

2 His Return

We took him up on his offer. Fried chicken is my favorite. Uncle Tommy knows that.

Elena is a beautiful but erce ghter. Gamma Tommy found her about 15 years ago. She was a lone wolf, looking to move to the Keys after running away from an abusive father. She pulled her old beat-up car next to Uncle Tommy's at the Wawa gas station and it was game over for both of them. They were fated mates. She is unable to have kids and has always been like the mother I wished I had.

Once, when I was turning 10, I got in a huge ght with mom because she had forgotten my birthday again. She and dad didn't even acknowledge me the whole day and Parker was off doing alpha training exercises with another pack. Mom slapped me when I demanded to talk to dad. I ended up running to the Gamma quarters in tears.

Uncle Tommy was still working, but Aunt Elena had tenderly placed an ice pack on my cheek, cooing and cuddling me while I cried in her arms. I remember whispering to her after I calmed down that I wished she were my mom, and she whispered back, "Me too."

Now, whenever I need parental gures, I go to her or Uncle Tommy. My parents may support me nancially, gifting me with a new car when I got my driver's license so mom wouldn't have to take me to school anymore, and giving me a credit card so I can buy my meals outside of the packhouse and so mom never has to take me shopping, but the Childes have been more my parents in the ways that truly count.

Casey spends much of the meal asking Gamma Nathan about Blue Cliff Pack. Aunt Elena took out a dark witch a few days ago, and she is still recovering from the damage the witch's magic did to her body. She is feeling better, but not well enough to deal with 30 rambusious pups as they try to man-handle her.

I drop Casey off at his beach home, waving to his parents, where they are looking from the window. I guess he is serious about moving with me to Blue Cliff. He even told Uncle Tommy to take his name off the candidate list for gamma here. Gamma Nathan assures Casey that he can have a shot at gamma of Blue Cliff if he works hard. Gamma Nathan only has a daughter, and Courtney is not a warrior. She is nishing her rst year in college to become a nurse. Nathan was hoping to pass the title down to Courtney's mate but she hadn't found him yet. He is getting older, nearly 45, and is thinking about retirement.

The packhouse is still wide awake when I park in the palm-shaded parking lot. Lizards scurry away from the door as I make my way inside. Everyone seemed to be gathered in the meeting hall. People are cheering and laughing loudly. Curiosity got the better of me, so I peaked my head in around the corner. There, at the center of all the attention, is Parker.

His messy blonde curls are much longer than the last time I saw him. He is towering over most everyone at nearly 7 feet tall. He looks so much more like dad now, with his droopy eyes, full lips and bulkier frame. I feel like his body has doubled in size since I saw him at Christmas.

Mom is gushing at Parker's side. "I thought you were going with your friends to California for a few weeks after your classes nished? You still have 3 weeks until your graduation. We were planning on coming and riding back with you," mom looked anxious, probably because she wasn't prepared for his arrival. Knowing how she is, she probably wanted to have the Alpha quarters scrubbed to perfection and a huge welcome party planned. This is of little consequence to me. About 2 months after Parker left for university, mom had me moved out of the alpha quarters and into one of the 3rd oor warrior suites. She said it was because I trained so much, she wanted me to be able to come and go without disturbing them throughout the day. She probably didn't want to pretend to tolerate me anymore after Parker started treating me like a disease.

"I changed my plans. I can go to Cali any time. Carli is graduating next week. I wanted to make it in time for that," Parker smiles and shrugs at her.

"Oh, honey. She would understand if you missed it. It's not like you guys are close. She has plans with her friends anyway. She's been hanging out with Casey Lewis more. I think they had a date planned for after her graduation anyway."

Parker's eyes ashed with anger momentarily, startling my mom. He quickly recovers and ashes her a megawatt smile.

"Maybe I just missed you and dad," he says, earning him awes from the crowd.

Mom smiled back up at him, but her eyes still looked nervous. She then glances over, her eyes meeting mine, then turning hostile. I roll my eyes and leave, bounding up the stairs to the third oor so I can get ready for bed.

After I showered again, washing the sticky humidity from being outside in the murky climate all evening, I put on a pair of spanx and a sports bra. It's nearing summer, meaning it's always hot and sticky. Except for at school where they keep it freezing with powerful air conditioning to encourage students to cover their bodies more, everyone wears the bare minimum most of the time. It's too hot for real pajamas. I had to order jeans and warmer clothes for my impending move. Going from the extreme balmy heat to the harsh cold is going to be a real shock.

I was lying in my bed, scrolling through webtoons on my phone when I heard a knock at my door. Uncle Tommy or Aunt Elena probably just wanted to make sure I made it back okay.

When I answered the door, I was surprised to see it was Parker on the other side.

He looks at my outt, a look of disgust crossing his features, "What the hell are you wearing? Do you always answer your door practically naked?"

I glared up at him. He may be freakishly tall, but I'm not short either. Even at 5 foot 10 inches, Parker towers over me.

"This is how I dress for training most days anyway, just like every other woman warrior," I roll my eyes and he bares his teeth at my sarcasm. "I'm doing great, by the way. Thanks for asking. I know, it's been sooo long since we've last spoken. I'm so glad we could catch up. Tell mom and dad 'hi' for me," I sneered, then went to close the door in his face.

"Why the heck are you in a room down here? Why did you leave home?" he asks me, holding the door open with his hand.

I looked at him in utter confusion, "I've lived down here for almost 4 years now. Why are you just now noticing? You were here a few months ago at Christmas."

"You weren't here at Christmas," he states.

