

Cried Wolf 31

Chapter 31

After a couple of months had passed, Nina stopped greeting me each day, knowing I would not respond. Now in high school, she had become a loner. Keeping to herself in class, and went to the library at recess and lunch.

May would elbow me and glare if she caught me staring at Nina, but then again, she would always get jealous and cranky at any girl

glanced at

'Stop elbowing me, May,' I growl.

'Stop staring at Nina then. You haven't spoken to her in seven years, yet you are always staring at her. Besides, you should just be focusing your attention on me. Everyone knows we will be mates,' she beams.

'Not if I can help it.'

'Your such an ass Magnus,' she growls

'Yes, I'm told daily by many girls I have a nice ass,' I smirk.

'Who is telling you that? I demand to know their names right now,' she says, glaring at every female in the classroom.

'May, you need to get over it.'

'No, you need to get over Nina!'

I glare at May, making her cower back in her seat.

'I can't get over someone I was never into in the first place,' I snap

May crosses her arms and looks away. We spend the last ten minutes of maths in silence. As soon as the bell rings, she clings onto my arm as if we never argued, smiling as we make our way to the cafeteria.

I sit at the popular table that is reserved for myself and my friends. Zak, Trixie, and Flint join me at my table along with our school friends, Paul and Claire.

Biting into my salad roll, I watch as Nina walks in and takes her seat in the far corner. Meanwhile, nearly every female is trying to grab my attention.

Claire places her hand on my shoulder and sits next to me.

'Hey, Magnus,'

'Hi, Claire,' I say and continue to eat my roll.

'So, I'm having a party on Saturday and wanted to invite you along.'

'Oh, a party!' Trixie butts in.

'Okay,' I mumble.

'Great! I, um, was also hoping you would come to the party as um my date?' she says nervously.

I stare at her in thought. She is one of the most beautiful girls at school. She has nice long legs, and a decent-sized bust with long red hair and green eyes. Thinking of how gorgeous she is, I somehow stared back at Nina again. With her long brown hair, stunning brown eyes, a petite figure, I could easily wrap my arms around and lift her with one hand. I wonder what her hair smells like. Does her skin feel as smooth as it looks?

Wait... why am I thinking of Nina this way? I cut her out of my life years ago for a reason, so why am I so curious about her? Now that I think about it, I don't think I've ever gone a day without thinking of her....

'Um, excuse me, Claire, you can't just ask him out when he is already claimed,' May growls.

Magnus is a free man, May, you two aren't dating and just because you think you are his mate doesn't mean you will be.'

Zak, Trixie, and Flint, back away from the table just in time as May leaps towards Claire. A fight breaks out between them and I sigh in disbelief.

Everyone in the Cafeteria crowd around them and all chant 'Fight, fight, fight, fight!'

Nina rushes towards the crowd and sees Claire is winning the fight. I go to pull them apart, but Nina jumps in front of May to protect her.

"Nina, what are you doing?' May yell as she touches the deep scratch across her cheek.

"Stopping you from getting seriously injured.'

I don't need a freak like you to protect me,' she yells.

The cafeteria suddenly goes quiet and all eyes are on Nina. I see deep sadness for a moment that she quickly hides.

"Claire is beating the crap out of you with ease and no one else seems to want to save your ass,' she says, then looks at me.

I look away, avoiding eye contact.

Yeah, well, I bet I could beat the crap out of you with ease,' she yells and as she lunges towards Nina, I grab May around the waist and pull her back into my chest before she could hurt Nina.

That's enough, all of you,' I growl fiercely for everyone to hear. Everyone submits and lowers their heads. 'Trixie, take May to the nurse's office to get check her wounds checked out and cleaned up,'

May smiles and looks up at me as if she has fallen in love with me even more. Of course, I care about May, but not in the way she wants me to. Right now, I just want her out of here and away from Nina before she tries to hurt her again.

'Everyone, get back to lunch!' I yell. Everyone returns to their tables except for Nina, who remains standing there staring at me. As I'm about to sit down, she takes a few steps towards me.

'I know you don't want to hear my voice or even look at me, but I just wanted to say Thank you, for stopping her, as much as she hates me, she is still my sister and I could never fight her or hurt her,' My eyes against my will, instantly connect with hers. Her innocent eyes remind me of a fawn about to be eaten by a wolf. My eyes trail down her smooth skin, past her small nose, and to her lips. I wonder... how sweet her lips would taste...

'Magnus?' Claire says. I shake my head at my thoughts. I need to stop thinking about Nina and move on if I'm going to be the best Alpha that everyone will respect and admire. Stepping closer to Claire, I ignore Nina and caress the red mark on Claire's cheek.

"Are you okay?" I ask Claire.

Nina slumps and walks away.

I'm fine, she only slapped me once,'

I watch Nina's back as she continues to walk away. Maybe if I date Claire, I'll stop thinking about her?

Claire?

"Yes, Magnus?"

I didn't have time to answer your question.' I smile.

I can see Zak, Trixie, Pauls, and Flint's faces watching on in anticipation.

