's a predator who knows he's onto a win, before looking up and spotting me easily and I swear as his eyes lock onto mine, he smiles, and licks his teeth in an almost excited gesture.

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I crawl backwards, trembling in instant fear, because I know this is a matter of fight or die and I need to be stronger than I was ten minutes ago. He almost ended me so easily with one swipe that it's pathetic. Call myself Luna? I'm a complete failure.

I need to get my head together and outsmart him while my body tries to heal, give myself time to power up. I steady my breathing, willing all the energy I can muster up to save me from him, and homing in on the part of me I rarely have to use. It just means he has to get really close for me to absorb what he has when I'm this low, to draw from his strength instead of my own and it may be more useful than energy balls which seem to be failing me.

Colton's fast, even by Lychan standards, and I get up in a dash, to backwards run an in attempt to coax him to me and almost get decapitated in the process as a new clawed paw tries to take my head off.

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I don't think so, b****!!

Carmen's sa**y voice in the link rings through my head, that superior tone that I used to hate, but now I sort of love, as she comes down over the top of me, seemingly from thin air and drags it with her in a tumbling roll sideways. Taking the male down with a swoop and aggressive s***** at his head. I catch sight of Colton flashing towards me, visually targeting his prey and that look of determined malice makes my blood run cold. I just need a second of his touch, brief contact, enough to feel his gifts surging and then I'll be able to deflect them. He pushes through the battling bodies between us, seemingly slowing and taking his time to savor the fact I'm no longer running and instead intent on letting him get to me. Heart pounding behind my ribcage like a war drum, and body trembling with both lack of blood and the icy swell of terror.

I turn my body so that if he catches me again with his claw the injury will be less devastating and in a place that won't make me bleed out in seconds. I tense and brace myself for the impact I know will come and close my eyes for a second to will up the internal energy to somehow do this. Sierra was right, the blood loss isn't rectified, and I can barely pull myself around with efficiency, let alone take on a wolf like him.

I fall backwards with a strangled cry of surprise as the expected full weight of my mate tears down on me like a savage. Taking me from behind in a rugby tackle and throwing us both out of the arc of the ditch where I was shielding. He seemed to have meant to plough through me so I would end up splattered to the floor under him, but his sheer size ends up being a softer cushion and dampener for me as a human and his arms under my back take the full brunt of our fall. We sort of tuck and tumble as we scramble together, molded into one body as I hold on to protect myself.

I end up curled against his chest, clinging on for a moment with sheer desperation as we roll through the dirt and somehow collide with a huge rock sitting proud from forest floor which thuds us to a halt. His spine meets cold grey matter with a sickening thwack, and it's enough to crumble the entire side away, rendering him momentarily stunned as he grunts in pain from sheer impact. His arms splay out, releasing me from his cloying hold and it's all the time I need to feed from his strength, his speed. His fierce being drawn into me as I absorb everything I can with our physical meshing together. I can feel it, like the inhaling

of smoke from the air, into my lungs and through my veins, only it's Colton's essence I seem to be drawing out.

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I panic as my wolf self almost rips control from me with the intensity of his powers, riling her into action and eager to be free to protect me. I have to grapple to stay human with all I have inside, but with his matching strength I soar suddenly with new life and find the power to jump to my feet as he does. I grab his wrist as he goes for me, twist it back and deflect every swipe and punch and thrust that reigns towards me with blink speed reaction, thwarting every move. Colton roars in anger at my newfound skill, somehow manages to leg swipe my with one of his huge paws as we both crash to the ground once more. I tuck myself inwards to protect my abdomen, twisting away from him to avoid his weight on me again, but he catches my around the leg, his claws curling around my narrow limb rather than piercing me. I yank and pull, attempting to keep lashing at him, while avoiding his razor-sharp weapons as we roll around in the dirt and collect debris and gravel as we maneuver into wrestle hold rather than blows.

I'm faster this way and he gets angry as hell as I block the blows, hold off the attempts to bite and maim, and seem to successfully hold my own for as long as I can. It would be easier as a wolf, so much easier, but I'm aware the whole time of the two life forces I'm protecting in my body and I'm careful with every duck, hit and lurch to keep that part of me shielded, beneath the metal panel and free from impact. Thanking god the armor saves me from bumps and scr****s more than I thought it would. It may not withstand Lychan impaling, but the natural world is a little less able to penetrate it.

