

## 2. Best Laid Plans

My jaw dropped in shock. I stared straight ahead to watch Jake claim the blonde-haired beauty, who stood tall at about ve foot nine, slender, and dressed to kill, who was reciprocating his carnal response.

I could tell by the animated expression on her face that she could sense their bond. Wide-eyed and with a stiffened position, her body language screamed with desire. I couldn't believe my eyes. My heart stopped for a moment. I felt frozen in the very spot I stood in. My stomach twisted in agony as I realized they were each other's fated mates.

The attention of my fellow pack members ickered between me and the stunning goddess standing beside me. They looked just as shocked as I was, but they looked to be laced more with pity towards me.

My heart was breaking into tiny little pieces at that very moment. The love of my life, my chosen mate, my best friend, had met his fated mate, and now all bets were off. There was no way I could ever contend with the goddess-given fated mate bond, nor would I wish to. I just had to be happy for Jake. He had found his other half, but right now, I just wanted to get out of here. Feeling physically ill, ghting the urge to cry a river of tears. I felt broken beyond repair.

Watching as Jake and the blonde beauty embraced and devoured one another passionately for all to see. I couldn't bear another moment of this. Doing my best to control my emotions and my immediate need to cry my heart out, I turned slowly and made my way to the side of the stage.

I could hear Max calling after me, trying to get my attention. But I needed to be alone right now. Once out of the ballroom, I sprinted on my heels, shifting into my wolf and galloping for the tree line. I didn't know where I was going, but I knew I just needed to run for now, howling painfully at the moon as I made my way through the woods.

After running for what seemed like forever, I was tired. I slowed down and tried to take in my surroundings. I had never been this far out of the pack boundaries. I was feeling a little lost. But I was okay with that at this very moment.

My emotional distress and constant running had completely consumed me, leaving me exhausted. I trudged through the woods, looking for a sheltered spot to rest and hide from threatening creatures.

Finally, nding a bush canopy, I settled in the corner. Once I was certain that I was no longer visible to others, I curled up and let out the cries that I had worked so hard to contain for so long.

I eventually gave in and closed my eyes, just for a bit, I told myself. I was utterly exhausted.

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The sun's rays awakened me from my slumber. I did not know what time it was. I knew it was daytime, and even though I still felt broken, I knew it was time to go back. No doubt my parents and Max would try to console me today.

I was not looking forward to the looks of pity that I was about to get from my fellow pack members. Over the years, they had warned me that this day would come. I guess I was just so baed in love and stubborn that I didn't want to believe it could be true.

"Are you still with me, Indigo?" I asked my wolf in trepidation.

"Always Katya," Indigo faithfully replied.

"Come on, say it. You told me so," I snapped at Indigo, who had always maintained this day would come.

"He was never ours, Katya," she gently reminded me.

I don't know what I was thinking. And I would never expect him to reject his fated mate for me. We had always been adamant that if one of us were to meet their mate, then we would have to end things. I guess I just never thought that day would come.

"Everything happens for a reason Katya, we have a mate out there, somewhere," Indigo wisely counseled me.

"Even if we don't, it's irrelevant. I saw the way he looked at her last night. He claimed her, right there, in front of the entire pack," I said, trying to convince myself more than my wise counterpart.

"We are strong Katya, we will overcome this," Indigo declared.

"I know, it just doesn't feel like it right now, still feels kinda raw," I replied.

"We need food. Food always makes us happier. Come on, let's go catch something," Indigo called out. And before I knew it, we were up on our hinds stalking through woods. In no time, we found something to sustain us on our journey back to White Pine.

After a little sustenance, we were on our way back home. It was time to face reality. Time to face the inevitable. That Jake and I would be no longer, that the love I had shared with him for what seems like a lifetime was not meant to be.

Now that I bore the ocial mark, the hurt intensied even more. But I knew over time the mark would fade. I guess I could thank the goddess for small mercies that we hadn't ocially mated. That would have made things much worse.

I didn't realize how far out of pack territory we had gotten. It had taken us hours, and yet we still felt so far away. Alarms rang internally as I picked up on some non-woody scents mixed with something offensive, and my hackles instantly raised, as Indigo and I both knew we now had company.

Three scraggly grayish-brown rogues stepped out from behind a bunch of trees. They were slowly stalking towards us, snarling aggressively.

This wasn't our rst rodeo, we had fought rogues before, but usually, we had backup. We were on our own out here, so we would not be making the rst move.

Moments later, the smallest and most pathetic-looking one on the right pounced toward us. We dodged its impact at the last moment and the wolf fell forward knocking its head against a nearby tree.

The next wolf which was slightly bigger, circled us, and then it leaped forward with its canines out ready to attack. We met it mid-air and ripped a large chunk from the space between its scapular and neck. We heard it whimper in pain and fall to the ground.

The last one standing was the largest rogue wolf. He watched us momentarily growling; He had seen us ght and felt he could anticipate some of our moves, so we waited for him to strike.

The wolf lunged toward us, latching onto our lower leg. We howled in pain as we felt his canines rip into our esh. He took a large chunk out of our leg in his vicious attack resulting in us propelling backward.

We felt defenceless on the ground, the large rogue wolf standing in front of us, sizing us up as if we were his lunch. We played on our injury like a helpless she-wolf whimpering.

