

Chapter 7

Brandon

I woke up in the middle of the night feeling like a freight train had run me over. I had never experienced such raw power like that. I vaguely remember leaving the bar, then Sierra taking off my pants, then my wolf taking over in my drunken/high state of mind. And, of course, being blasted across the room like a f*****g rag doll.

It took me all of 5 seconds to figure out that Sierra was locked in my office. I could hear her snoring. I had to hope she didn't look through my desk. I needed to contact my Alpha immediately. Yesterday at the bar I paid off a couple of people to keep Sienna distracted long enough for me to run home and call my Alpha. Shifting at 12? Daughter of an Alpha? Something didn't sit right. He said he would have someone look into it.

But last night? Sienna, little miss daughter of an alpha gone rouge/gone slave, was a hybrid?! This was quite the news. I never met a hybrid who could hide it for as long as she seems to have. But I had to be sure first. If I were wrong, it would be my head. Though the bump on my head should speak for itself. Since I was too far away to link with him, I sent him a text to avoid being heard on the phone.

Slave girl just got interesting. I think she is a hybrid. I will verify it today.

I hit send, a moment later his response came in.

How surprising. You know what to do. I'll have an extraction team following you on standby.

That I did.

Yes Sir.

I deleted the messages and began putting my plan into motion. I needed as much information as I could get. That in mind, I got dressed and made my way over to the pack house.

"Gifted?" Alpha Carl let out a long yawn. "I have no idea what you are talking about, Sie-Heather isn't gifted." He corrected himself.

"I see. Well, if you remember anything else, you know where to find me." I stood to leave the Alphas office.

"Maybe next time not at 3am?" He yawned again.

I rolled my eyes and left his office, only to be greeted by a pair of hooded eyes.

"Your new." The she-wolf spoke seductively.

"I'm here to train some warriors, and you are?" I questioned the blond-haired she wolf.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" She took a step closer to me. She had the same face as her mother and the hair of her father. This must be the real Heather. Maybe she knew something.

"What I really want to know is everything you know about my new mate, Heather". I chose my words carefully. "She is a bit...peculiar...and I would like to know more." I took a step closer to her, matching her heated gaze.

"What's in it for me?" Her eyes narrowed.

I tilted her chin up towards me, keeping my eyes locked on her lips. "What would you like?"

"Ahh! Yes! Yes! Yes! Right there!" Heather screamed as I pounded into her from behind. I grabbed her by the throat, pulling her back to my front.

"What do you know" I whispered in her ear.

"Huh? You wanna do this now?" She panted.

"Talk woman." I slowed my pace and bit her neck, causing another moan to escape her.

"She's a freak." She began.

"And?" I implored, grabbing one of her breasts with one hand while the other found her clit.

"Goddess...."

"Focus". I stopped all of my movements. She let out a wince in protest.

"I cant explain it but weird things happen around her."

I picked up my pace and resumed teasing her perky n****s.

"Like last week, she came into the kitchen wanting to make breakfast while I was sitting on the counter and somehow the sink turned on and sprayed me with water. Or the time before that when I yelled at her and the door slammed in my face." She began grinding down on me, trying to get more friction.

"What else?" I rewarded her with a hard slap to her left butt cheek, making her clench up on me.

"My dad found her when she was 12. She said she shifted but has never been able to do it since then. She is a complete enigma." Heather stilled, undoubtedly realizing what secret she had just given away.

"Your secret is safe with me. We'll keep this between us," I said before I pinned her to the bed and pounded into her with everything I had.

An hour later, I crept into the house. It was just before 6am. Show time.

"Sierra?" I called.

After a few good lies and some coaxing, I managed to get her out of my office and convinced her to go out for breakfast. Let the fun begin.

"We're eating here?" She huffed in annoyance.

I needed to get a rise out of her, from what Heather told me, whenever she was angry something would happen, so what better way than to take her back to where yesterday's fiasco started?

"Yes, I've been told they make great pancakes." I lied.

"Fine. Whatever." She led the way into the bar where a very perky waitress was quick to seat us in a booth in the back.

"What can I get for ya this morning?" The waitress asked.

"Coffee please....Lottie" I spotted her nametag.

"Just water." Said a very annoyed Sierra.

"I'll give you both a few minutes to decide." She handed us menus and went on her way to grab our drinks.

After receiving our drinks and placing our orders, I began to poke the bear.

"So what was it like, being a slave?" I blurted out.

Sierra's face looked confused for a moment before she recovered. "It was awful, I told you this."

"How about being an orphan?" I retorted.

"Better than being a slave", she said with a confused tone in her voice. She was making this more difficult than I anticipated.

"Did you watch your family die or did you just run without looking back?" I sipped my coffee.

"Excuse me?" Her eyes narrowed. Bingo.

"You said you were an Alpha's daughter, and from what you implied, they are no longer, so did you watch helplessly from the sidelines or did you run like a coward?" I looked at her.

"You're a real piece of s**t, you know that." A single tear fell. "I was a child, I was helpless. They were monsters. Our pack didn't do anything to deserve what they did." Her voice got louder and her eyes started to change....were they turning purple?