I hear the faint howls and the ongoing noises of battles around us, catch sight of Carmen still throwing around the brown wolf she saved me from, but Sierra is out of sight. Probably fighting her own little war as we all aim to get through this alive. Even with our numbers, we're barely keeping even with the strongest of our pack and many are failing. They have more skill and speed; more battle experience and I already know so many of ours have pa**ed at their hands.

A blood curling howl tears me from my focus, stunning my brain as a throbbing pain rips through my body and renders me completely useless. Clutching my head and ears and crying out in despair at the cruel invasion, while it feels like my entire brain wants to self-implode. It's Carmen, it has to be, and she's using her own weapon to fight back where I guess she too is struggling to stay in control. Giving the pack an instant head bashing and a few minutes of disorientation and bleeding eardrums.

I'm momentarily disabled from the shock attack and crumble to the ground with a gasp and shudder, hitting the floor like a sack of rubble. Only, so does Colton, also unable to defend himself against her unique power and we fall apart, groaning as ache from a wound we didn't inflict on one another make us crumble and moan. There's a new wave of warmth and pain spearing through my central body as the sound ebbs away and my ears start ringing, but it's nowhere near the intensity of this instant stabbing.

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I can't seem to catch my breath with its appearance, and I splay my hands out to scramble across the dirt as I waiver with disorientation. I try to block out the pulsating boom of stunned hearing as I attempt to pull oxygen from around me. I battle to fill my lungs, choking intensifying and unable to breathe at all while a heavy weight, crushing my ribs and sudden tearing slicing, reverberates through my upper body. It feels like Colton impaled me, but he's still strewn nearby and suffering a similar fate, so it can't be him.

Panic floods me, that the inability to inhale is worse than Carmen's head puncturing and I don't know what's happening. I'm aware Colton is writhing mere feet beside me, clutching his ribs too, but my entire focus is on the slow suffocation as I grasp at my chest and claw at my throat to try and gain oxygen. Confused, inner chaos growing, as I open my mouth wide, gulping, but yet get nothing. My eyes water profusely, open wide as I blink in terror, and that's when I see it.

Sierra, at a distance of maybe twenty feet from me, across my field of vision. She's impaled on long sharp claws at the core of her body, right at the point where mine is failing. She's held in midair as she scrambles to fight back limply and unhook herself from a grey male's torturous hold and seems to be whimpering in agony. He stumbles to one knee, shaking his head as though trying to drown out and recover from the now quiet Carmen's aftereffects, but doesn't release Sierra from his grip.

Carmen.... It's Sierra!!! I shriek out in the link, moving to make to go to her, but falling down as my lack of air pushes me to instant black vision. I lift my chin weakly, focusing as best I can through the blur, more concerned for her in this moment and silent sob out in relief as a flying wolf hauls her out of the death hold she's in. It drags her backwards, yanking the claws from her lungs as they fall into the undergrowth and almost instantly my own inflate in response. Relief and oxygen swelling inside my body so that it makes me lightheaded and I slump again as my lungs finally work.

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Our life bond means her pain when close to death is my pain, and it seems to still link to Colton even if he is under a spell. He stops clutching and gasping in the same way I was, indicating he too has been released and I know that means nothing good for me. I force myself to get up, on shaking limbs, slowly with determination to face him, knowing recovery of us both will be rapid as Sierra heals in the blink of an eye. I hold my ground, fixated on his huge body, as he rolls to his upright position with an easy move and locks black soulless eyes back on me. Without an ounce of hesitation, no delay, he comes at me again, full fury and ready for round two.

He moves like a steam train on rocket fuel. His claws splaying towards my shoulders, tackling me bodily once more even though I try to dodge with a jump. He flings me backwards with the impact, but I roll onto my shoulder blades as I meet dirt and push both my feet into his abdomen as we fall. I thrust him up hard and over the top of me, in a move he taught me, with a little effort and a huge amount of momentum. Letting go as he goes flying further into the woods with a crashing roar.

