

Prologue - The Banished Beta's Saving Grace

**This is Book Three of the Guardians Trilogy. This book contains references to events that occurred in the first two books and spoilers for those books. It is recommended that you read *The Broken Warrior's Daughter* and *Alpha's Guardian Angel* before reading this, the final book in the trilogy.

Eli

I never expected to find my mate, much less in a small town in the middle of the Appalachian Mountains where I was just passing through. Even more surprising than her being under eighteen and nearly half my age, was the fact that she was human.

I had been on a bus, with a ticket paid for by an old foe, turned...not exactly friend, but no longer a foe. I had stuffed the envelope of money he'd given me deep into my backpack underneath the new clothes he'd also bought for me. All of them still had the price tags on.

When the bus had stopped for a two-hour layover, I had gotten off to find a place to eat. There was only one little mom and pop diner in the small town and when I walked into the rundown restaurant, I immediately smelled her scent. Cherry blossoms. Sweet and floral and a little exotic.

When she walked up to take my order, I realized something was off about her. While she smelled vaguely of the forest, she didn't have the strong scent that all werewolves carry.

'Louis, does she have a wolf?' I ask my wolf.

I can see him in my head tilting his head from side to side, his ears up like he's trying figure her out. 'No. I don't sense a wolf. But...'

'But?' I ask.

'I don't know, there's something, like maybe she's a wolfless werewolf. She has power, but, well, I'm not sure. There's something there.'

"Good afternoon. Welcome to the diner. Can I get you something to drink?" The minimal effort she gives me in smiling her fake smile is obvious.

"Just water. Thank you."

Before I can say more, she's turning on her heel and walking back to the kitchen. She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. I know all werewolves say that about their mate, but this woman is definitely the most gorgeous woman in the world with her

caramel-colored skin, eyes the color of milk chocolate and her straight dark hair cut short.

I watch her look up as the bell over the front door rings. When she brings my water, she also has additional menus for the newcomers.

“Hey Benny.” She says as she walks up to the newcomer. This time, her smile is warm and generous and Louis snarls in my head, unhappy with his mate giving attention to another man.

‘Easy Louis. She doesn’t recognize us as her mate. If we’re going to take her as our mate, we’ll have to plan to stay for awhile and get to know her. She won’t recognize what we are to her without a wolf.’ I try to calm him.

However, it’s the conversation that I hear after she walks away that concerns me. The humans don’t understand that the rash of “animal attacks” that they are seeing in this area are actually vampire attacks. There are tell-tale signs and based on what they are saying, the vampires are heading south. South, to the packs that just let me go, to the son of the woman I couldn’t protect so many years ago. I owe her, even if I don’t owe them.

I left the diner, without ordering anything, jogging to the nearest forest and shifting. Louis ran straight through without stopping. I had to be there in time. I had to warn Liam. I owed Luna Estella that. After everything she did for me, I couldn’t save her, but I could save him and repay that debt.

After warning Liam that the vampire attack was imminent, I headed straight back to the little town to find my mate. It was hard enough to leave her the first time, but now the pull to her was so strong it was almost painful.

When I return, I find the only motel in town and get a room for a couple of nights. I need to learn all I can about my little mate, find out when she’ll be eighteen, see if her parents are actually werewolves and if so, why they are living here, on the outskirts of a pack.

After putting my things in the motel room and finding a hiding spot for my money, I return to the diner. Through the window, I can see that my mate is working the nightshift tonight, so I head in and sit down, Louis and I relaxing as we take in her sweet, exotic scent.

As she comes around the corner of the kitchen, I watch as her body stiffens, her nose going up into the air, nostrils flaring.

When she looks into my eyes, hers are not only showing that she now has her wolf, but they are brimming with the bright gold of the Guardian, turning her chocolate-colored eyes to amber.

“Mate.” She whispers.