"Are you sure about that? You were only 12, maybe your father barked up the wrong tree. I cant imagine he told you everything."

"Don't talk about my family that way!" Her eyes began to glow, her hands slamming on the table, making my coffee splash out of the cup. Let's bring it home.

"What family? They are all dead, you said so yourself."

"ENOUGH!" She yelled, her eyes now glowing red. The glasses at the bar all burst like confetti. So that is what Heather meant. Here comes the icing.

"I wonder what your parents would have to say about your life right now. You're a coward, a push over, you're weak, naive. Your only redeeming factor is that you at least taste good." I gave a devious smile.

Sierra

I had enough of this asshole! It was one thing to talk s**t about me, but to bring my family into it? To slander their names?!

"I wonder what your parents would have to say about your life right now. You're a coward, a push over, you're weak, naive. Your only redeeming factor is that you at least taste good." He smirked at me.

He remembered? He remembered!! I tried to hold back as much as I could but I felt myself snap. Before I knew it, there was a Brandon sized hole going through the side of the bar. s**t.

"NOW!" I heard an unfamiliar voice yell.

Dozens of armed men came flooding into the bar, surrounding me. This was bad.

"Sienna, what do I do?!"

"Let me take over!"

"What?"

I felt a surge of power run through my veins, and then a burst of raw energy left my body, blasting outwards, leveling my adversaries and the building. Oopse.

"My turn" Sienna said as what was left of the bar began tumbling down.

My bones began to shift and crack. It hurt like hell. I let out a yelp of pain, shook out my fur and let Sienna take the wheel. She grabbed our pile of shredded clothes and ran like the devil himself was chasing her.

"You can run but you can't hide Sienna!" I heard someone yell from behind me. "We won't stop until you're dead! Just like your pack! Hahaha!"

"Where are we going?"

"Away from here" Her paws thrummed against the forest floor, heading north.

Sienna took us far away from the pack, running for at least half a day nonstop, full speed. She changed directions a few times, and anytime she hit a water source she used that to cover our trail. It was night time when she finally stopped running, confident she had lost anyone who dared to try to follow us, and shifted us back. I made a futile attempt to piece my clothes back together, settling on a makeshift bikini of a sort. I thankfully still had the map I took from Brandon's office, that might come in handy.

Sienna took us to a mountainous region, loaded with a variety of trees and boulders and caves. I didn't have time to appreciate the beautiful terrain since it was already past dusk and I was past exhaustion. I was able to make a small shelter from an old dead tree that had fallen over. I used broken branches to make a wall and mud and fallen leaves to fill in the cracks. Finally, I found a piece of flint and was able to start a small fire. Tomorrow we would need to figure out what was next, but for tonight we were safe enough.

"Hey missy, are you alright?" A calm voice spoke.

"Huh?" I quickly snapped out of my sleepy state and sat up, immediately regretting my fast motion. My body ached from the shift, the long run, and sleeping on the forest floor in the cold, unforgiving October night.

"Woah, hang on there" The older looking werewolf spoke. "You look like you've been through hell." He offered me a shaky hand.

"Yeah I kinda had a rough night." I brushed myself off and took his hand to stand.

"My wife Gloria and I have a cabin down past those trees" he pointed. "You are welcome to come and have a shower and get some clean dry clothes. I'm Tom, by the way."

"Oh I don't want to impose...." I declined.

"Please, I insist, my Gloria wouldn't let me live it down if she knew a young wolf such as yourself was out here by herself."

"I'm kinda in some trouble and I'd hate to bring it your way." I admitted sheepishly.

"You are not the first and won't be the last. Come, let's get you a hot meal." He began walking down the side of the mountain.

I only felt good intentions emitting from him. Sienna also agreed that we should take him up on his offer, but we wouldn't be long-term guests. Tom looked like a sweet older man. He had blue eyes and gray hair as well as a slight hunch. He must be an older werewolf. Typically, we werewolves will live to 150 years old, some even more if they maintain good health. If I had to guess, he was somewhere in his late 130s.

A leisurely twenty minute walk later, a picturesque log cottage came into view. There was a stepping stone path that led its way past the wild flower garden acting as a fence of sorts, under a white archway, and up to the front door. There was a stone chimney that went up the right side of the house, white clouds of smoke billowing softly from the top. The roof had some moss growing around the gutters, and the windows with some vines growing overtop. Overall, it felt like a cozy home. Tom led the way into his cabin, immediately taking his shoes and coat off.

"Make yourself comfortable, I'm going to go find Gloria." He smiled, walking further into the house. "Gloria! We have a guest joining us for dinner". Tom called out to his wife.

"Oh? Someone we know dear? Or someone new?" the she wolf came shuffling out of what I presumed to be the kitchen. She also had blue eyes and gray hair. She wore a yellow apron with daisies printed on it and a set of readers that hung on the tip of her nose, tethered to her neck by a gold-colored chain. "Well, aren't you gorgeous!" She exclaimed.

"Hi, it's nice to meet you. Thank you for welcoming me into your home. My name is Sierra." I smiled at her and Tom, who appeared to be linking something to each other.

