

Chapter 4

When Vanessa was out of his sensitive hearing range, Jake pushed the maid away from him.

"Get out and shut the door behind you," He ordered, ignoring her disappointed look.

As her door closed, he stumbled onto his bed like a drunk man and hit his knee on the wooden edge of his bed because he was so preoccupied with his thoughts.

His true mate was beautiful, just like he had always wished she would be, but she was blind and human. Could he still mate with her, even though she was blind? He knew their pups would look great, but was that enough? What Alpha didn't want to father powerful Alpha pups? He also wanted that, but Ciara could not give him that.

Unfortunately, all his internal questions kept ending with the same answer. Ciara could not be his Luna for several reasons.

She was blind. She knew nothing about being a Luna. Worse yet, she needed his mother to assign Vanessa to take care of her so she probably couldn't take care of herself, so it would be too much to expect for her to take care of pack members and meet their needs. From the way Vanessa and his mother always talked about her, he knew she was a liability and her blindness would turn him into a source of mockery among other alphas, his friends, and maybe even among the pack members.

A weak Luna would surely be the weak link that other packs looking to expand their territory would exploit to attack the Thurman pack. Only the combination of a strong Alpha and Luna could keep a pack safe from greedy eyes and packs.

There was no way he could risk his reputation, his pack's reputation, and the well-being of his pack by mating with her when the only advantage she had was her delicate beauty. She had no powerful family or pack to help his pack if need be, and she couldn't even defend herself.

Suddenly, an urgency spurred by his wolf's restlessness had him standing up and making his way to the attic, where he knew his mother had dumped Ciara to keep her away from pack guests. He found her fast asleep, her wavy honey-colored hair spread around her on the pillow, making her look like a minor goddess.

If only she could see. If only she was the daughter of a powerful Alpha or even beta. Then he could try to abandon all the other girls he wanted to sleep with just to mate with her, love her, wake up beside her every morning, and have pups with her.

Drawn to her like a magnet to iron, he couldn't resist dropping a kiss on her cheeks. From an innocent kiss on the cheek, he kissed her on her so bow-shaped lips and couldn't resist kissing her more and more.

As a minute of kissing, Ciara seemed to wake up a little and, since she didn't push him away, he deepened his kiss. At first, it seemed like she was kissing him back, but then she went still as if she was just waking up and started trying to shove him away from her with all her puny human strength.

He reluctantly pulled himself off her, releasing her from the embrace he couldn't remember initiating. Then he straightened up and stared at her with flared nostrils.

Her lips were slightly swollen from his kisses and her cheeks were an adorable shade of light pink.

She was seated on her bed, panting slightly, holding her blanket to her chest and looking around wildly, even though she couldn't see a thing.

She was truly innocent, and he liked that if he were to mate with her, he would be her first and only.

When he didn't say anything, she started asking questions and he could smell her fear, which made his wolf antsy. "Who are you? What do you want?!"

He didn't know what to say or how to introduce himself. Should he introduce himself as her alpha-to-be or as her true mate?

Eventually, he decided not to introduce himself at all and walked out of her room with a grumpy order. "Go back to sleep. I'm leaving."

"Who are you?"

Opening her door to leave, he looked back for a moment to stare at her disheveled, shivering form. Then he ignored his wolves' instinctive desire to reassure her and closed the door.

A few hours later, Jake had just ended his shower after a quick run in wolf form to blow off the steam of kissing Ciara when he heard someone knock on his door. He stepped out of the shower, tied a towel around his waist, and unlocked the door for his friend and future Beta, Tyler.

"Where were you? I came earlier, but you weren't here," He asked.

"I went for a run."

Jake felt like hitting him when Tyler started laughing, as if the thought of him running was a huge joke. "You went for a run? At 5 am? What's wrong, man? I thought I would have to hit you really hard to wake you up. After all, on a regular Saturday, you don't get up until 10 and you leave the party pretty early last night...without a girl?"

"There's nothing wrong, okay? I just need a little space." Jake turned away and opened his closet to pick out a t-shirt and jeans.

"Yeah, well, I don't believe you. You probably hooked up with one of those girls sent by the other packs. Probably that Serena girl who went missing around the same time you went missing. I..."

Glaring at him for making assumptions, Jake interrupted Tyler. "What do you want?"

"Your father wants to see you in the conference room asap."

"Why?"

"I don't know why yet, but something hardcore is going on 'cos some of the Council Members are panicking."

"That's bad," Jake grunted as he got dressed.

"Really bad. My dad says they're supposed to be cool and composed at all times to show that nothing can faze them." Tyler agreed.

"Mm-hmm."

"Let's go," Jake said as he was tying the laces on his sneakers and running a comb through his hair.

As they walked to the conference room, Jake listened as Tyler recalled all that he had missed after he left his coming-of-age party early.

When they got there, his parents were engaged in a serious argument that ended when his father looked up and saw him. "Jacob! It's about time you got here. Where have you been? We have serious trouble."

"What's going on?" Jake walked to the empty seat on the right-hand side of his father's seat at the head of the table.