He looked back at its two companions proudly, likely gloating before he was about to go in for the kill. So we took that moment to lunge forward with all of our might and we latched onto his neck. He shook frantically to maintain control and shake us off, but we weren't about to let go. This was our only chance.

We sunk our canines even deeper and when the wolf's resistance lessened; We ripped a large pound of esh out. Blood spurted everywhere all over the wolf, all over us, and on the ground. We watched satisfactorily as he bled out, death taking him.

The other two wolves whimpered in the background. We watched them with crazed expression on our faces and stood up high, pung our chest out, with all the strength we could muster. The remaining rogues howled loudly and painfully and galloped off into the distance.

We lay back down on the ground for a moment, panting and covered in blood, the rogue's blood, and mine. Indigo was trying to heal our injury, but it was quite signicant and it would take time. More time than we had. We were vulnerable out here on our own. So we painstakingly did our best to hobble our way back to White Pine.

We stopped to rest on multiple occasions. We were losing a lot of blood, and unsure how much longer we were going to last in this state. Indigo could sense that we weren't too far off the White Pine pack perimeter, but we were so lightheaded and our vision was now blurring. We were still too far away to mind-link our pack members.

We continued to hobble along to the best of our ability until we couldn't move a step further and we nally succumbed to the darkness.

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I awoke to a shaking sensation. I opened my eyes to nd Maxine looking at me with concern etched across her face.

"Kat, I could kill you. Why did you run off like that?" Max yelled at me while attacking me with her hands.

"We've been searching everywhere for you!" She reiterated.

Ah, I registered the searing pain in my left leg. I gasped out loud, attempting to sit up.

"Lay back, don't move!" Max called out impatiently to me, looking highly unimpressed.

"You have a nasty gash on your leg. Hold on while we move you to the stretcher," Maxine instructed.

I just lay back. I knew better than to argue with Max when she was in one of these moods. That and I was so weak and dizzy. I closed my eyes again and faded away into unconsciousness.

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The next time I opened my eyes, I was in the pack hospital. I was attached to a bag of uids, an intravenous line inserted in my hand, and a cuff on my arm. A nurse was hovering over me with a syringe in her hand. I didn't even have time to ask what she was doing when she jabbed my arm with the syringe. I winced slightly, looking at her with confusion etched on my face.

"Relax, it's just a tetanus shot. You were overdue," she replied while moving on to her next task of checking my blood pressure.

Well, at least I will sleep easy tonight, knowing that I won't die of tetanus today, I thought to myself.

Sitting myself up in the hospital bed, I looked at the wall in search of a clock. There wasn't a clock in this room. I did not know what time of the day or night it was, or how long I had been out. Although I was now feeling well-rested and somewhat energetic.

Hopefully, Indigo was healing my wound and I could get out of this place as soon as possible. There was somewhere I needed to be. I needed to speak with Jake. I knew from the moment he had claimed his mate in front of everyone that was it for us. But I just wanted to get some closure, not to mention get the ocial rejection over with. I was not looking forward to that at all. But I knew it needed to happen.

"We will be ok. It will hurt. But I will take as much of the pain away as possible." Indigo courageously vowed.

"It's ok, I can handle this. This was my foolish mistake, not yours, Indigo, you warned me more than once." I said to my wolf counterpart.

"Everything happens for a reason, Katya," Indigo offered.

A knock at the door distracted me from my party. "Come in," I called out. I assumed my parents were here to scold me on my idiocracy, running out of pack territory like that, putting myself in danger, etc.

But it wasn't my parents, nor was it Max. It was Jake, of all people. I gasped out loud, as I was not expecting to see him so soon.

"Hey gorgeous," He said with a grin on his face, winking at me, and waltzing in as if nothing had happened.

It was like he was pulling at my heartstrings. It was not okay to talk to me like that anymore, not when he had found his fated mate.

Not phased by my shocked expression, he kissed me on my forehead; I pulled away, as much as I could, being stuck in a hospital bed.

"What are you doing?" I asked frustratedly.

"Kissing my mate," He replied with an air of smugness and arrogance about him.

He sat on my bed and positioned himself next to me. I moved over a little. Watching his actions and feeling a little annoyed at his nonchalance, I couldn't help but get angry.

"You claimed your fated mate last night!" I shot back at him. "In front of the entire pack!"

"My fated mate, yes, but you are my chosen mate," he replied, a hint of deviousness clear on his face.

"What!" I snapped back, feeling myself getting riled up, folding my arms in front of me, an unimpressed look on my face.

"Jake, it breaks my heart to say this, but just reject me already!" I blurted out, desperately trying to hold back my tears.

"Kitty Kat," he called out in a condescending tone. It was surreal that something that I once considered cute now made me irritated.

"Don't call me that, ever again!" I said, raising my voice, a rogue tear escaping from my eyes.

"Everything okay in here?" A nurse called out concerningly upon entering the room.

"No, Jake was just leaving!" I demanded, looking away from the man I loved.

He grabbed my wrist to get my attention. I looked back at him and was startled to see he was no longer in control.

With a look of anger spreading across his face, I saw Brute's presence as his eyes darkened. And just as quickly as that happened, Jake regained control again.

"We're not nished here!" He threatened.

"Excuse me Beta but Katya needs her rest," she said bowing her head respectfully.

"I'll be back later Kitty Kat," he said with promise laced over his features, and with that, he stormed out of the room.

"What in the hell was that?" I exclaimed internally.