"Sierra, what a beautiful name for a beautiful girl. Come with me, let's see what clothes we can find for you." She smiled.

She led me down the hallway to a spare bedroom. It had a pink frilly comforter on the twin bed and pink walls with a brown carpet. It reminded me of my grandmother's house.

"Help yourself to anything in the closet, the bathroom is on the other side of the hallway. I'll have dinner ready shortly. I hope you like lasagna." She shuffled out of the room and a few moments later I could hear her yelling at Tom for eating a piece of garlic bread before dinner. 'You'll spoil your appetite' were her exact words.

I laughed to myself and then began sifting through the closet. There were mostly girls' clothes, with the occasional men's clothing also. I picked out a pair of black jeans, a thick brown sweater, a navy t-shirt, and a pair of black boots that were slightly too big for my feet but, with thick enough socks, would fit just fine, which I found in a bag on the closet floor. I also lucked out and found a bra, though it was a cup size too small, better than nothing, and a pair of underwear with the tags still on them. Thank Goddess for these people.

Scurrying across the hallway, I stripped down and turned the shower on. I noticed they had metal bars in various places in the bathroom. One by the toilet and two in the shower, they must be older and more frail than I thought. Steam began to fill the bathroom, the hot water ready to warm my cold, achy body. I took my time, savoring what might be my last hot shower for a while. The hot water helped sooth me, I started to feel normal again. Not like some run away who was more than likely being hunted down by some very dangerous people. I dismissed the thought, trying to focus on the good that was happening today and save my worries for tomorrow. I dressed quickly, the clothes mostly fitting me. If anything, they were bigger than what I needed. Not the worst problem to have. I left the bathroom, the savory aroma of cheese and sauce guiding me back to the kitchen.

"Anything I can help with Gloria?" I asked.

"Unless you can get Tom to stop stealing all the garlic bread before dinner, I don't think so!" She laughed. "Actually, why don't you bring the bread to the table over there and then go pour yourself a drink. We have a few things in the refrigerator you can choose from."

"Yes ma'am." I smiled and took the bread to the dining room table that was just off the kitchen.

Knick nacks cluttered the room, miniature figurines and porcelain dolls mostly. They sat within and on top of the wooden china cabinet as well as on the windowsill. There was a rocking chair in the corner of the room that had a spool of yellow yarn attached to its half-finished project sitting on the seat. I admired it for a moment before heading to the kitchen to pick a mismatched glass from the cupboard Gloria had pointed me to, then to the refrigerator to pick out a beverage. I decided on a tall glass of milk.

"Dinner is ready!" Gloria called out to Tom. I could hear him shuffling back. We all sat down at the dining room table and Tom said a quick prayer. Gloria dished out the lasagna and garlic bread and we all dug in.

"Goddess, this is the best meal I have had in years!" I practically moaned to my food.

"I'm glad you like it, it's my specialty." Gloria smiled.

"So, Sierra, how did such a pretty she wolf like yourself end up way out here?" Tom asked.

My smile fell for a moment, I didn't want to burden these nice people with my terrible life story.

"Dear, there isn't anything you could tell us that we haven't heard before." Gloria said in between bites of food, eyeing me up through her glasses.

"Okay well...it all started when..." I began to practically vomit my entire life to these complete strangers. They sat and patiently listened to my montage, eating their lasagna like what I was telling them was the most normal day to day thing on the planet. When I finished, I actually felt much lighter, like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. They were the first people who seemed to really care about what I had to say.

Tom took a gulp of his drink. "Well, that's a new one." He chuckled.

"We've never had a hybrid stay with us before. In fact, you might be the first one we've ever met!" Gloria said excitedly.

"Oh..."

"It's nothing to be ashamed of dear, you are special. The moon goddess has a plan for you. Eventually, the bigger picture will reveal itself. Your picture is just a bit more colorful than most. Whatever it may be, I truly believe you are destined for greatness."

"Yes, it's an honor and a privilege to have you in our home," Tom agreed.

Hot tears fell down my face at their sweet, caring words. "Thank you both, you have shown me such kindness. I can't thank you enough." I cried.

"We are just doing what any decent were-person should do, no need to thank us." Gloria said as she collected our dinner plates.

"I really do appreciate it." I stood to leave. "I should be on my way.."

"Nonsense! It'll be dark soon. You can stay the night, you can stay in the spare bedroom you were in earlier."

"But I'm being chased after, it isn't safe for me to be here, if they find me they might try to hurt you for helping me." I protested.

"Don't worry about us missy, we have dealt with far worse in our day. We've seen war and famine, we've lost loved ones, we've lost children. You staying one night won't do any harm," Tom reassured me.

"Oh...I'm very sorry to hear that."

"Don't be, its all part of the bigger picture dear. We have lived a long, wonderful life, in spite of the hardships." Gloria held my hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "Now go wash up and get ready for bed."

Chapter 8

Sierra

"Sierra, breakfast is ready!"

The familiar smell of bacon and pancakes wafted into my room. Was I dreaming?