He spins on the ground as he collides, comes right back like a boomerang, and launches himself at my laid down posture as I move. He misses me by a hair's breadth, crashing onto my vacant spot and tumbling over like a clumsy oaf who's too fueled with fury to control his reflexes. I dodge as he swiftly follows me with a claw swipe, and I manage to push his wrist away at the last second. I have to counteract his jaw coming in to take a bite at my face as he follows through and end up thrusting my head down and s***er punching him in the belly with the flat of my palm. A sudden energy boost giving me oomph and he staggers back with the blow.

"Colton, are you really this stupid?" I spit at his face while he attempts to right his footing and gives me a second to breathe. "If I die, so do you, you utter Moron!" I thrust a knee into his groin with a crunch when he flies back into me, my confidence growing with the use of his own strength on my side, knowing that even in wolf form that's still a sensitive area. There's a grunt as knee bone flattens wolf bone; an instant as his body shudders and crumples a little, and I have to duck when he almost takes my head off for it in howling agony.

His roar of frustration that I wounded him there, that I'm matched in every way, fuels his rage and I pull backwards with a slight limp because of my now bruised kneecap. It was so worth it though, even if it might mean our twins don't get more siblings in the future.

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I grit my teeth, show my fierce, and using a throw he taught me yet again, by wedging my b*** as I swiftly turn in his abdomen, grabbing his upper arm, I throw him right over me in a forward flip. I toss him several feet with the exertion of using what I'm absorbing by touch, then jump to straighten to meet him face on when he recovers his standing. I can feel my energy building again, although it seems my vampire gifts are the ones weakened by my blood loss now, while the wolf and her ability to absorb are still going strong. It makes no sense, but I'm glad a part of me is still in this fight, even if I am stealing my mate's abilities. Colton would tell me to do this, and I know when we break this curse, he'll be thankful that I could use his own alpha power against him.

Carmen flashes into sight from the left seemingly she finally shook off the wolf she had been battling and goes straight for Colton's face, side on, taking him down to the left with her and they roll away from my sight under bushes and roughage. I make a move to help her but I'm held still with a sudden gentle touch on my back.

Come... Meadow and Leyanne will be at the mountain by now, we're barley holding on here, we need to get you out of the thick of it. Colton's too strong and you're not going to maintain this energy.

Sierra's voice floors me as she jumps in front of me and tries to trip me over onto her back the way Carmen did earlier, but I stand my ground. I know she means well, and she thinks that now I've proven myself, I should retreat and stay safe. That's not how this works.

"No. No other wolf can match Colton, and I won't let someone die trying... he's mine! I have to keep his focus on me. Carmen won't be able to hold him." He's my mate, my responsibility and he would annihilate any other in the pack without breaking a sweat.

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Carmen yelps out in a ringing blast as if proving my point, her whimper echoing from nearby and I turn in time to see her being tossed thirty feet in the air, like a ragdoll with no weight to her. She comes down to earth with a bone shattering thud, a slight tremble of the ground beneath my feet, which leaves her panting and whimpering, as internally things crunch and grind as her body starts to insta-heal. Unlike before when Colton's attention always came back at me, this time he turns and heads to her for a second blow, before she's had time to recover. My stomach lurches into my throat, knowing the killing intent across his face and her lack of seconds to get herself up.

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I fly forward without hesitation. I run, at full speed at the back of him and throw myself onto his back as he rears back to deliver a smack to Carmen's exposed underside, while her body tries to repair broken bones. It would be a death blow in her state of vulnerable and she wouldn't stand a chance.

I grab him around the head, pulling his jaw left and dodge his claws as he grapples, reaching back to dislodge me, to no avail. Sierra works with me, and swipes under his legs with a fast maneuver that brings him down backwards, almost on top of me. At the last second, I let go and leap away, so his crushing weight misses me or else I'd be squashed. I'm not fast enough to escape though, as he catches hold of my left ankle and yanks me back brutally. He digs his claws into bone and flesh on one of the smallest parts of my body, following with a crushing snap of searing splice that makes me cry out in wailing pain.

I turn impulsively, shocked into retaliation by the instant agony and hit him full on with a powerful ball of energy. I get him right in the face, smack, and it sends him rolling away, releasing my broken and slashed ankle as I crawl away as fast as I can for Sierra. Aiming for her healing help as she closes the gap between us once more.

