

## The Rescue

Quinn POV

They're gone.

Everyone.

They're all gone.

"Sweetheart, can you hear me? Can you focus on me?" A man with a deep, gravelly voice asks from above me.

I can hear him, but my eyes can't focus on his blurry gure. My mouth won't move properly to form words.

"She's alive, but in shock. She's been bitten. Her blood is poisoned and she appears to be a minor. Her wolf isn't adult to help heal her yet."

The man's frantic voice oats around me, but I still can't focus on his face.

I'm tired of trying. Tired of straining to keep my eyes open and tired of the pain that struggling to survive brings.

Everyone is dead. Everyone. Why can't I join them?

Right before I give in to the darkness, the prick of a needle in the side of my neck makes my eyes jolt open again. The searing pain that was running through my veins ices over, slowly at rst, then as the anti-venom reaches my heart, my heart beats in overtime to spread the medicine to the rest of my body.

As the pain of the poison recedes, another pain, more focused and distinct, stabs and pulses in my back.

"Hurts," I cried out in an airy scream. It hurts so badly. So f\*\*\*\*g bad. I was almost numb from the overwhelming pain of the poison as I neared my death before, but now that that pain is gone, this pain is enough to send me into an agony like no other.

Before, the pain felt like it had an end. That end was death, but it was still a hope of an end. This, however, feels innite and gruesome. It feels like a rod of re from hell had been stabbed through my back to forever torture me, brutally deforming me from the inside.

"Oh, s\*\*t. Archie, get her on her f\*\*\*\*g front. Now! Look at her f\*\*\*\*g sides."

A less friendly voice, full of authority and gravely harsh echoes from somewhere nearby.

I feel my body being jostled, turned and the damp earth is pressed against my cheek as I whimper from the pain moving causes me. The stabbing burn is shooting up my spine.

"s\*\*t," the rst voice mutters. "MEDIC! I NEED A DOCTOR NOW!"

"What is it?" a new voice asks.

"She has open wounds on her damn back. The poison clogging her veins must have prevented her from bleeding out. This looks like....it's wolfsbane," the unfriendly voice from before conrmed in disgusted surprise.

"Wolfsbane?!" the rst voice repeats. "Why would vampires have wolfsbane?"

They wouldn't. I did. I had it on my belt as I was leaving interrogation training with dad. I was training to be the next Beta. I had to learn how to lace weapons and restraints with the stuff.

When the vamps attacked, they must have torn open my back as we fought, and then when I fell, the aerosol container must have exploded on my back.

"Get the f\*\*\*\*g wounds cleaned out, you assholes, and quit f\*\*\*\*g yammering. She's a f\*\*\*\*g minor. If it doesn't get cleaned out now, there are going to be lasting effects."

I feel multiple hands and a rough material start prodding and scrapping at my back. I screamed out, unable to tolerate the pain any longer.

"It's okay, kid. It will be over soon," the mean voice from before suddenly sounded more comforting right next to my ear. "This should help."

A large hand rested on my shoulder, and warmth rushed through me.

He's an alpha. He's using his aura to soothe and calm me. It doesn't take long before I give into the feeling his aura and warm hand brings me, and I stop struggling, nally giving in to sleep as the pain fades into blackness.

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Farak POV

"Did your dad tell you anything else about the rescue? The number of survivors? Anything?" I asked my best friend, Axel, the future Alpha of our pack.

"I'm sure it's nothing more than what your dad told you. Probably less. He told me to mind my own damn business and leave him the f\*\*k alone while he was busy," he shrugs, staring down at his math assignment due tomorrow.

I'm lying on his bed, throwing a ball up in the air and catching it over and over again, nervous for some reason about the rescue party's return this evening.

"He didn't even mention how many they rescued? How many were, you know, killed?"

Axel sighs, throwing his pencil down in exasperation. "It was a m\*\*\*\*\*e, Rick. Dad said a f\*\*\*\*g m\*\*\*\*\*e like he had never seen. There might not be survivors. The alpha there didn't contact our pack until it was already too late."

"Then why is it taking them so long to get back? They've been gone for 2 days now."

"I don't know, but I know that if I fail this homework assignment because you're being a pain in the ass, I'm going to destroy you."

I cringe, knowing he means it. He's trying to nish school a year early so he can work on the mining claims for a year, getting experience before leaving for college.

My dad suggested I do the same, but opted to do dual credit instead, going to a community college to get my associate's degree while still going to high school. Math and school are easy for me. I would rather get it out of the way rst before learning the businesses of the pack and how they run.

Dad always says you have to learn to be a follower before a leader, and working the mining claims and logging elds like a regular worker is part of that. It's not a fun task, but as the future beta, it's something I'll have to do.

Axel loves it. He likes the hard work and the long gruelling hours. I like my regular, worry-free pack life where I can just go to school and train and have my social life. Axel doesn't have much of a social life besides me.

Not that he couldn't. He's just not interested. Most girls annoy the crap out of him, and he doesn't tolerate fake niceness well. People that try to get close to him because of his rank are soon put in their place when Axel has enough of them putting on airs.

He's gruff like his dad, but a good guy. Perfect for an Alpha. Logical, focused, and insanely loyal to our pack.

I'm easily distracted lately, lacking drive for many of the things I need to be doing. Dad says it's a faze, and I'll nd my motivation one day.

Axel just calls me an i\*\*t.

