

In One Year part One

2. In One Year

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I pulled my hoodie down further to cover more of my face as I shopped for my essential items. Leaving the house had become a challenge for me, and I had resorted to visiting the lake or the graveyard. My mother had offered to help me, but I refused. Despite being viewed as a source of bad luck, I was determined to be independent. They already helped me with some of my bills, but I was not a fugitive. I had the freedom to roam around the pack, but I would be doing that alone, no one would dare to be seen with me.

I quickly lled up my cart and hurried to the counter, hoping to avoid recognition because, even though a year had passed since Justin's death, the stares and judgmental looks persisted whenever I forgot to wear my hoodie or went shopping during the daytime. It had become my new normal, and sadly, I had grown accustomed to it.

Mostly, I ventured out at night to the lake, just a few meters behind the pack house. I would sit there, staring at the moon, and dip my feet into the water. It was the only way I knew to find solace, the only place where my troubles seemed to fade away. But then I would torture myself emotionally by visiting their graves. I lost count of how many times I had read the inscriptions on their headstones, but I would always stand there and read them over and over again.

Death was a funny thing. One moment a person was there, and the next they were gone. I wondered if they were happy wherever they were, if Justin had found happiness after taking his own life to escape me. Perhaps he realized that I was a harbinger of misfortune, someone who would ruin his life by being involved with him. Maybe.

I approached the cashier with my lled basket, Denise checked the items and I paid for them in cash. I swiftly grabbed the shopping bag, ready to leave when she grabbed the material of my black hoodie. I turned to face her, and it seemed as if she realized her mistake and immediately let go, as if my hoodie had burned her skin.

"My mother doesn't want you to come here anymore," she announced, though her eyes held pity rather than disdain. "A few customers complained," she added, as if that justified the decision to kick me out of their shop.

"It's ne," I replied with a curt nod. I was used to it. This wasn't my rst experience like this. In fact, this was the fth store in the pack that had banned me. Unfortunately, it was also the last store in the pack. They had tried to accommodate me for as long as they could, holding on longer than the others. Four months was decent, I suppose. Now I would have to start getting things from the human town, but it was quite far away, and I didn't have a car. How was I supposed to run with shopping bags?

"Sahel, I'm so sorry," Denise pleaded.

"I understand," I gave her a sad smile before walking out of the store. The bell rang, and it felt like another door of life had closed in my face.

I walked through the pack grounds, earning a few glances from passersby. They couldn't see my face, but they were well aware of my identity. Who else would be hiding their face from the world like a criminal? I sighed as I continued my walk, noticing a bonre on the side. It was where the potential pack warriors trained. There were quite a few people there, maybe ten or fteen. They seemed to be having fun, their lively chatter and laughter echoing across the eld, mingling with the music playing in the background.

Quietly, I made my way past them, but I stopped when I heard someone call my name. I hoped it was just my imagination, but I was wrong. The person called out again.

"Sahel!" I heard the voice for the third time, and I stood frozen. I hadn't expected this tonight. It had been a while since someone had called my name so loudly, other than my family members.

I noticed a familiar gure running towards me while I remained still, like a statue. "I knew it was you. No one would want to hide..." she stopped herself from nishing the sentence, but I had already gured out what she wanted to say. Perhaps she was going to say, "No one would want to hide themselves like a criminal."

I stared at my former best friend, Laura. I couldn't really call her my best friend anymore since we hadn't spoken in over a year. I was quite surprised that she was speaking to me now. I remembered the last time we spoke on the phone, two weeks after Justin's death. She had been ignoring my calls and avoiding me altogether. But I persisted because Laura had stuck by my side when I lost Paul and then Tyler. I had expected the same support when Justin died. I had hoped she wouldn't turn her back on me like the rest of the pack members, but I was wrong, and it was devastating.

On that fateful night, I had left countless missed calls on her phone, desperately trying to reach her. I was in a rough place, having been attacked by Janet and Faith, who blamed me for their son's death. I needed someone to talk to, someone who I thought cared for me. Laura nally picked up the call after numerous attempts, but her response was harsh.

"What, Sahel? Can you stop calling me? I have a lot to gure out myself, you know... Sahel, I don't think we should be friends for the time being. My family wants me to stay away from you, and I think it's for the best," she said, cutting off any chance for me to respond.