I would love to be your date for the party'

Everyone in the cafeteria stops what they are doing and stares at Claire and me in shock.

Disappointment and heartbreak etch into the faces of all the females

Seriously You will be my date?

Inod my head She jumps up and wraps her arms around me, squealing with delight. I gently place her back down,

Zak, Flint, and I finish our lunch, then run some laps around the oval. The bell goes, and it's time for science class,

As we walk through the corridor to science, I am met with a furious May

'Magnus Why am I hearing that you are going to Claire's dumb party as her date?

'Because I accepted her offer,' I say, then step around her to continue to class

May runs back in front of me and places her hand on my chest I took down at her hand, then back at her with a scowl.

Magnus, you can't do this to me, to us. We should be together. Thave always had feelings for you and I know it's because we will be mates. If you go on this date with Claire, you would be practically cheating,' she sobs

It's not cheating and I highly doubt we will be mates, May.'

'You don't know that we won't be mates!'

'Well, you don't know we will be mates, only the Moon goddess knows'

A hurt look crosses her face,

*Please Magnus, you can't ditch me for Claire My reputation will be destroyed,'

'Is that all you care about May, your reputation? How people will see you? You should spend that time with people that care about you and want to be around you. It should never matter what anyone else thinks of you,' I say and storm off into science class, running late because of May I walk inside the room and a strange feeling runs through my body as I see the only vacant seat is next to Nina

Chapter 32

'Magnus, nice of you to join the class. Just because you are the future Alpha does not mean you get special privileges. Now take your seat before you get yourself detention,'

I growl under my breath, 'Yes Mr. Thomson, and plonk my books onto the table and take my seat next to Nina.

Nina stiffens in surprise as I sit beside her. She looks at me and is trying to contain a smile. I try to tune her presence out and tune into Mr. Thompson. He talks about different types of soil which are low in nutrients and which are high in nutrients. Nina's pen flicks back and forth as she listens to Mr. Thomson. Her hands are small and dainty and her nails have been freshly manicured and painted with a very light subtle pink. Her long brown hair drapes down her arms. I watch as she tucks her hair behind her ear, revealing a gold earring and exposing her nape. My eyes focus on the nape of her neck. I feel my heart racing. It pounds faster and faster. I break out into a sweat as I feel my heartbeat pounding erratically through my chest.

'Magnus... Magnus!' Mr. Thomson yells. I fall off my chair. Everyone is laughing. I glare at the class and they fall silent. 'For the second time Magnus. Take. Your. Seat.'

Nina gives me a look, but I grab my chair and take my seat, continuing to ignore her.

'Now, as I was saying, the student you are all sitting next to will be your lab partners for the rest of the term.'

'What!' I say, slamming my fist on the table. It breaks in half. My books fall down with Nina's and all eyes are on me.

'I'm not partnering with Nina for the rest of the term!'

Nina raises her hand. 'Mr. Thomson, I have to agree with Magnus, 'd rather be lab partners with the classroom guinea pig in the cage over there, at least its IQ would be higher than Magnus's,' she says.

The room roars with laughter.

'Quiet, quiet everyone,' Mr. Thomson shouts, the room becomes quiet minus the low giggles everyone tries to hold in. 'Now Magnus, you have detention for being late and for not paying attention and the destruction of school property.'

But..,' I try to argue back. Nina laughs and I glare at her.

'As for you, Nina, you will be lab partners with Magnus whether or not you like it, and you will also join him in detention today after school!

'What! Mr. Thomson, that's not fair,'

'As is life, Nina,' he growls.

Nina and I sit back in our seats with our arms crossed and backs facing each other since we no longer have a table to face and we are both struggling to hold our tongues to not get into further trouble.

The bell goes, everyone leaves as Nina and I squat down to collect our books. Of course, the books mixed up when they fell. As we collect our books, we go to grab the same book and I end up grabbing her hand instead. We pause and look at our hands. Her hand feels so soft and warm. We look up at each other for a split second and I quickly let go of her hand as if it burnt me. Grabbing my last two books, I storm off to my last class for the day

May and Claire have already arrived in the English class before me. They sit on the opposite side of the room to each other, thank goodness. The only problem now is that are both patting the seat next to them for me to sit beside them.

Flint and Zak snigger in the back, wondering who I will choose to sit next to. Well, since I'm going on a date with Claire, I should probably get to know her better than I do and it will help take my mind off Nina and what had just transpired in class with her.

May frowns as I take my seat next to Claire and I see Zak pouts as he hands five dollars over to Flint. They had placed a bet as to who I chose

Claire clings onto my arm the same way May would

'I can't wait until the party this Saturday.'

'Yeah, um me neither,

'So, what do you plan on wearing?' she asks.

'Er, clothes..?'

'Of course, you will wear clothes, dummy. What style of clothes?'

'a shirt and jeans I guess...'

You know what? I'm free after school tomorrow. Maybe I could come over and help you pick something out?'

I feel hesitant about having her over at my place. Do I even want her over? My mind flashes back to the touch of Nina's hand and I realise one of my many questions has been answered. Yes, her skin is just as smooth as it looks.

