

## Chapter Four

Five Years Later

Natalia

"But I want chocolate chip!"

"I want blueberry!"

"I want blueberry too!"

Anna gasps, the four year old turning in her seat to x her brother with an open mouthed stare. I bite back my laughter at her betrayed expression.

"Blueberry tastes better, Anna." Nicholas shrugs in defence, bringing his sippy cup to his mouth with both hands.

A begrudged Anna folds her chubby arms over her chest, "Does not!"

"Does too!" Axel joins in on the squabble between his siblings.

"Does not!" Anna glares.

"Does too!" Axel sticks his tongue out at his sister.

I hold up my hands in front of me, "Alright, quit it, no ghting." I say, xing Anna with a pointed stare, which she blatantly ignores. Of all the triplets, she has to be the most stubborn. "You want chocolate chip pancakes, Anna? How about I make some just for you?"

Her face breaks into a cute little pout, as she grips the counter in her little hands, nodding frantically up at me. I rue her dark hair with a laugh, glancing at her brothers, "And you guys can have all the blueberry pancakes you want as well."

"Yay, Mom!" Axel tosses his st into the air, while Nicholas steadily suckles at the apple juice in his cup.

After setting Axel's iPad in front of him, a colouring book in front of Anna and xing up another cup of apple juice for Nicholas, I head to kitchen to get started on breakfast.

Sighing, I wonder when the hell the triplets are ever going to be able to agree on one thing. I mean, they get along for the most part, but for three kids about to hit the ve year mark, they sure do have a lot of nit picky preferences. It's the same battle every morning, and the fact in turn, always leaves me running late for work, cause my beating mother heart can't let any of them go a day without being completely satised.

It's something I'm going to have to work on. Another thing I'm gong to have to work on. The last ve years has been full of an endless list of things I feel I've had to change about myself, in order to become the woman I am today.

A mother, of three beautifully identical babies.

A full time doctor. A successful one.

And most of all, the one who left it all behind.

I'm no longer the girl I used to be, and I have no one but myself to thank for that. I had to learn the hard way, rsthand, that when someone breaks you, it becomes solely your responsibility to put the pieces of yourself back together. You shoulder the damage they cause, and you bend over backwards to mend the fragments of your soul that were lost.

I know.

Because when I had nothing left, when I had no one, I carried that burden, and I made something of myself with it. The memories hit me in a ash then, the journey that had brought me here. The cop, Gus, who'd saved me from those thugs once I'd ran away from the werewolf realm became one of my dearest friends. And I didn't have many of those, even now. I had colleagues, and patients, people who respected me and held me in high regard simply for the fact that I was damn good at my job, but friendships were always few and far between.

When you've been hurt before, the harder it becomes to trust again. Over here, I've never been looked at like I don't belong. I've never been labeled as a pariah over matters beyond my control. Here, became home. More of a home than the Wild Wolves ever was to me. Back then, I was grateful the life I lived there had been a living hell. It made it easy enough to bury the past and my old self with it. But some bits of the girl I was then followed me till this day.

Some bits of him.

My eyes move to the window, watching the kids who've now drifted to the backyard to play with the water guns Gus had gifted them. They're an extension from one of the most trying periods of my life, memories of a past I wanted to burn to the ground.

Memories of the only male I've ever loved.

I might never want to remember him, but I'll never change what's become.

Because I love my children, and I wouldn't give them up for the world.

After what happened ve years ago, part of me never thought I'd recover from the unfairness of it all. But here I am today, a thousand times stronger and better for it.

Gus had taken me in, brought me into his home, and cared for the nineteen year old girl he'd found broken on the street who didn't even know she was pregnant at the time.

When I'd found out, I damn near lost it.

Part of me had thought I had to go back, that I had to tell Cardan about the consequences of what we'd done. That maybe... maybe he would change his mind once he realised I was pregnant. Maybe he would choose me instead. But that was the pathetic, weak version of myself wishing that day. What would have happened if I'd gone back? Was I willing to subject my children to the cruel treatment I'd endured all my life just because I wanted some infatuation I had with a male to take root? Would I have subjected my children to that sort of abuse? Because I needed him to act of the affections he'd sworn he had for me?

It was the last time I ever let my heart lead the way, and the rst time I used my brain.

Cardan didn't love me. He made his choice. And so I made mine. And ever since then, I've never looked back. It's been ve years, and it still didn't change the fact that I see his face every goddesseddamned day. Whenever I look at my children. He may not know they exist, and he may never know either. But I always will, because fate would just so have it that I'd given birth to three identical triplets who shared an uncanny resemblance to their father. The sudden silence snags my attention, bringing out of the memory lled stupor.

"Anna?" I call out distractedly, ipping over her pancakes on the burner.

When the kids grow quiet, it's a sign they're up to no good. "Nicky?"

No response.

I gaze out the window, realizing with a pause that they've disappeared from my line of sight. Letting the spatula drop to the counter, I rush out the backdoor, hoping to hell they haven't somehow managed to turn the lock on the picket fence and make their way on to the busy street.

"Axel?" I call.

My heart pounds in my chest at the silence.

Goddess. Where the hell are they?

"Ann-" The name dies on my lips as the oor board creeks behind me, I move to turn around, but suddenly, a large hand reaches for me, clamping down hard on my mouth. A scream travels up my throat, but doesn't make it up for air.

I buck against the large man, ghting tooth and nail as he pins my body like I'm no more than a squirming insect. Fear wraps around my heart and squeezes.

Anna. Nicholas. Axel.

I cry against his hold, ghting desperately to break free from his unrelenting grip.

"Do as he says, and everything will turn out ne. Don't?" The man whispers hotly by my ear, "And you'll never see them again."

The words send an icy chill though my entire body, locking up my bones and freezing my veins. I grow still as a statue.

What has he done to my children?

And then something sharp lodges into the side of my neck, a smarting pain follows as he empties the contents of the syringe.

Anna. Nicholas. Axel.

Please, be okay.

It's the last thought that lters into my mind, and then everything fades to black.