This is not a plan.... this is not a plan. This is barely keeping our s*** together.

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Her panicked rambling comes at me in repeated mumbles as she quickly, hands on, tries to heal me as she turns human again. Only too aware he's getting up and already coming for us. Her anxiety rising in time with mine and the sense of urgency becomes almost hysterical in its weight around us.

"No, it's not..... I don't know what else to do but keep his focus. We have to give the witch time." I compel her, hands up in bewilderment of 'what else can we do?

She heals me only seconds before I dodge out of the way, instinct kicking in, his claws miss both her and I, as she turns and leaps back. I know this isn't working. Colton is hard on any day of the week to defeat and even with my gifts, I've never actually overpowered him when he wanted to fight back. He's never actually properly intended to win anytime he trained me and always held back and tried not to hurt me. It's becoming pretty obvious that the advantage in that was what made me think I could always kick his a**.

Like this, with no holding back, I'm barely keeping up and I squeal mid run as my hair is caught from behind me with a brutal tug of ripping roots. I'm dragged backward while distracted by my own stupid thoughts. Panic searing through me that I so easily got myself captured but followed by relief when I realize it's not Colton

Sorry, I didn't know what else to grab.

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Carmen growls through the link, releasing my chunk of hair from her mouth as she lets me loose. Right away I see she saved me from a lunge of another wolf who had tried his luck going for me. One who has gone crashing right into Sierra's angry thrust. She head b***s him low and then tosses him backwards over her body with little effort and sends him rolling into the forest behind with a crash.

What the hell is taking so long with the witch? It feels like it's been hours already.

Carmen snorts, pulling my mind away from her question by pushing me full force, back, as two wolves dive over us accidentally when clearing the log and don't see us at all. I realize they are being pursued by enchanted wolves and heading into the mini battle that's pulled Colton away from us while he deals with a group of protective land wolves. This is chaos and the only way to tell who is who is by looking at their eyes. Only Colton is an obvious target as he stands huge and foreboding with being the only black male am*** us.

"Where is he?" I blanch, my eyes scanning our surroundings when I stray back to arm myself to take him on again and I realize Colton isn't here anymore. In the blink of an eye, he seems to have disappeared into thin air and it kicks my manic panic b***on into fury.

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I span the circle around us, a flurry of worry and anticipation spiking inside of me, dodging another fly attack from a brown wolf that Carmen flips on its side and tosses backwards. My panic rises further, and I spin around, visually raking every space in front of us. I know I can't let him out of my sight, I can't lose the one person who may have ability to chase the witch down.

I take in the trees, the bushes, the rocks, and all around us, frantically searching for a sign, in an effort to locate him then weaken instantly, blood draining from my face when I spot what I seek. Twenty feet to our left, almost concealed by a thick tree trunk. He's holding up a smaller, grey wolf, by the throat, his teeth close to their jugular in a threatening manner and about a second away from tearing it out. There's no mistaking that's his intent.

NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!

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My ears almost explode, and I swear my heart erupts in my rib cage as though it already combusted as I crumble to the ground, grasping the agonizing pain in my skull as even my vision begins to vibrate. I forgot how painful Carmen's scream could be, guessing earlier she had gone lightly, and by god it's so much worse when her emotions kick in.

I feel like my eardrums are bleeding as I force myself to clutch my ears and struggle to look up to see Colton has dropped his prey long enough for it to crawl away. Every single wolf around us is cowering in pain, at the god-awful noise coming from that girl. It's effective to say the least but it's really not directional and all of us are being wounded in a bid to save one.

If I thought I could deal with this pain for the long term, it would be a great weapon in keeping everyone here from killing each other, but as soon as it's stretched into long seconds, my vision begins to blur and blacken and the pain in my head threatens to knock me out. It's that moment before gla** shatters with high frequency, and even though I know she isn't trying to hurt me, my nose starts to flood and a trickle of blood runs over my top lip.