'So, what do you say, Magnus?'

'Huh?'

'About me coming over after school tomorrow unless you want me to come over today. I can cancel my shopping spree at the mall in the city with my girlfriends.'

'Can't today. I have detention after school with Nina,'

The pencil in her hand snaps in half, 'Detention, and with Nina?'

'Yup, I know. It's like the Moon Goddess wants to punish me. I do not know why, though.'

'Well, I feel for you Boo-boo. It would be a curse to spend time with that freak. I will come over tomorrow after school then,'

I shuttered when she called me Boo-boo and felt anger build up inside when she referred to Nina as a freak. I shouldn't care. Why do I care? It made me angry when May had called her a freak earlier in the cafeteria as well.

Claire caresses her fingers across my lower arm as we listen to Mrs. Lofts discussing our upcoming essay assignment. Claire's caresses are making me cringe. She may as well run her nails across the chalkboard, as it would give me the same effect. I take her hand and hold it, so she stops touching my arm. She grins and looks over at May, who is mentally throwing daggers at me. Her skin isn't as smooth and lacks the warmth I felt with Nina's. In fact, her hands are quite clammy.

'Now open your textbooks to page 139 and answer the questions in your notebooks.'

I've never been so happy with Mrs. Lofts giving me work to do. Happily releasing Claire's hand, I grab my pen and write my answers, I purposely answer them slowly until the bell rings as an excuse to not have to hold her hand again.

The bell goes, I'm happy to run home and get away from everyone, especially May and Claire. Then I remember I have dreaded detention

Returning to my locker, I pack my books away on the shelf and take my school bag. Josie runs up to me with her backpack.

'Ready to go home, brother?' she smiles.

Nope, I have detention, with Nina,'

Magnus! This is your chance!' she squeals.

'Chance for what?'

'Um, to get on your knees and beg the hottie for forgiveness for being such a dumbass all these years.'

Josie! Not going to happen'

But why not? I never understood why you would cut your best friend off like that. You two were so close and did everything together

“You wouldn’t understand Josie, you’re not the one who is going to be an Alpha one day. I need to be respected, not laughed at

I’m your little sister, daughter of an Alpha which means my mate will probably be an Alpha from a different pack, so yeah I get you to need to be respected just as I do as a potential Luna but I do not know what that has to do with Nina?’

Just forget it, okay, I’m going to be late for detention. I’ll see you at home for dinner’

Flint walks up to us as I’m about to walk away Josie wraps her arms around Flint and sobs into his chest Just great After everything else going on, now Josie is upset at me

Chapter33

Without greeting Mr. Thomson, I enter the science room and place my bag on a table and sit in silence, avoiding eye contact with Mr. Thompson and Nina.

‘Late again, Magnus,’ he huffs with his hands-on hip.

I shrug my shoulders and look away. Nina is sitting four tables away. It’s obvious she also isn’t happy to be here.

Well, if you two think you are both going to sit here in silence, then you have another thing coming,’

Nina and I turn our attention back to Mr. Thomson.

‘I have borrowed some tools and a spare tabletop from the woodwork room. You will both spend detention fixing the table you broke,

‘What! But I never broke it,’ Nina protests.

“Do not care, Nina, now come and take this hammer,’ he growls.

I abruptly step down from my chair and march up to the teacher’s desk, muttering and mumbling in dissatisfaction. Nina takes the nails and hammer and I carry the tabletop. Nina kneels next to the broken table and assesses it closely. I kneel opposite her and place the tabletop down.

Mr. Thomson walks towards the class doorway. ‘I will be back in thirty minutes. I expect the table to be fixed.’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ I say, waving him off.

Nina clears her throat. ‘Take the legs off the broken table, then we can nail them into the new tabletop.’

Without saying a word, I take hold of the legs and go to pull it off, but Nina interrupts me, tapping me on the shoulder with a screwdriver

'Just unscrew them like a normal person. Otherwise, you will either bend the legs or break them like you did the table,'

Ignoring her suggestion, I pull the leg, ripping it off, but the leg is bent and crooked as she foretold would happen...

'Great one, Magnus, a broken table and a bent leg, just great,' she huffs.

'Well, if you think you can do a better job, then you fix it.'

'If you didn't break it in the first place, Magnus, I wouldn't have to fix it.'

Our hands are on our hips as we glare at each other, grizzling in silence.

"Unbelievable,' she says and kneels by the other leg and unscrews the good leg with the screwdriver, as I should have done.

As she unscrews the last nail, the metal leg falls towards her. I grab it just before it hits her head. She looks up in shock, but I'm not sure if it's because she was about to be hit across the head or if it's because I caught the leg before it knocked her out. I take the leg over to the new tabletop and hold it in place. She is still silent; her mind plays over what just happened.

'Well, are you going to come 10 screw this in while I hold it or not?|I growl.