"We need a human sacrifice." It was Tyler's father, the Beta of the pack, who answered him because his parents were glaring at each other.

Jake was about to sit, but he paused in surprise, looking carefully around the room at all the serious and gloomy faces in the pack's biggest conference room. "Is that supposed to be a joke?"

His father's face was much more somber than usual as he shook his head. "No, the vampires are back."

"The ones that live in the gated estate beyond Tantile woods?"

"Yes."

"What are they doing here? I thought they stayed in their other territory in the south?"

"According to what I have gathered, they may be back for good this time because they want to do business with the expanse of land in their old territory. Asking for a human sacrifice is probably so they can affirm their dominance as the real owners of this territory."

Tyler's father answered.

"And they just had to demand a human sacrifice? That's ridiculous! Don't they have coven-grown humans and voluntary blood donors that provide them with blood? Plus, there are plenty of humans living in town. There shouldn't be any problem picking one and sending it to them. Besides, we've stayed in this territory for the past twenty years they've been gone, the land is now ours." Jake said.

His father shook his head with a resigned sigh. "They were here before us and they actually fought for and have the paperwork for these lands, so it's their territory. And they're too powerful so, fighting with them is not an option. They must be trying to drive us away by asking us to provide a human sacrifice within two days when they know we can't give them any of the humans in town."

A councilman nodded. "This is a show of power to tell us they can make life difficult for us."

"I don't understand. Why can't we take the humans in town?" Jake asked.

"Eighteen years ago, a few humans went missing in town. By the time we realized there was a rogue group hunting humans for sport and sent in pack warriors to deal with them, their actions had already been recorded on camera. We were forced to sign a treaty with the town mayor and the mayors of all the surrounding towns, to never hurt their townspeople." It was a council member who answered Jake's question.

Jake was perplexed now. "...So what do we do?"

"I suggested that we give them the blind human, but your father refused." His mother said.

"Mackenzie, we can't do that. Ciara was entrusted to us to care for. We can't offer her up as a human sacrifice. That's not right." His father protested.

"Anything pragmatic is not right to you!" Jake's mother sneered.

The idea of giving Ciara as a human sacrifice didn't appeal to Jake himself, but he didn't say a word.

"Alright! I think a vote is in order. All in favor of giving the blind girl as a human sacrifice, raise your hands, please." The head of the Council said.

The only people who raised their hands, when Jake and Alpha Donovan didn't, were five council members and his mother. Jake avoided his mother's gaze because he could see that she was shocked that he hadn't supported her decision like he always did during similar meetings.

Instead, Jake stared at his father's triumphant and smug smile, wondering if his father had a close relationship with Ciara since he seemed to be so against sending her out as a sacrifice, even though that was the easiest solution to their current problem.

"The majority wins. We are not sacrificing Ciara."

"But what do we do now?" Tyler's father asked.

"I don't know yet. I suggest that everyone reflect on this matter and then, we will assemble in the evening and come up with better solutions. Meeting dismissed," His father said.

"Yes, Alpha Donovan," Everyone chorused, bowing their heads to Jake's father before leaving the conference room in ones and twos.

Jake was walking out with the others when his father called him back. "Jacob, wait a second. I want to talk to you."

Jake was surprised because he and his father never saw eye to eye, because his father wasn't as accommodating and supportive as his mother.

His father was always stern, advising him to be disciplined and principled in everything he did. When his father had seen that his advice was going through one ear and coming out of the other, he stopped advising Jake and just stared at him with a familiar disappointed look whenever he did something wrong. Of course, whenever Jake did something that really angered him, his father still took time to lecture and punish him.

As soon as his mother heard his father, she turned on her heels and walked back into the conference room.

"I didn't ask you to stay, Mackenzie. I want to talk to my son alone." His father used his Alpha voice to back his order, which didn't surprise Jake.

His mother was an Alpha, just like his father, but she was more assertive and knew how to persuade people to do things her way while his father was quiet and reserved. Jake had always wondered how his father managed to restrain and keep up with her, and now he had his answer.

His mother obviously wanted to say something scathing to his father for what she probably perceived as an insult in the presence of the council members that were still in the room but a look from his father silenced her and had her stalking out of the conference room in anger.

As soon as the room had cleared out, his father patted him on his shoulder. "I'm glad you didn't raise your hands. If you did, most of the council members would have raised theirs too, and I would have been outnumbered."

His father turned to stare out the window with his hands in his pocket. "I know you think I'm too stern with you. But that's because I'm trying to teach you to be the best Alpha you can be. I've always thought that letting you and your mother get as close as you are now was my biggest mistake in life and that I had ruined your life, but now I can see that there's still hope for you."

His father turned to face him. "I hope that, from now, you'll start working on yourself and try to be a better Alpha than pack members can look up to and respect. Keep it up, son."

As he watched his father walk out of the conference room with a pleasant smile on his face, Jake couldn't help grinning. He'd finally had a taste of what he had always secretly desired. His father's approval.

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