Thankfully she stops. Before my mind and heart give out, but I'm left with a woozy sensation and all my senses seemed to be knocked sideways and I'm back to dizzy and disorientated. Feeling surreal, like I'm caught in a dream where this isn't happening in reality. I impulsively lift my hands to the wet warmth rolling over my mouth, knowing it's blood but startled to find it's also coming from my ears as it makes way down my neck. I shiver with the sudden dampening on the clothes inside my body shield aware Carmen has ruptured something.

Oh my god. I'm sorry.

Her voice comes at me but I shake my head and push away the furry body that moves to help hold me up, suddenly attentive to my fragile movements.

"I'm fine, it's okay." I soothe, my voice sounding alien and detached from my own head and fake a show of stability. Pushing myself to my feet and ignoring the sway of my limbs.

I'm too weak like this, too vulnerable and I can't keep screaming on Sierra to heal me every five minutes.

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Talking of which I stagger on my feet, trying to pull my brain back together and click on the fact I can't see her. Carmen is between Colton and I, as he's now also heading this way and other wolves roll into view too. They seem to distract him long enough that Carmen pushes me bodily backwards, so we fall into a gulley, flanked by fallen logs and I collapse in a hazy mess with the sudden vertigo of her fast shove.

s***. I didn't think ... I'm sorry... I didn't mean to hurt you. I forgot that humans can't take it for long and that you can't heal.... I'll find Sierra, she was there a second ago.... Hide, stay low. Don't move while I get her. Carmen's panicking, appraising my face and the continued blood flow down my mouth and from my inner ears. The rising sickening nausea in my body has all my senses swirling, and I feel like I've had a blow to the head. I can't see straight, the ground waving up and down and little stars of glittering lights start coloring my vision. I'm in a bad way, just from a sound.

"No, it's okay, I'm just dizzy... I'm good." I lie to her, feeling worse than I want to admit but I can still get up and still fight if I take a moment. I don't want her to blame herself for anything more in this life than she already does, and I don't want to prove Meadow right in being the useless deadweight in this.

I pull myself to my knees and then gasp, painful inhalation, and grunt, as I'm winded by a backward kick to the head that sends me reeling as a wolf jumping over knocks me for six and fastens onto Carmen with a ferocious bite. We didn't see them coming.

She howls out in rage, and pain, and claws at it latched onto her back, trying to dislodge it as I muster enough energy to help. I throw the last ball of pure energy I can pull together, and it sends it cascading off into a groaning heap, mere feet away. It's long enough for Carmen to get the better of it and she hauls it across the leaf strewn basin and throws it hard, and furiously, out of our hideaway.

We have to move. Now!

She catches my arm in her mouth, that commanding snidey tone on show once more, and tugs me hard as she can to get me going. I know she wants to put

distance between me and Colton and I don't blame her for choosing me over the plan.

It's only then, when I have to fight gravity and momentum of moving, that it dawns on me I'm doing so much worse than I thought. My vision is all over the place, and I'm struggling to walk straight, my head spinning. I stumble and fall onto all fours after only a few steps forward, letting out an exasperated noise, unable to hide how much I'm suffering. Carmen hesitates, looks out into the chaos and seems to struggle to decide what to do.

I'll find Sierra, stay. Look, behind you, in the log. Get in and lay down. Hide. I'll be fast, please...I beg of you...stay concealed.

This time I don't argue. I know this is bad and I'm losing use of my limbs and even the sensation of my fingers and toes. I can hear a soft high pitch tone rattling inside my brain and the bleeding hasn't eased up at all. My head's aching, my sight's completely out of whack and I know something is really wrong with my mind. My wolf is writhing and whining to let her come out to help me and I have to grip on with every ounce of willpower to stop the self-preservation kicking in to make me turn. It's a battle in itself and it drains me as fast as this new injury is doing.

Despite the sun rising high enough to warm my bones there's a coldness seeping through me as I struggle to take control, and I barely manage to crawl into a fallen log Carmen guides me to. I feel like a coward having to hide but I have no choice. The witch was right and like this I'm weak, no match for a wolf, especially not Colton.

I either have to accept fate and lose the lives within to save my pack, live on to keep fighting for them, or succumb to the fact that I can't do this, and I need to retreat and hide to save my children. My pack or my babies.... that's what this comes down to and I can't choose to let go of my own blood.