She shakes her head at her thoughts and kneels right beside me. Our legs touch and I want to smile, but I don't. Her dainty hands twirl the screwdriver in circles until the four screws are in. I lean across her lap to grab the bent leg, our faces so close for a moment that I smell her sweet breath reminding me of candy. Her lips have a clear coat of lip-gloss, I guess the strawberry

flavour. Try to bend the leg back in place, but I seem to make it worse. Nina lets out a giggle, then quickly places her hand over her mouth to hide her smile. Something flutters inside my stomach at the thought that I just made her laugh like that. It's a pleasant feeling, unlike the one I have had for years that carries a sense of doom.

She finishes screwing the bent leg in and we stand back to look at the table that is on a slant. I place a book on it and we watch as it slides off and burst into laughter,

"What do you think Mr. Thompsons is going to say?' Nina sniggers

"Eh, who cares? It was fun making it, but then again I don't want another detention,' I say, picking up the fallen book and placing "

under the foot of the bent leg. The table is now leveled out.

We burst into laughter again and the fluttering I feel inside grows. Mr. Thomson walks into the classroom. I hope the table is... finished,' he trails off, looking at the bent leg propped up on a book.

'Magnus and Nina, detention again next Wednesday.'

"But we both try to argue with him.

I told you both to fix it, not mangle it more! Now go home before decide to call your parents,' he yells.

Nina and I both gulp and run out the door together. Seeing as we both live at the Packhouse, we both walked towards home together in silence, but it was a nice silence though.

Walking along the grass, she sees a baby bird chirping near a tree and rushes over to it. I follow her and watch as she scoops it up.

The poor thing has fallen from its nest,' she says as she stares up at the extremely tall tree. I'm going to put it back in its nest.'

You can't climb up there Nina, this tree is even taller than what I would even climb,' the bird chirps in her hands. It's quite cute to look at. I gently scratch its little head to reassure it. It relaxes and snuggles further into Nina's hand. I can feel our bodies radiating warmth and realise how close I'm standing to Nina. I take a step back, giving her space.

Well, I can't leave it here, Magnus. I'm going up there with or without your permission,' she says and grabs onto the first branch.

Fine, but I'm coming with you, only because if something happens to you, I will get the blame for it.'

Nina laughs. You won't get the blame for my actions, Magnus,' she says, now on the third branch.

I climb below her in case she accidentally falls. I don't want her to get hurt.

Uh, yeah I will. I always get blamed for anything you pull.'

Her laugh echoed through the trees as she grabs the tenth branch. It was like beautiful music to my ears.

'Don't be so absurd Magnus, you think too highly of yourself. I get into plenty of trouble myself each day, although once upon a time we used to get into trouble together and we had so much fun doing so,'

I laugh, 'Fun? Anything we did as a child was far from fun, from what I remember,'

'Well, you remember wrong,' she says.

I look down at the ground. We must be at least forty branches high.

'Enlighten me then,'

Okay, remember the time the laundry overflowed with bubbles and we would play hide and seek to find each other?'

"Yeah,'

'Well, Magnus, that was your idea to fill the washing machine up with bubble bath and turn it on, and if you remember, I took the blame for it'

I forgot she had taken the blame for it. She had to mop it all up and went to bed without supper. I snuck into her room and gave her a sandwich that night

"And then there was the night we wanted to watch the moon from the roof. We went climbing through May's bedroom window, but when you tried to open it, it wouldn't budge. You used such force that the whole window fell out and crashed onto the pavers outside. You went and hid in May's wardrobe and I took the blame,

She said, I remember now. My parents would have been so mad at me for wanting to climb onto the roof in the first place, let alone breaking a window in the process of it all. I had run straight to the wardrobe and hid inside and watched through the crack as May decided not to tude and look the blame instead

Well, I got » so much vouble because I wanted to protect you, you were my best friend. I thought it would be fun to play a couple of plants on you in return for a bit of fun, and so we would be even I heard the warriors say the next morning they will need to felease some water from the dam You were refusing to have your bath the day before anyway, so I thought it would be funny to have you stand more oleek while the water washed over you I know you were twice the size of most kids, so the water would only reach your waist, but you acted so dramatically that day as if you were going to drown when you could have just stood up and watched a flow past you and you never spoke to me again until now she says giving me a sad look for a moment before looking away

Chapter 34

And then it happened. It all hits me at once, that dreaded feeling but tenfold. That feeling when a hole in the ground opens up and just swallows you whole. Guilt... What have done? She didn't make the Pack think I was a joke. It wasn't her responsible for all the pranks. It was me all along.

'There's the nest,' she says, not realising the bombshell she just dropped on my head.

Nina hovers over the nest. I climb next to her as fast as I can. She stretches her hands out to put the baby bird back in its nest.

'Careful,' I say, cupping my hands under hers. She looks up at me for a moment, and we lower our hands, gently placing the bird gently back in its nest.

There you go, little guy,' I say and give it another gentle pat on the head.

The sun is setting, and the moon is rising. It's a breathtaking sight. We sit next to each other and watch the beauty of it in silence, the comfortable silence. We lean back on our hands and our pinkies touch, but neither of us moves our hand away. I want to apologise to her. I want to get on my knees and beg for forgiveness, just as Josie suggested. Josie was right. I had been a complete dumbass.