"Better hurry before Tom inhales it all!"

Gloria. I wasn't dreaming. I jumped out of bed and quickly made my way to the kitchen, trying not to seem too overly excited. I failed miserably.

"Smooth moves." Sienna snorted, though she was equally excited for a hot meal.

"Goodness dear! Aren't we lively this morning!" Gloria noted.

"Ugh..yeah its kinda been a while since I had bacon and pancakes" I let out a small laugh.

"What a beautiful laugh you have! You need to laugh more often, it's a crime to deprive the world of that smile and laugh!"

We all sat down and ate breakfast and talked about nothing. It was wonderful. It felt like the closest thing to home I had experienced in years. It made me sad to leave, but maybe I will come and visit again one day.

"Now, Sierra, I know life is tough right now, but I have someone I think you'd like to meet. I think you two would be a good match," Gloria began.

"Stop playing match maker Gloria! We've talked about this!" Tom chastised.

"Oh hush." She threw daggers at Tom, her expression immediately softening again when she turned back to me. "You let me know when you would like to meet this gentleman and I'll arrange it."

"Oh, I dont think I'll be in the market anytime soon, plus i'm waiting for my mate." I blushed.

"My offer will stand." She said as she cleared the table.

"Thank you Gloria." I stood up from the table. "I really should be going now. Thank you again for your hospitality."

"Hold on there hot wheels," Tom interjected. "What exactly is your plan?"

"Umm..."

"That's what I thought. Now from what you've told me, you have never lived long-term as a rogue, you have no survival training, your wolf is a bit shy, you have no self-defense training, a highly sophisticated group of trained armed wolves is after you, and you have no place to stay.

"I can't stay here Tom, I won't." I stood my ground.

"I know you are leaving, and honestly I'm sad to see you go. You remind me of our daughter. And because of that, I feel the need to help you like I would my own daughter. So I put this together last night." He handed me a large dark green tactical backpack.

"What is-"

"In it is a sleeping bag, a single person tent, a purifying water bottle, a fire starter, and a hatchet. Gloria also packed a few changes of clothes and some home-made granola bars. It's not much, but it is something to get you going.

"I can't accep-"

"Its not up for debate missy. I also have a map here. I circled a few places on the map, there are some good people who live around those areas. You tell 'em Tom sent ya and they should lend a hand. Over here," He pointed to a circle on the map "Should be your first stop. It's about 50 miles north of here. There is an older man, not as old as me, who lives around there. He can teach you some good fighting skills and maybe even a thing or two about living off the land."

I took the map from Tom and threw my arms around him to give him a hug. "Thank you"

Leaving Tom and Gloria proved to be much more difficult than I had thought. I made a promise to come and visit them every now and then. But I knew one day they would come for me. I could only hope I was the only casualty.

"Goddess, why cant we be normal?" I complained as I flipped one leg over a fallen tree, followed by the other, keeping true to my path.

"Normal isn't much fun." Sienna scoffed.

"Normal keeps us out of trouble. Normal lets us shift whenever we want, so we don't have to walk over 50 miles on foot. Normal keeps extremists from targeting us." I trudged through a small brook.

I had been traveling for three days, in search of a more permanent place to set up camp, but also in the hope of finding the man who Tom told me about. I wouldn't mind learning a thing or two if I was going to be living on my own from now on. I had been lucky so far that I hadn't come across any rogues.

"Something feels off." Sienna warned.

"What kind of off?" I continued walking.

"Someone was here..."

"A good someone or a bad someone? It is the forest, after all, people do have the right to-"

"Aaaahhhhh!!!" I yelled, as my world suddenly flipped upside down.

"What just happened?"

"I told you something was off."

"Not helping!"

My foot was the only thing keeping me suspended in the air. I must have stepped into a trap.

"I'm stuck!"

"No s**t Sherlock."

I rolled my eyes at my very snarky wolf. She had been even more difficult since our last shift. Being able to run on her own again made her miss the freedom and feel bottled up again.

I could feel my face turn red from the blood that rushed to my head. My hair fell around my face, effectively obstructing my vision. Fan-fucking-tastic. With what little core strength I possessed, I made a very pitiful attempt to free my captive foot. Useless.

"Don't move." A male's voice called out.

I squirmed around, trying to pinpoint where the voice was coming from.

"I'm harmless!" I vouched for myself.

"I said, don't move." I could hear what I presumed to be a gun being loaded and ready for action. I immediately went completely limp and dangled there like a deer carcass waiting to be skinned.

"Who are you? What do you want?" The man asked.

"I'm looking for a man who can train me" I blurted out. "Tom sent me" I could only hope this was the man I was looking for and not someone who would turn me in.

"Tom? That cheeky bastard did it again." He mumbled to himself. "What kind of training are you looking for?"

"Life drew me a s**t hand and I'm more or less a rogue now. I don't know a damn thing about surviving on my own and I have no where to go." I huffed. "Can you please let me down?" I pleaded.

"You reek of werewolf, you can get yourself down. Its only a rope." He scoffed.

"I'm an enigma! I'm a freak who has only shifted twice! I don't have a reliable wolf!"

