

Chapter 1

The woods were scary, but she had to be brave. It was long past her bedtime, so it was dark. She had been fast asleep in the back of the car when she woke up to the loud bang. Then she saw them.

The monsters.

The monsters standing over her father's body.

She did what her father had taught her to do in this situation. She quietly slipped out of the car and started running

“Hey, Someone seen us!”

It didn't take long for the loud footsteps to follow her through the trees. The darkness and shadows cast by the full moon looked like predators ready to pounce on her, but she couldn't close her eyes to make them go away. She had to survive. She tried to stay quiet as her dad had taught her. Step lightly. Change direction. Try not to leave too many tracks. But their long strides were fast and quickly catching up to her little ones.

The forest was eerily quiet. All she could hear was her thundering heartbeat, harsh breaths, and the monsters behind her. It was like

everything in the forest already knew what her fate would be. But she would fight that fate. She didn't want to disappoint her daddy.

Someone yanked her braid from behind, and she screamed in pain as she was thrown against the trunk of a tree. Her head hurt, and she felt pain in her arm as she rolled over and tried to stand.

"It's just a kid, Mike," she heard one of the voices say,

"She's seen us, and now you said my fucking name," another growled.

The one called Mike grabbed her again, pulling her painful arm. She screamed again and called out for her daddy. But she knew he would never come again now. She was all alone.

"Just do it quickly, and let's get the hell out of here. She's making too much noise."

Mike shoved her to her knees, and she heard the cocking sound of a gun. With a silent cry, she looked up at the sky peeking through the tall trees and saw the clouds part to reveal the moon. Her daddy always told her that the Moon Goddess would always watch out for her even if he couldn't. Closing her eyes, she gave a final prayer. She was not mad that this was how it ended. Her parents were waiting for her on the other side.

"I can't do it. I can't have the murder of an innocent child on my conscience. You do it yourself."

She heard their quiet arguing as the moon's rays shone on her face, filling her with calm. And then she felt it. It was a warm feeling touching every part of her, and she knew she would never be alone again. Maybe it was the Goddess' touch. But the most terrifying growl she had ever heard filled her ears. It took her a moment to realize it had come from her.

“She's a fucking monster! Shoot her!”

Then there were screams. And so much blood. The screams kept repeating in her ears, and the begging, the tears. But she didn't stop.

That one scene repeated over and over again. Screams. Blood. The crunching sounds. Screams, Blood. The crunching sounds.

Ava Morgan shot up in bed, sweat drenching her pajamas and her heart pounding. Her hand was shaking as she reached for the water bottle on her side table, and most of it ended up down her pajama top instead of in her mouth.

It had been a while since she'd had that nightmare, but she knew what had triggered it. She threw the empty water bottle trash bin and then squeezed her eyes shut as if that would make the images in her head disappear. It never worked. She always heard the screams long after she'd woken up. She always saw the blood. The broken bones,

Ava lay back on her bed with a tired sigh as she tried to calm her breathing and heartbeat. The time on her clock said it was only three in the morning, but she knew she wasn't going back to sleep again. In a

few hours, she had to leave home and start a real-life nightmare that would last for four years.

Four years! She had to give up four more years of her life before she could finally be free.

The full moon's rays filtered through her curtains and illuminated her room. She turned her head and saw her packed bags waiting by the door. Her chest squeezed painfully, and she had to train her breathing to stop the looming panic attack.

"It will be over in no time. Ava. Breathe. Just breathe," she whispered to herself.

An hour later, she felt calm enough to get ready. She put her bedside lamp on and sighed as she pushed the covers off her body. She trod quietly, as she had learned to do her whole life, making sure she wouldn't wake the others. Then she walked to the adjoining bathroom to take a quick shower and brush her teeth. When she finished, she walked to her wardrobe. The first thing she saw was the horrid uniform.

She had never worn a school uniform in her life, and now, as an adult, she was expected to conform. Who forced people to wear uniforms at a university? She ignored it and pulled out a pair of sweats and a T-shirt. When she was dressed, she quietly left her room to head to the kitchen.