"I was right here, dipshit. I wasn't in the alpha quarters, but I was down here, enjoying Christmas with Uncle Tommy and Aunt Elena."

"They're not our aunt and uncle. And mom said you went away with friends for Christmas," he argues.

I sighed loudly, wishing for this conversation to be over. "I went over to hang out with Simone and Casey when mom told me to steer clear of you. I stayed with them a few nights until you left again." I tried to pull the door from his grip but to no avail. I just want to f*****g read my nerd pictures and go to bed! "What do you want, Parker? I just got back from dinner with Casey and I want to go to bed."

Parker growled at my tone, gripping the door harder. I can hear the wood groaning in his hand and hope internally that he doesn't break my door. That would make going to bed take so much longer while waiting for the repairman to come replace it. Maybe I could just stay with Simone tonight?

"Are you dating that guy? If you are, I swear I'm not making him my gamma. There's no way I'm letting a guy who doesn't wait for his mate help me lead my pack."

"How the hell do you know he's not my mate? And you don't have to worry about making him gamma. He already withdrew his name from the running. He's moving to Blue Cliff with me after graduation. We talked to Gamma Nathan about it today."

I tried one more time to jerk the door from his grip. To my surprise, it came free. I looked up at Parker triumphantly, and that's when I noticed the rage running off of him in waves. I have never been scared of my brother, but at that moment he looked terrifying.

"You're leaving with him? You're moving to Canada?! That's the other end of the continent. Are you being serious right now?" His voice sounds calm, but I know better. This is the tone for when my brother is truly pissed. When he is so angry, everything inside him ices over.

"I thought you knew. Mom and dad did the transfer request behind my back. I didn't even know until it was approved. I thought you were behind it too. Mom said it was to stay out of your way when you got back," I can't keep the mocking tone out of my voice. "Casey decided to move today after talking with Gamma Nathan. He will be in the running for gamma up there."

Parker is seething. I can literally feel his fury as he glares at me with his dark brown, droopy eyes.

"As much as I like being looked down upon and dealing with your f*****d up anger issues, I'm tired. Good night, Parker, and Welcome home."

I shut the door on his face, which was still xed in a mask of fury. After closing the door, I leaned against it, then slowly fell to the oor. I miss the brother from my youth. The brother who I thought was the only one I needed to love me in my family. I don't know this version of Parker, and I don't wish to know him. All I want now is to hurry up and graduate, then move on to start a new life.

Parker POV

Seeing Carli again took my breath away. I could tell the moment she entered the packhouse. Her sweet coconut scent touched my nose and everything inside me started to crave her once again. No matter how long we are apart, no matter how much I start to believe it's all in my head, that there is no way my sister could be my mate, reality hits me like a ton of bricks once her scent takes over my senses.

I thought she would come and see me in the meeting hall after her scent reached me, but she never showed. I waited for an extra hour down there, dealing with mom's theatrics and the prying questions from the other she-wolves and warriors waiting for the chance to see her. I haven't seen her much in the past 4 years.

At rst, I avoided her, confused by the revelation that she was my mate. I told mom, not trusting my dad to not banish her if he found out. Mom helped me transfer to an out of state school and told me she would help me to avoid my sister until this was all sorted out.

After the rst year of no contact, distracting myself, sleeping with anyone I could, but only being able to nish the job when I imagined her face, I came home for summer break between my freshman and sophomore year. Mom had sent Carli out with Gamma Tommy and his mate to help a neighboring pack recover from a rogue attack. She stayed gone the whole time I was home and I never got a chance to talk things out with her.

I caught her from across the room and at a distance periodically when I would come home on breaks, but mom always said she was out with friends or doing warrior duties outside the pack when I was home. After a while, I came to realize she was avoiding me as well. Carli was trying to steer clear of me.

No matter who I dated, who I slept with, Carli was the only person I could think about. I spent the last year planning, and came to realize that no matter what, I couldn't reject her like I had originally planned to do 4 years ago. Mom isn't my real mom. My real mom died when I was four years old. I barely remember her. Mary has been my mom since dad discovered she was his fated mate and brought her home not long after mom died.

Dad had gotten my real mom pregnant in college. Since he was to be alpha, and I ended up being a boy making me his alpha heir, dad took my real mom, Rose, as his chosen mate and his chosen Luna.

I don't think he ever loved my real mom the way he loves my mom now. He would coat the entire packhouse in gold and paint the walls neon pink if it made her happy.

Since Carli is only my half sister, I thought it would be alright if I gave into the bond. She is everything a luna should be. She's erce, independent, loves her pack and will defend it above all else. As my fated mate, my gift from the moon goddess herself, this has to be what is best for me and my pack.

I almost lost it when mom mentioned Carli was dating Casey Lewis. I remember the kid from warrior training before I left for college. I saw his name on the list of prospective gammas and instantly thought of a way to make Carli break up with him.

That all came crashing down when she told me she was leaving Crystal Moon with the guy and moving to the other end of the continent.

I couldn't even respond. I just stared into her vibrant green eyes and watched as she shut the door on my breaking heart.

She was a woman now. A gorgeous woman, with a rm body and distinct curves. I almost jumped her when she opened the door and I saw her practically in her underwear. The way her hips moved as she shifted angrily on her feet; the way her ass cheeks were peeking out of her micro shorts and the sweat glistened off her full chest had the blood rushing south.

Then she told me she was moving away with her boyfriend because of a decision our parents made had me seeing red. No f*****g way was I letting her go once I resolved myself to give into fate. No f*****g way was I going to let her belong to another.