"Bitch." I could feel Sienna rolling her eyes in my head.

"What's your name, girl?"

"Sierra, Sierra Wilson." Gravity finally worked in my favor and I was face to face, although upside down, with the man. "Its nice to meet you, Mr...?" I extended my hand out for him to shake it.

"You'll learn my name when you earn it." He lowered his weapon. "I'm not as forthcoming as Tom."

"Okay, sure. Can you get me down from here now?"

"Lesson number one of being a rogue, you rely only on yourself. Get yourself out."

"WHAT?" I yelled "Are you crazy?"

"If you are serious about learning, you'll find a way out of this. If not, I'm sure there are some hungry wild animals out there who would love a good meal." His gruff voice faded, was he leaving?!

"Wait! Dont leave me!"

"Better hurry, the sun will set in a few hours." His voice was even further away now.

"Come back!"

Edward

My wolf Edmund has been on edge all day. I couldn't figure out why. He couldn't figure out why. I decided it would be best if I let him blow off some steam. If I didn't, I think one of us was about to go crazy. I stepped outside of my lakehouse, which was practically on the water. It was our family vacation home that we would go and visit during the summertime, it was near the edge of the kingdom's pack borders, and more importantly, it didn't smell or remind me of Hope. I stayed there from time to time when I needed a break from palace life. I stripped down and put my clothes in a leather duffel bag, shifted, and let my wolf take the lead.

I don't know where or for how long we had been running for, my mind felt like it was filled with static. It wasn't until a familiar scent hit Edmund's snout that I knew exactly where he had taken us.

"King Edward? Is that you? What a pleasant surprise!" Gloria said as she stood with shaky legs from her bench in her slightly overgrown garden. I shifted and began to dress quickly behind a tree. I didn't need the old woman to have a heart attack from seeing me naked, werewolf or not.

"Yes ma'am." I said, coming out from behind the tree. She pulled me in for a hug. I naturally reciprocated. "So good to see you again."

"Its been far too long!" Gloria chastised, giving me a firm swat to the back of my hand.

"It wouldn't be if you came to live in the kingdom, you just say the word and I'll make it happen." I smiled. "How is Tom? Is he home?"

"Tom went out for a bit. He should be back soon. Why don't you come inside for a cup of tea? Then you can help me pull some weeds in the garden." She ordered rather than asked. I'm positive this is the only woman, no person, that would order me around and get off scot free. Edmund and I would roll over like a puppy for Gloria. She was the sweetest person, she was basically everyone's grandmother. And she didn't take any nonsense. She gave my Lycan men quite the trouble when they came to collect her and Tom for investigation. That's how I met them actually. I had received a distress call from my men. On arrival, I found them at their cottage fixing a spot on the roof, dusting old spider webs in the ceiling corners, fixing a creaky step. She is very bossy for such a sweet, frail thing. Tom sure had his hands full.

"You got it." I said, grabbing the door so she could easily shuffle herself inside. She made us a pot of green tea in record time. We sat and I listened to her go on and on about everything happening in her world. It was a nice change. These days most people avoid me, probably because I'm miserable 99.9% of the time. All my energy, and all my warrior's energy, was being thrown into finding Hopes' killers. My gut told me something big was out there. And I was determined to find out what.

"So what do you think?" Gloria asked.

"I'm sorry Gloria, I missed that last part, could you please repeat it? I spaced out for a moment, I haven't been sleeping very well lately and it seems to be interfering with my day to day." I admitted.

She looked up at me through her readers, which just barely stayed on with how close she had them rested to the end of her nose. I couldn't tell if she was angry with me for not listening or was pitying me for my lack of sleep.

"I said, I have someone I would like you to meet. Would you be interested?"

"What kind of someone?" I asked, feeling very skeptical.

"A girl, someone." Gloria avoided eye contact. "She is one of a kind. I think you two would just hit it off."

I could feel my anger rising at her blatant disrespect for my fallen mate. My wounds were still fresh and she wanted to set me up. Goddess help me!

"Now, before you go getting all huffy and puffy on me, hear me out. The girl doesn't want to meet you either." She began.

"What? Then why-"

"Because I know a match when I see one. You think about it, I know you are missing your mate, but I believe the moon goddess has something great in store for you. Now be a dear and go pull some weeds. I left a pair of gloves on the bed in the spare room." She shooed me away. Only Gloria.

I had to hunch over in their tiny cottage to avoid hitting my head on the ceiling. I made it back to their spare bedroom and saw the gloves on the bed. Grabbing them, I turned to leave when my senses seemed to engage. What a weird feeling. I sniffed around the room, something but nothing all at the same time. Apples maybe? I dismissed it, shaking my head and made my way to the garden.

Sierra

It was nearly dusk when I finally decided to engage my one working brain cell and I finally figured out how to get out. I tried to get my hatchet out of my bag first, only to drop my entire backpack onto the ground. I tried to swing back and forth to reach a nearby tree, if nothing else, to get the blood back into my feet. I tried to shift, that was a joke.

"Watch it." Sienna growled.

"Just telling it like it is, babe."