The light was on as she approached, and the smell of fresh coffee hit her nose. She found Alpha Roland hunched over a cup, staring at it as if it would give him the answer to all of their problems.

“I didn’t wake you, did I?” she asked as she kissed his cheek and walked over to the cupboards to pull a mug out.

“I don’t think I slept,” Alpha Roland grunted.

She felt a pang because she knew she was the cause of this

“I’ll be fine, Dad,” she said gently as she took her cup to sit beside him.

She had been calling him dad since he found her in a foster home. It seemed like forever since then.

“If there is any sign of trouble, anything at all, call me, and I will come and get you.”

“I thought this was a rite of passage for every wolf,” she teased.

She didn’t want to point out that trouble would probably be all she would get. He was worried enough. Besides, she was sure they would have her out of there when they realized she was human. This was a colossal mistake, and someone would fix it

“I’ve already taught you everything you need to know,” Alpha grumbled again. “If that stupid Council weren’t so stuck in their antiquated ways, there would be no need for all this.”

“The rules are the rules, Dad. You can’t break them, even for me.”

She had brought enough trouble to him over the years for the things she could not control—the calls from school, the hospital visits, and the way

her mouth sometimes worked before she could stop it. But she could control the outcome of this. She could follow the rules, keep her head down, and let the Council come to the right decision themselves

Alpha Roland sighed and hugged her to his side before he kissed the top of her head. He was a huge man, like most werewolves, even her peers. It was another reason she believed she was not one of them, no matter what she imagined had happened years ago.

Make sure you keep standing up for yourself. Don't let anyone break your spirit," he whispered.

I'm the ruthless Alpha Roland's daughter. No one will ever break me," she said with a sad smile.

She blocked back some tears as she pulled away.

"I'm going to make us all a huge breakfast so you can all celebrate kicking me out of the house for four years" she said as she stood

"I'm going to miss your cooking Every time Caleb cooks, it tastes like he shit in it," her Dad grunted.

Asa laughed as she pulled ingredients out of the fridge. She had to. She couldn't let the man who raised her know how completely terrified she was of the journey she was about to start

By the time she was almost finished, her brothers found their way downstairs to the kitchen one by one despite the very early hour. Caleb ruffled her hair before he went to pour himself some coffee. Nate went

straight for a piece of bacon before planking himself down at the table. The twins, Alex and Nick, were the last down. She hadn't thought she would see them until long after the sun had risen, but they came and kissed a check each before they went to sit at their kitchen table, too.

They all tried to keep the usual cheerful mood, but she could tell they were forcing it. Of all of them, Caleb was the oldest and had already done his four years. She had seen how much he changed every time he came home, and the sadness in his eyes every time he looked at her now made her worry the most. But he couldn't tell her what to expect like she couldn't tell Nate and the twins when it was their turn.

"So, remember the rules, Nate said after they finished eating. "No boys. No thinking about boys. No speaking to boys. No parties. Nothing"

"No fun. Got it. Dad," she snorted.

"This isn't a fucking joke, Ava. Caleb snapped. "For once in your life, do as you're told."

She stopped piling the plates and looked at her big brother in shock. Caleb looked away and started fiddling with his coffee mug.

"I'm sorry. It's just very important that you follow their rules," he said gruffly.

She couldn't stop the anxiety that trickled through. Her father and Caleb were the most worried about her because they knew what it would be like. And if two men with Alpha blood were worried, how could she not be scared?

“Why don’t you go for a run before we drive Ava to the airport,” their dad suggested.

With the way Caleb lowered his head, she knew that had been a command. He rose quickly and then dropped a kiss on the top of her head before he used the back door to leave the house

She sighed as she turned back to the rest of the family.

“I’ll be fine,” she said with a little smile.

“Yes, you’re with Alpha Roland replied with a smile of her own.”

As she left her brothers to tidy up the kitchen, she couldn’t help the dread that settled in her stomach again and the bad feeling that told her that, no, she would not be fine.