'We should get back to the Packhouse. We are going to get into trouble for being late home,' she says.

Nodding, I climb down first, a third of the way Nina slips and falls. My hand wraps around her waist as she screams past me and I pull her into the safety of my chest. Her arms cling back around my waist as she shakes from the fright of falling. She looks up at me and I gaze into her eyes. Slowly, our lips draw closer to each other like a moth to a flame. As they are about to touch, the branch cracks from the weight of both of us and breaks. I wrap my arms around her and land on my back, taking the brunt of the fall.

'Magnus! Are you okay?'

A few sharp pains bolt through my body as I sit up. I scrunch my face. I'll be fine,' I say, clearly in pain.

'No, you're not fine, here let me help you,' she says and puts my arm over her shoulder. 'You should not have done that,'

'Done what?

'Take the brunt of the fall, so I didn't get hurt,

'It was nothing,

'Sure.'

We make it back to the Packhouse grounds. Leon and two of his warriors run towards us.

"What happened Magnus, are you okay?" he says, taking over from Nina, helping to carry my weight.

'I'll be fine, I just fell is all,'

Nina gives me a confused look but says nothing.

"Well, we have all been worried sick about you two,'

"Sorry, Dad,

"It's okay Sweetie, I'm glad you helped Magnus home. Go to the dinner table. We will be there in a minute.'

'I'd rather just rest my back in my room rather than sit at the dinner table, Leon,'

"Of course,

'At least in a couple of months when you get your wolf on your eighteenth, you will heal quickly.

"That's true, I smile, excited at the thought I will soon have my first shift and get to meet my wolf. I'm extra excited because I have Alpha blood. My wolf will be pure black like my dad's My mother is a descendant of the Moon Goddess, so she has a pure white wolf.

'But until then you will heal at a normal human rate,

"Yeah, I know. Can you have the cook bring my dinner up for me please, Leon?"

Of course,

Forty minutes later, there's a knock at my door.

'Come in,'

It's Nina holding a plate of food.

'I, um, wanted to come to check on you and thought I'd bring your dinner,'

Thanks,' I say, taking the plate and cutlery.

I also wanted to say thanks for, um, catching me from the fall.'

She stands in silence, waiting for my response. I want to apologise to her, but the only word that comes out is.

'Anytime,'

She frowns. 'Well, I guess I'll leave you to it then,' she says and walks out the door. I'm such an idiot "Anytime." That's all I could say to her. I munch my meal down while I mentally scold myself. Maybe at school tomorrow I can make things right. There is another knock at my door.

'Nina?' I say.

'No, it's me, Josie,

.

She walks in and sits in the chair beside my bed.

'Theard you fell over and hurt yourself, but I didn't believe Leon when he said that. My big brother and future. Alpha hurt from just a minor fall? No way, so I'm here to ask what really happened.'

Josie... You were right... about Nina. I've been such a jerk and don't even know how to make it up to her. She will never forgive me.'

O.M.G Magnus Are you okay, you must have hit your head. It's a concussion, right? Maybe a fever?' She says, placing her hand on my forehead. I whack it away.

'No Josie, I'm not sick and I don't have a concussion. After detention with Nina, we spent some time together. We climbed a tree, we talked, and I realised I made a mistake cutting her off seven years ago. She slipped, and I caught her, then my branch broke. I purposely took the brunt of the fall so she didn't get hurt.'

Josie blinks rapidly, processing what I just told her. She grabs my shoulders and shakes me.

Tell her you're sorry!' she says right in my face.

"I know Josie, I tried too, but I struggled to say what I wanted to say to her. I'm going to make it up to her at school tomorrow'

'Well, I should hope so, Magnus. It's the least you can do,'

I know I owe it to her, do you think she will forgive me?'

'As long as you don't stuff it up with her again, then I don't see why not.'

*Thank Josie,' I smile

Oh, Flint and i never mentioned you and Nina had detention either, she says, pretending to zip her mouth

"Thanks, I appreciate it,'

Well, I hope you will be well enough to go to school tomorrow so you can make things right again with Nina,' she smiles.

'Me too, see you in the morning,' I smile and watch as she leaves the room

Okay, so my checklist for tomorrow beg Ning for forgiveness and restore our friendship. Too easy. Trying to fall asleep. I tossed and turned all night and had a bad feeling about school tomorrow

Chapter 35

Sitting up, I look at myself in the mirror. My hair is a scruffy mess from all the lossing and turning, and can see slight bags under my eyes. My back feels okay, just a little tender, but nothing that can stop me from going to school. I shower and dress in jeans and a black tight-fitting shirt that shows off my muscular physique with my favourite pair of black sneakers. As I comb my hair back, it flings back into the scruffy style, giving me the ruggedly handsome look instead of the sleek, handsome look I usually go for. I take my seat at the table for breakfast.

'Magnus, darling, how is your back dear?' mother asks.

'It's fine. It wasn't anything major, to begin with.'

I'm glad to hear,' she smiles.