My final attempt, which, because of the position of the sun, had to have been at least 3 hours in, was sliding my boot off of my foot. I dropped to the ground with a thud. My foot ached and I'm confident I pulled a number of muscles as well. But I was finally free. I put my shoe back on, threw my backpack over my shoulder and headed in the direction I saw the man go. Twenty minutes passed, the forest growing darker by the minute when I smelled it. Smoke. I quickened my pace to find the older man sitting on a log by the fire. Now that I was upright, I could take a moment to look over his features. His hair was silver, almost completely buzzed off with a clean shave to match. His skin looked immaculate. I had never seen anyone with such a perfect face. Not a single scar or crater. His lips were fine looking and his face chiseled. He didn't smell like a werewolf. I couldn't quite place his scent, though it seemed familiar somehow.

"What are you?" I found myself asking. s**t did I say that out loud?

"The name is Cyrus. And im a vampire."

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Chapter 9

6 years later

Sierra

I trudged my way through the tall grass, my body still aching from Cyrus's training session yesterday. It has been 6 years since I fell into his trap, quite literally. He took me on as his apprentice after I had managed to free myself all those years ago. I like to think I have improved 1,000% since having met Cyrus. He was an old vampire who had seen his fair share of battles over the years. He was over 100 years old, though in the vampire world, he was considered a spring chicken still. And it made sense, I'm pretty sure during my first year of training I did nothing but get thrown around like a rag doll, the man was impressively fast.

Vampires were known to be obnoxiously fast, probably the fastest creatures on the planet, but I completely underestimated their speed. These days, I was keeping up quite well, though Cyrus could still manage to put me on my ass every now and then. He taught me how to forge, how to hunt, how to hide, and how to fight. I finally had some confidence in myself. I still had the nagging feeling that one day the people hunting hybrids would come for me, but now I at least stood a chance. It was dumb luck that I had escaped them before. I still didn't know how I had created such a blast of energy. Cyrus suggested I should find a witch to train with, that they would know how to guide me in ways he couldn't. So that's where I was off to, to find a witch. I still had Tom's map he had given me when I left. I was on my way to pay him and Gloria a visit and to ask him which of those circles on the map, if any, were witches.

I could smell smoke in the distance and not long after I could see Tom and Gloria's house come into view. I made a point to visit them every few weeks. They were so kind. Gloria was still trying to set me up with some mystery man. I'd be lying if I said I didn't think about taking her up on the offer more than once. My wolf was still anxious to find our mate, but I was more open to the idea. After being alone for so long, I craved the idea of having someone to call my own. I craved their touch. But

they would have to be someone really special. Not many people would want a rogue who was being hunted down as their mate.

"Tom, Gloria! Its Sierra" I called out, announcing my presence as I opened the front door to let myself in. Tom and Gloria were more than okay with me coming in without knocking or calling ahead. I had only agreed because I knew it would save them a trip up and down. Their health has been steadily declining over the past 6 years. The less they had to get up and move around, the less chance they would fall.

"Hi dear" Gloria spoke softly. She was sitting in her rocking chair in the dining room holding a frozen bag of peas to her ankle.

"What happened?" I said, crouching down to further inspect Gloria's bruised ankle.

"Oh, my clumsy old self took a wrong step and I'm afraid I may have done a good number on it. Tom went off to find some arnica."

Arnica, I had learned from Cyrus, was a plant with antiinflammatory properties. It also helped with bruising, which I unfortunately used on more than one occasion after training.

"I don't know if that will be enough, Gloria, I think you may have broken it..." I slowly began to flex her ankle and she let in a sharp hiss of pain. "Please let me take you to a hospital." Gloria was a stubborn woman, but I don't think she could even deny that it wasn't bad.

"Tom should be back soon..." She started.

"We'll leave him a note. I don't want to see you in pain any longer than you have to be. Tom still has his truck, right?" I asked, standing to my feet. I grabbed a pen and paper and left a note for Tom letting him know where we had gone off too.

"Yes, his keys are in the kitchen drawer." She said as she tried to stand.

"Oh no, let me help you." I took Gloria's arm and hung it over my shoulder and we walked to the truck together. I knew she was too stubborn to let me carry her and I was positive they didn't have a wheelchair.

Thankfully, Cyrus has also taught me how to drive. I wasn't a great driver, but I could manage to drive to the nearest hospital, which was about an hour away, unfortunately for Gloria. Tom and Gloria didn't live in a pack, they chose to live on their own and trusted the moon goddess to protect them. I envied their dedication.

Our car ride was uneventful. Gloria seemed to be in a lot of pain though she tried to fool me with a brave face. I had Gloria look at Tom's map to see if she knew if any of the people were witches. There was one, about a day's journey by foot past where Cyrus lived, just outside of the Northern Kingdom's pack. After this, I would pay her a stop. We were taken back quickly. Gloria went for x-rays and it was confirmed that she broke her ankle. The doctor put her in a small outpatient room and gave her some good pain meds. He said he would send someone in to get a cast on her soon. Werewolves heal at twice the speed of humans, but because Gloria wasn't in her prime, she would undoubtedly heal slower than the average wolf.