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My heart breaks open and the internal wracking guilt gnaws at my sanity. I'm instantly so consumed with sudden grief that when I slump into my hiding place, failing to check around me before seeing Carmen shoot off in pursuit of my healing mother-in-law. My entire focus on the damp earth under my flat palms, as I lay on my front and shallowly breath through the mist of my own broken eyesight.

The log is ripped from around me, so sudden, like the blink of an eye that I can't react. I grip the fallen debris below my fingers in haste to cling on, as I'm trundled out like a floppy rag onto the ground into a disheveled heap and discarded. The huge black silhouette of my worst nightmare, and best dream, towers over me and snarls in satisfaction that he found his prey once more. I lift my frail hand in an attempt to muster what power I have left and it dies on me completely, ebbing away like a flickering flame that's been caught in an airless room.

I'm seeing two of him, my head aching, my throat dry and my limbs no longer functioning. Heaped in an awkward position on uneven ground, because I'm so fatigued, I can't move myself. My gift even as a wolf has given up on me, the will to turn is all that claws inside, and I need to choose how this goes.

Save myself.... Kill them.

Let him take me, we die anyway and yet the pack may yet survive.

Could I live on with the knowledge I took my babies lives? Could I look him in the eye and watch him destroy himself with the guilt that he did this, when the spell finally breaks.

No. I can't. I'd rather die than live with his pain, and mine, and the loss of them.

Colton lifts me up by the throat, choking me with his sheer pulsating strength, even without gripping hard, pulling my lifeless form to him as though I'm a mere scrap of rubbish. My eyes mist over as emotions consume me and I stare helplessly into the dead and empty eyes of the man I love more than anything in the world. It's his body, his wolf, but he's not in there anymore and nothing I do will change it. Physically he's hurting me as he presses just a little, but emotionally he's destroying the last ounces of my soul and I begin to sob like a broken child. Pain coursing through every nerve ending.

I know this is it.... My life, or theirs, and the way this is looking, they will die anyway if I don't turn. Because Colton isn't about to stop. My wolf can't defeat him either. I have to face the reality of this.

I weakly grab at his wrists, hating his familiar warmth, the feel of his fur and the expanse of muscle beneath. Aching and yearning for him, while being petrified of who he is in front of me. It's like he senses I have nothing left to fight with and that snarl turns to a toothy smug growl, showing his satisfaction that I'm not fighting him anymore. He takes pleasure from seeing my tears, mingled with my own blood, spreading across my mouth and chin and the pitiful sodden expression of lost hope.

Colton, please.... It's me... Lorey.... Your mate. Don't." I know begging is futile, but my body is too weak to try, my heart refuses to give up on him and as he starts to choke the life out of me a little more, he holds me up to admire what he's about to kill. My voice is all I have left, even while the claws constrict around my neck, closing my airways and disable my ability to breath. I grasp at his fingers with both hands, to try and hold him back and gasp when he tightens with a flex, to show how easy this will be.

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There's nothing behind those eyes, no life, no acknowledgement of who I am, and I pull everything in me to try and deflect one last time, only managing a slight push of air at his face which barely moves him at all. He seems amused by it, my feeble attempts, and drops me in a heap on the ground as though mocking me by delaying the urge to end me. My body drops, bashing rocks and sticks s***tered across the ground as I slump into uselessness submission. I've never been so ashamed of myself.

I killed a bear on my own for gods' sakes.... It's not a hard choice. Turn and live, turn and fight him. Turn and live with knowing I ended the life of our children before they even had a chance to exist. I just need to let go of them, to save my people, just be brave, be a Luna, and maybe one day, we can try again. Once he comes back to me...once..... once.....

"I can't do it!" I cry out in anguish; loud and hoarse as it burns my throat and my soul screams in pain. Sobbing his way with a broken expression, focused on his empty eyes, even though he has no idea what I'm talking about. I wail in broken despair, pushing myself down to facepalm the earth, burying my face in the rotting leaves of the dirty musky soil. I know he's standing over me, toying with his little mouse, and enjoying the slow build to killing me but it feels like I'm already dead inside.

The only way I would stand a chance with him is as a wolf. And it's the one option I refuse to take.