I look up to see Nina down the other end of the table, talking to her parents while she eats her breakfast. Josie is constantly looking between Nina and me. It's time to go to school. Nina grabs her bag and races ahead of us. I want to catch up to her but she is faster than me. We have an assembly this morning and make our way to the hall. I sit as close as I can to Nina. There are five students between us. Claire calls out to me and races over and sits next to me.

'Boo-boo, I've been looking for you all morning,' she says and clings onto my arm and leans on me as the assembly starts. I can't shake her off and cause a scene, so I just sit there quietly.

Principal Conrad stands at the podium.

'Good morning students, I would, first, like to remind you all that your rubbish goes in the bin and not on the ground. You should all know better by now. Today I would also like to welcome a new student joining our school today. I'm sure you will all make Moss feel very welcome.'

The school claps as Moss makes his way to the podium. He is almost as handsome as I am also with brown hair, but unlike my blue eyes, he has brown. You can tell he trains regularly, although he isn't as big as I am, he isn't far off it. I can't help but glare at him and decide I already dislike him.

'Thank you, Principal Conrad, I look forward to meeting you all and feel very welcomed already,' he smiles. Everyone claps except me; I watch as he walks away from the podium with his smug face. After ten more minutes of Principal Conrad talking, assembly ends.

Nina stares for a moment at Claire, still clinging onto my arm as we leave the hall.

'We have the first-class together Boo-boo, let's go,' she smiles.

'Great,' I say, lacking any enthusiasm.

Nina sits in her usual spot and avoids any eye contact, completely ignoring Claire and me. Then things become even worse... Moss walks in with a big grin showing off his sparkly white perfect teeth. I almost want to throw up looking at him. His smile pissed me off, and I secretly hoped I could one day knock that smug smile from his face with maybe a couple of teeth out along with it. He stares around the room at the vacant seats and his face lights up even more like a sparkler on a birthday cake when he sees Nina sitting in the far corner with no one near her. He takes the seat right next to her and puts his hand out to shake hers,

“Hey, I’m Moss, what’s a pretty girl like yourself doing alone in the corner here?”

Nina blushes and shakes his hand

“Oh, I’m Nina, I prefer to sit alone,” she says.

“Oh, would you like me to move? I didn’t mean to intrude in your space?” he says sincerely

“Actually, some company might be nice for a change and you’re new here anyway, so please make yourself comfortable,” she smiles

They chatted quietly and giggled together throughout class. The bell finally goes and I’m happy they will part ways.

“What subject do you have next? She asks him

‘Visual Art,

‘Me too,” she says with happiness, ‘Let’s go together then.’ She smiles.

My heart sinks along with my gut. I’ve got English so I’m stuck with Claire again, but at least Zak and Flint are in English with me. I try to think of who I know who has Visual Art.

I’ll meet you in English, Claire. I just got to stop by the men’s room,

“Okay, Boo-boo, don’t take too long now,” she says, giving me a wink and blowing me a kiss. I try to hold the shudder as my body is screaming to release it. I rush down the corridor and find Paul just before he enters Visual Art class.

‘Hey, Paul,

‘Yo-Yo, what’s up Magnus?’”

Um not much, I just have a favour to ask,’

‘Oh, ok,’

The new guy. I don’t know what it is about him, but I can just sense something isn’t right. Can you monitor Nina? I’m just wanting to monitor her welfare around him. Being the future Alpha and all, it’s going to be my duty to keep my pack safe, so why not now?’

‘Sure, Magnus, I’ll monitor both of them for you.’

‘Great, and Paul, don’t mention this to anyone okay, it’s just between you and me. Got it?’

'Got it,' he nods.

I run back to English and sit in my seat between Claire and Zak, with Flint beside Zak. We have to write an essay, I struggle to concentrate instead, I think of Moss and Nina.

'Everything okay, Boo-boo? Claire asks.

Zak and Flint snigger at her nickname she gave me. I elbow Zak hard enough he flies into Flint. It shuts them up from laughing at

me.

'Yup, fine, just struggling to concentrate is all.'

'Oh, my Boo-boo, do you have a headache? I can finish the essay for you?'

'Um yeah it's a headache... sure,' I say, sliding my essay to her.'

I put my hand up.

'Yes, Magnus?'

'Um, I need to go to the men's room,

'Okay, but be quick,

'Okay, Mrs. Lofts,'

'Oh, Boo-boo, you had just been to the men's room. Is it the runs' she asks in front of the entire class.

I welcomed the hole that opened up and swallowed me whole yesterday to reappear and swallow me again.

"No, I don't have the runs, just be quiet Claire,' I growl and storm out of the room, heading straight to Visual Arts class. I duck down outside the window and peek in. Moss is leaning over Nina, helping her with her work. He sits back next to her and pushes her hair behind her ear, I let out a very loud growl and everyone turns their attention to the growling window. I duck down just in time and crawl away furiously. Claire smiles when she sees me return to class, but she then frowns when she sees the anger across my face.

'What's wrong Boo-boo?'

'Nothing,' I growl.