I sat down in the uncomfortable chair in the corner of the room. Gloria sat on a hospital bed that looked almost equally uncomfortable. The doctor had given her an IV and fluids to make sure she stayed hydrated and to dispense the pain medication. Gloria looked better and better with each passing minute.

"I wish Cyrus would give us pain meds after some of his training sessions..." Sienna deadpanned.

I snorted to myself, causing Gloria to shoot me a curious glance.

"Mrs Banner?" A knock came from the door, interrupting my thoughts. In waltzed a very attractive man. Tall, dark and handsome, everything a girl could ask for. I turned away to hide my blush I could feel creeping up on me.

"Thats me!" Gloria beamed at the man.

"I'm Dr Andres from Ortho, I'll be casting you up today." He said, taking a seat in the small circular rolling chair that was pushed into the other corner of the room. "If you don't mind sitting on the edge of the bed, I'll get you finished up as soon as I can." He smiled.

"Oh how nice of you, thank you dear." I helped Gloria scoot to the side of the bed, careful not to bump her ankle.

"Anytime, ma'am. Do you have a color preference? I have blue, green, pink, purple, yellow...."

"Yellow is fine. Are you single dear?" She bluntly asked.

"Ha, yeah. It's hard to find someone with the hours I work." He admitted as he began to wrap her ankle.

"Sierra here is also single." I inhaled sharply at her boldness, nearly choking on my own spit. "Isnt she pretty?" she continued.

"She is beautiful," he said softly.

I could feel my face flush, turning crimson red.

"Sierra here is a very special woman." Gloria kept talking.

"Mark, Mark Andres. Its nice to meet you." He extended his hand for a handshake.

I took his hand in mine, he gave my hand a gentile squeeze, lingering for a moment.

"Sierra, Sierra Wilson. Its nice to meet you." I smiled. Our hands still holding one another.

"Where are you from, Sierra?" His eyes flicked to my marked neck with an odd expression resting on his face. He released my hand. And that's when the very familiar rocks came back into the pit of my stomach.

"Oh, Sierra, she likes to travel a lot..." Gloria started.

"What's your tattoo?" I cut her off, trying to get my nervousness under control.

"Oh this?" He pulled back his white coat sleeve to reveal a diamond with two crescent moons facing each other. "It's an old thing I got when I was a teen." He dismissed.

"How unique!" Gloria praised.

"Thank you, what do you think about it?" He asked me, and a knowing look passed between us.

Goddess I needed to get out of here. That was the same tattoo Brandon had which couldn't be a good sign.

"Gloria, I actually need to head out now."

"But why dear?" She asked as I made my way to the door.

"Dont worry, I'll make sure to take good care of Gloria." He said. "I'll be sure to let Brandon know I ran into you. I know he has been looking for you for some time."

My hand rested on the door handle for a moment. I knew what I had to do, but no amount of training could possibly prepare me for it. I locked the door and turned around, narrowly missing a right hook coming my way.

"Oh!!!" Gloria exclaimed.

I reciprocated with an uppercut to his jaw, stunning him for a moment. He came barreling at me, throwing me against a wall. Dust filled my nose from the now broken wall. I dropped to the ground like Cyrus had shown me, giving a quick jab to his ribcage, effectively breaking a rib or two. I followed through with a sleeper hold. Dr Andres struggled a bit, he cut my arm pretty good before falling to the ground and eventually going limp. There was only one last thing for me to do now. I drew a knife out of my boot and slit his throat. Gloria screamed out in horror. I couldn't blame her, this was grim.

"What?!" Gloria exclaimed.

"Gloria, I need you to listen to me carefully. You can never speak a word of this, you can never speak of me again. You and Tom will be in danger if you do. I need to get out of here before someone comes and finds me. I'm so sorry I dragged you into my mess." I said frantically before casting her one last look and running out of the hospital.

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Edward

"Tomorrow I'm leaving with the warriors to collect the next pack, " Jackson noted.

"Thank you Brother." I said as I sifted through a stack of papers on my desk.

"How much longer? Its been over 6 years", he asked.

"You are free to go." I dismissed him.

I glanced up to see the disappointed, pitiful look he shot my way before he left my office. It sent a pang of guilt through me, especially since he so closely resembled our fallen father. We both did, actually. We all had the same dark brown hair. The same emerald green eyes, the same full lips and straight pointed nose, our medium skintone that held a warm, almost golden hue. Our mother's features pulled through mostly in our sister Abby but we had certain looks that resembled her as well.

My mourning had subsided over the years, which made little sense. No one just got over their mate dying. Don't get me wrong, I missed Hope immensely but something had changed in me over the years. I could only attest it to the unbridled rage that burned inside of me. Maybe part of it also came from exhaustion. Bringing in all of these packs puts a lot of strain on myself and my men. Though it wasn't all in vain, we did eradicate a few alphas who were abusing power and there was one group who was selling shewolves for s*x. We did more than just kill them. My wolf smirked at the memory.