I can't save myself and end them, even if he kills us all. My wolf isn't even trying to save me anymore, because she too knows that saving me will kill me in other ways. I'll never recover mentally, emotionally, if I make that choice to put my life over theirs. I'm their mother, I can't be the one to choose to discard them. They're innocent and they never asked me to be created. They're the product of our love, our bond, our time together, and I won't be able to ever look him in the face again if I lose them to save him.

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I love them both already. As much as I love him. Maybe more.

My wolf, it's like her instinct to keep me alive has disconnected too and is in there with them, hoping she can keep them safe instead of me. She's as torn as I and no longer is my survival, my safety, her priority in this fight.

His hot breath and panting raspy heat hits me right by my ear as he bends low and growls into the left side of my head. My body goosebumping all over as a cold wave turns my skin to ice. I freeze, holding my breath and tremble at his sudden proximity, still affected by him but with a growing fear. There's a moment of still, a slight silent pause, where I actually wonder if maybe he's doubting the instinct to deliver the final blow and stupidly for a moment think he won't do it. Maybe there's an ounce of him still inside his body, who's fighting to save me too. I grasp onto that tiny inkling of hope, that our love is stronger than a spell.

I'm wrong

Colton thrusts a clawed clenched grab into my right shoulder with a fierce impale, tossing me aside, and sends me splaying back ten feet with the impact. I fly through the air, everything slowing down into surreal disbelief and any chance of finding my strength evades me. He sends my lifeless body into the trees without a way to shield myself, so I'm hammered by the impact, with a crunch, and cracking. My ribs shatter in the process, piercing soft flesh, and pulsing vitality, behind my armor. I can't even cry out; such is the ma**ive blow to my body, the immense scourge of immense hurt, which stuns me into numb uselessness.

My body plate is dented and warped, as I slide down from mid-way up the trunk, and crumple into a broken mess, at the base of a shadow oak tree that broke my flight. Crunching my splintered body into agonizing pain, the collision into hard wood has completely knocked the wind out of me. I lay in a mangled heap and grasp for air, mouth opening and body trying, but I'm like a fish out of water.

Unable to do anything at all except whine under my breath, and claw weakly at the dirt around me, trying like crazy to inflate my lungs even an inch. My shoulder's wet from a severe set of puncture wounds that extend up onto the side of my neck, and I know it's probably my jugular that's making the flow so intense. The throbbing coming from there, in time to my low and weak heartbeat, pulsing out my blood with every thud.

I'm bleeding fast and hard and have another two claw marks across my arm where he must have cut me with his throwing blow. I raise my head with all I have left and catch sight of him walking to me, slowly, predator like, while my blood drips from his paw and claws like a red beacon that signals his betrayal.

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As he gets within a foot of me, my eyes fall down and level with the huge, clawed feet coming to my face. I don't know why, but he chooses this moment to turn semi human and the sudden sight of that tanned skin on normal feet, and strong legs, , standing so close, gives me the energy to take one last look at him, A slight hope that Leyanne has won and maybe he's turning because my mate has come back to me.

My eyes rise to his, and I almost cry out loud once more when I still see only the deadly black obsidian of his pupils, in a human face that's sneering my way in total disdain. Although his teeth and claws are still out and waiting.

It seems he's chosen to toy with me until the end, and kill me in his weaker form, to show how pitiful I am. He doesn't need to be wolf to do this, I'm not resisting. There's no glory if he's four times the size of me.

Colton please... don't." I beg breathlessly forcing the words out and crying silently as the inevitable becomes clear and a memory hits me full force in the face.

Colton's dream... it was a vision; it was this moment. He saw my death – our death, because I wouldn't turn. And now I know why.

He knew it, he felt it, and his dreams warned him of all that was coming. If only we took heed and never ventured into the forest again.

My hand slides to my abdomen, almost like a last final decision that their life means more than my own and despite knowing they will die too.... I just can't be the one to end theirs. Colton would never forgive himself, and neither would I. It would be our undoing.

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He walks forward, slowly, no care in the world, taking his time, and I screw my eyes shut and start to whimper under my breath as I accept fate. My body is broken and my blood seeping out at a rate that I know I don't have much time left.

"I'm sorry."

I failed them all.

My pack, Sierra, Meadow...My children.....

My mate.