"Hey, hey, Ax," little Courtney comes running into Axel's room right after he picks back up his pencil to continue with his calculus homework. He growls, throws the pencil on the oor, then turns to Courtney.

"WHAT?!"

She gives him the stink eye, raising her eyebrows at him. "Excuse you? Try again," she says, again on her hip and pre-teen attitude exuding from her.

I chuckle, amused that Courtney is literally the only one who can face off with her older cousin.

Axel sighs, running a hand down his face. "What Court? I have stuff to do, and that jerk is distracting enough as it is."

"Apologize rst," she lifts her nose in the air, and I snort from trying to hold back my laughter.

Axel bares his teeth. "Fine. Sorry. Now what do you want?"

She crosses her arms, turning her head to the side. "I don't feel like you mean that. Say it like you mean it."

"I'm sorry that I'm going to choke you out if you don't tell me what you want," he snaps.

"I'm telling Uncle Max," she lifted her nose higher.

Okay, I can see the ght about to break out, so it's time to step in. These two are hilarious the way they bicker, but when their dominant alpha personalities collide it can turn ugly really fast.

"Courtney, did you hear anything from your dad about the rescue party? Did he say if there were any survivors?"

Courtney throws Axel one last death glare, then comes to sit next to me on the bed. She's Axel's cousin, but she's like my little sister. Being the only children of the ranked wolves in our pack, we were raised as siblings. Axel and Courtney are cousins, Alpha Max being the big brother of Fiona, Courtney's mom.

Courtney's dad, Nathan Childes, is our gamma and the one running the pack while Alpha Max and my dad are away.

I know what Courtney wants from me before she tells me. I prop my legs up so she can lean against them, resting her head on my knees. It's how she always wants to sit, propped up against one of us like we are there for her comfort only. Like living throw pillows. She can be dominating like an alpha, and this is probably her way of trying to dominate us.

She is sweet as can be to everyone else, but to us, the ones who will one day run the pack, she likes to keep us under her thumb.

And we let her for the most part. We let her think she has us in the palm of her hands with her little 13-year-old attitude, but it's us immersing ourselves so much in her life that no bratty, shit-brained boys can get close to her. It's like an unspoken pact between me and Axel. No one gets close to Courtney without our approval.

Like I said, she is too sweet for her own good sometimes. We don't want her taken advantage of, being the gamma's only child, the alpha's niece, and a girl. A girl completely uninterested in being the gamma one day. We don't want boys taking advantage of her to get closer to the top.

She has a cousin a year younger than her that she has never met, due to family issues. I saw the girl once when she came up to visit with Courtney's uncle and aunt. The girl, Carl, is orce for a 12 year old. Gamma Nate has been talking with Alpha Max about Carl, taking the Gamma title from him after she graduates. She's been training to take it in her current pack in Miami after her dad, Gamma Tommy, retires, but because of tensions with the alpha and luna of her pack, that might not be possible.

It's a lot of step-parent and fated mate drama between the luna of the Miami pack and Gamma Tommy, Courtney's uncle. Alpha Max told us to keep our noses out of it and leave her alone for now, so none of us really got to talk with her when she was visiting.

One day we will. Looks like we will be getting our next Gamma from the Miami pack. It's where Gamma Nate is from, and that speaks a lot for the pack's ability to produce decent gammas.

"Daddy said there was only one survivor. They got there too late. The vampires destroyed the whole pack, but the survivor had silver-laced wolfsbane in her blood somehow, so they didn't drain her. They just left her for dead."

She glares over at Axel, who is back to trying to concentrate on his work.

"I came here to tell you both that they're back. Uncle Max and Beta Archie had just passed through the main gates. Daddy told me to come get Axel to help," she sticks her tongue out at him like a child. "Jerk."

Axel sighs loudly, throwing his pencil to hit Courtney in the head gently, then running from the room so fast she doesn't have time to react.

"Hey! I'm telling your dad!" She jumps off the bed to run after him, leaving me chuckling, still on the bed.

My laughter dies down as that sick anxious feeling takes root again in my chest. I tossed the ball in the small hoop over Axel's door while contemplating where the unease was coming from.

Why am I so nervous about the rescue party returning? It's all I have been able to think about.

I pushed out of Axel's bed to start making my way out to the front of the packhouse.

There are several vans out front, but it's only our people ling out. Courtney said there was only one survivor, but I don't see anyone new.

In the last van, my dad is getting out, then he goes around to the back, opening the doors and helping a medic to lift a girl from the backseat.

Her hair falls over most of her face as she sleeps, but when dad cradles her bandaged body against his chest, he brushes her hair to the side in the motion. My breath catches in my throat.

Even bruised and scraped up, she's gorgeous. Too gorgeous. Her full, luscious lips make my teenage body react in an embarrassing way.

"What the f\*\*k took you so long, kid? Get your ass over here and help unload this s\*\*t!" Alpha Max yells out to Axel. "You too, turd for brains," he pins me with one of his hard looks, "Quit gawking like a creep and get over here and help."

I walked over, but didn't take my eyes off my dad as he carried the beautiful girl to the clinic. Fiona rushes out with a doctor and they hurry my dad and the girl inside.

Who is she?

Whoever she is, I feel called to her, and I spend the rest of the day distracted as I try to help the returning she unload and debrief. I was so distracted, that by dinner, I decided it was time to go and see who she was for myself.