Ring Ring

I sent my phone to voice mail. Whoever it was could wait. I had a mountain of paperwork to get through.

Ring Ring

I reluctantly picked up my phone.

"Hello?" I snapped.

"King Edward, its Tom...Tom and Gloria Banner"

"Hi Tom, its good to hear from you but I'm up to my eyeballs in paperwork right now. Can I call you back?" I asked.

"It's Gloria, she is in the hospital and I don't have a way to get to her." He sounded desperate. I knew they didn't live in a pack where they could get help. That meant I was the help.

"Okay, I'm on my way to you. I'll be there soon". I hung up the phone and grabbed the keys to my SUV.

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"She just left a note?" I asked.

"I had gone to go look for some healing herbs for her ankle, she banged it up pretty good. When I got back, the truck was gone and so was she. I called the hospital she said she was going to and they were all acting real funny on the phone. But they said I could come and get her when I was ready. I didn't know who else to call." His leg bounced up and down in the passenger seat.

I didn't bother trying to make light conversation. I knew what Tom was going through. The best I could do was step on the gas and get us to the hospital as soon as possible. I hardly had the vehicle in park before Tom was jumping out of the passenger seat and bee-lining it for the front doors of the hospital. I followed after him, getting strange glances as I passed by. It wasn't every day that the King followed an old man through a random packs ER.

"Gloria!" Tom called out.

"Over here!" She answered back.

Tom followed her call, she was sitting in the waiting room chairs. "Darling! What happened?" he asked "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine dear." She answered calmly.

I saw them staring at each other for a moment, their eyes glazed over, linking each other.

"Oh Goddess..." Tom said, Gloria's eyes were filled with tears.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Fine, just fine, Alpha." Gloria answered, wiping her unshed tears away. She never called me Alpha.

I looked around and everyone seemed to be on edge. Something was off.

"Why don't I go get your discharge papers?" I said as I headed for the reception counter.

"King Edward! How can I help you?" The shewolf receptionist bared her neck to me as a sign of respect.

"What happened here?" I got straight to the point.

"Um...we don't exactly know..." She nervously answered.

"Why don't you tell me what you do know?" If I knew one thing, it was that the receptionists always knew everything.

The timid shewolf, Isabella, went on to tell me that Gloria came in with a shewolf in her mid twenties. Dr Andres went in to go put a cast on Gloria and ten minutes later there was a struggle and the doctor was dead and the shewolf gone. Security footage was pulled from the hallway and they saw the doctor go in and the shewolf run out. According to Isabella, they tried to talk to Gloria but she said she couldn't remember a thing. I knew her well enough to know she didn't have dementia or any other memory problems, so she was obviously covering for this mystery woman. I just had to find out why.

"Gloria, a word." I used my Alpha aura to give no room for debate. Tom wheeled her into an empty exam room and I shut the door behind them.

"I know you are hiding something."

"I-"

"Gloria, what really happened?" I cut her off.

She let out a sigh and looked at Tom, who nodded to her and squeezed her hand.

"I'm not sure what exactly happened. I was having a nice conversation with the doctor, I was even playing matchmaker with the girl I was with and him. All of a sudden, the girl I was with got uneasy and she went to leave. Dr Andres said something and then attacked her. She killed him and told me to keep quiet about it all."

"Who is this girl?" I asked.

"With all due respect, King Edward, I can't tell you. I swore to her that I wouldn't speak of her again, not until she is safe at least."

"Gloria, be reasonable." I countered.

"I'm sorry, my lips are sealed."

Damn it woman. I knew she wouldn't talk either. I decided to take matters into my own hands. I stopped by security and viewed the footage. There was nothing I could make out with the girl. She had her head down the entire time and the footage was fuzzy and in black and white. I made a few calls and had them send any outdoor shots they had. They only had one camera and this mystery woman evaded it on the way out too. She was either extremely lucky, or skillfully trained. I visited the body at the morgue, a clean cut across his throat, a dislocated jaw, and two broken ribs. This werewolf was tall and muscular. I had little doubt in my mind now, she had some form of training. My last stop was to the crime scene itself.

I entered into the exam room, there was a trail of blood drops leaving the room. He must have gotten her. I carefully stepped inside to see a bigger pool of blood, where she undoubtedly got him back. Drywall littered the floor, the wall on the far side of the room was damaged. From what I can tell, he must have thrown her against the wall. The indent that was left behind was under six feet and not as broad, unlike our male victim. The girl was a fighter. I crouched down to get a closer look at everything, and I swear for a moment I smelled apples. So weird.

I decided to leave the case alone for now and let the pack's investigation team handle it. I had bigger fish to fry at the moment. I did however, make a mental note to myself to check in on this in a few months. I met Tom and Gloria back in the main waiting room and thanked them for their patience. The drive back was deadly quiet,

you could hear a pin drop. I tried not to hold anything against Gloria, she didn't do anything wrong.

"Except withhold information" Edmund noted.

"Whatever reason she has for keeping quiet about it must be good. I've never seen the woman keep quiet about anything."

"Perhaps...Lets have apple pie for dinner tonight"

"You smelled it too?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, and it was divine."