'Well, if it's nothing, why do you sound so grumpy and angry then?'

'I'm not grumpy or angry.' I take a subtle deep breath to calm myself down and think of Nina's brown-doe-like eyes. 'I just didn't sleep well last night, but now I know why.'

It's lunchtime. I race to the cafeteria to ask Nina to sit with us for lunch, losing Claire along the way. Barging into the cafeteria, all eyes are on me from my loud, eager entrance. My eyes dart to the corner to see Moss sitting at Nina's table having a good laugh. I barge back out of the cafeteria passing, Claire, Josie, Zak, Flint, and Paul.

'Where are you going, Boo-boo?'

'Anywhere but here,' I growl.

'What's his problem?' Flint asks.

They enter the cafeteria, and Josie can see why Magnus is upset. The new and hot, attractive guy is hanging out with Nina and clearly flirting with her. She frowns at the thought of it all, feeling sorry for Magnus.

Not wanting to be in the Cafeteria I decide to hang out in the library for the first time in my life. I sit myself down at a table with the school nerds. They all gasp and stare at me while I bang my head on the table.

'Stupid, stupid, stupid, I'm so stupid,' I say

'Um Y-you're putting a dint in the t-table,' I hear from a clearly nervous squeaky voice,

I look at her as she pushes her oversized glasses up closer to her eyes

'Pipe down Pipsqueak. Can't you see I'm in the middle of a crisis?'

'Oh...-sorry, maybe talk about your p-problems and maybe we can h-help you with some advice?'

Giving her a strange look, I frown.

'Advice from a bunch of nerds. Are you crazy?'

'If I was c-crazy I would have to have some kind of psychological d-disorder such as Munchausen or not be in touch with reality or...'

'Okay, okay, I get it. Since I do not know what to do now other than bash my head against a table, I will tell you what my problem is, but none of you are to breathe a word of this to anyone.'

'O-okay,'

'So, I had a best friend as a child. I couldn't even ask the Moon Goddess for a better friend. One day seven years ago I cut her off because I thought she was making my Pack not take me seriously and worry about me for when I become Alpha.

So yesterday I have realised that I'm an idiot and that it was myself making me look like a court jester. I decided last night that I would beg Nina for forgiveness and repair our friendship today at school. But the school brought in a new student this morning, who you all saw, Moss. He has been glued to Nina's hip and flirting with her all-damn day. So that's my problem,

O-okay, I see doesn't she live at the Packhouse with you. You could always apologize at home,'

'Yeah, but this morning I felt like she was purposely not wanting to talk to me. She spoke to her parents far more than usual and didn't even glance my way.'

'Okay, is there a subject you have with her?'

"Yes, science and Mr. Thompson made us lab partners,'

'p-perfect, that's when you can apologise,' she smiles.

'Thanks, I have science with her tomorrow,' I say, standing up to leave. 'What was your name, anyway?' I ask her.

'Pippa,

"Thanks, Pip-Squeak, see you around,' I wave goodbye.

The lunch bell goes and I complete my last two classes, happy to be going home.

'Oh, Boo-boo, I'm so excited to be coming over to your house,' Claire says, taking my arm in hers.

What are you talking about, Claire?"

Boo-boo, don't tell me you forgot already? I'm coming over to help pick you out something to wear for the party on the weekend, remember?

My stomach churned, I had completely forgotten that she was my date for the party and she was coming over. I'm lost in thought, trying to think of a way out of it, but can't think of a decent excuse

Come on then,' she says, pulling me along to catch up with Flint and Josie.

"Hey Claire, aren't you going home?' Josie asks,

'No, Magnus invited me over, I'm going to help him pick out something to wear to my party. I am his date, after all,' she says.

Josie goes to glare at me but quickly smiles when Claire looks at her again.

'You are coming to the party too, are you not?' she asks,

'I guess I'll be there,'

'Great!' she says, giving Josie a squeeze.

Nina walks behind us home. Every time I turn to see if she is still behind us, she is staring down at the ground. I can't see her face, her emotion, she completely ignores me and I don't like it.

We arrive at the Packhouse and are greeted by my parents. They look down at Claire's hand holding mine and frown.

'And who is this... lady?' mum asks,

'Oh, this is Claire, a... friend from school,'

Oh, don't be so shy around your parents, Magnus. I'm his date for the party this weekend,' she beams.

'How... lovely,' my mother says, forcing a smile. 'Well, you must come in then,' she says and gestures for us to enter. Claire and I go straight upstairs to my room.

'Wow, this room is so large, and you even have your own bathroom. Please don't tell me that is a walk-in wardrobe over there?' she asks. She is so excited I'm waiting for her head to pop and blow streamers out everywhere like a party popper.

'Yeah, it's no big deal.'

'No big deal? This is an enormous deal, Magnus!' she says, entering the wardrobe. Instead of following her, I make myself comfortable and lay on my bed in hopes she will get bored and go home.

Instead, she comes out with a pair of black jeans, a belt with a silver wolf's head as the buckle, and five coloured shirts.

You must try this one on first Boo-boo,' she smiles and hands me a silver-grey shirt,'

"Can't you just pick one? Then I don't have to try it on?"

This will be more fun, Magnus.'

Rolling my eyes, I sit up on the bed and remove my shirt.

Magnus, my-my you're so much more masculine than I even imagined,'

"You've imagined me shirtless? | ask, feeling awkward.

Claire crawls up the bed towards me and sits on my lap, pinning me down.

Oh, Boo-boo I've imagined you with far less on she says,' and smashes her lips to mine just as Josie enters with Nina.

Magnus!" Josie yells

In the utter shock and disgust of Claire kissing me, I push her away at the same time I hear Josie angrily yell my name.

Nina and I make eye contact and I can see the hurt in her eyes. She runs off down the corridor without saying a word.

'What the hell Magnus? Josie says,

Oh, sorry about that, Josie,' Claire says with a giggle. 'I get how gross it can look when your brother is making out with his girlfriend. Next time we will try to be more discreet,'

"Discreet are you serious?" Josie yells then lets out a frustrated 'G«,' and slams my door shut, leaving Claire and me alone,

What the hell Claire?’

What’s wrong Boo-boo?’ she says and tries to cup my face. I lean back, avoiding her touch.

You can’t just kiss me like that.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you just can’t.’

‘Oh, I see, too soon?’

Yes, too soon Claire, we haven’t even been on a date yet,’

I’m sorry Boo-boo, I’ll hold off until then,’

I’d appreciate that,’

‘Now, are you going to try this shirt on?’

I take the shirt and put it on.

‘Oh, very smooth, now try this one on.’

‘This one is fine, Claire; there, we have an outfit picked. It’s time I take you home,’

‘So soon?’

‘Yeah, I forgot I have an um... assignment to do.’

“Oh, okay then,

On my way out of the Packhouse, I run into Seth.

‘Hey Magnus, where are you off to?’

‘Taking Claire home. She lives near the school.’

I’m about to drive past the school. I can drop her home if you like

‘Oh, could you?’ I say, a little too excited, to Claire’s dismay.

‘Sure,

“Great! I take Claire’s hand and help her in the car and shut the door before she can give me a kiss on the cheek goodbye,’ I had never been so happy to see the back of Seth’s car driving away into the distance. Now to go find Nina. I run back inside and halfway up the staircase; I’m stopped by Josie storming angrily towards me.

‘What is wrong with you, you said you wanted to make things right with Nina. Minutes later, you are making out with Claire!

‘Look, it wasn’t what it looked like, I swear.’

Josie laughs. ‘Are you serious? It wasn’t what it looked like?’

‘Yes, Claire gave me shirts to try on for the stupid party. As soon as I took my shirt off, she climbed onto me and kissed me as you both walked in. I swear I didn’t know she was going to do that. She caught me off guard.’

Josie takes a moment, calming herself down,

“You need to fix this, Magnus. You need to make things right with Nina, and after what just conspired between you and Claire. Well, let’s just say it’s going to take more than grovelling and apologies to fix this,’

‘I know Josie, I’m going to see Nina now,’ I say and walk around her, continuing up the stairs.

‘Nina?’ I say gently, knocking on her door. ‘Nina?’

The door opens abruptly. Nina holds the door open with one hand and her other hand is on her hip. Her face shows no emotion,

What do you want, Magnus?’ she says, sending a hot shiver down my spine, saying my name.

‘I wanted to come to apologise to you?’

‘For what exactly?’

“For what you just saw between Claire and me.’

Why are you apologising for something that’s not my business?’

I’m stunned by what Nina is saying. She left and ran down the corridor. I thought it upset her seeing me with Claire?

You ran off upset when you saw us, I thought?’

You thought wrong. Why would I be upset? We have meant nothing to each other for seven years, so why would I care now?’ Her words hit me like a knife in my heart. Her words were brutal, but I could see where she was coming from. ‘What you do isn’t my business and hasn’t been for seven years now, so

why would I care whose mouth you stick your tongue down? Now if you excuse me, I'm going to bed. Goodnight, Magnus,' and slams her door in my face.

Leaning our backs against either side of the door, we both slide down and stare at our feet with sadness, although she won't admit it. I know I hurt her again. She will be in the Science class tomorrow. That will be my opportunity to speak to her. I return to my room and step into the shower, and bang my head against the wall in frustration. Once I've finished sulking in the shower, I climb into bed for another restless night of little sleep.

The morning arrives, and I sit at the table for breakfast to find Nina completely ignoring me again. She runs to school ahead of us again.

On arrival at the school, I walk to my locker with Josie and Flint on either side of me. I look over at Nina's locker. Moss has an arm above Nina leaning into the locker. She blushes and giggles as he whispers in her ear.

Josie and Flint observe them as well, then give each other a worried look.

'Let's get to class,' Flint says.

'What do we have first?'

'Physical Ed, let's go get our training gear on,

PE is just what I needed to help me burn some of this frustration out. We go to the change room and change into shorts and tank shirts and walk to the oval where Mr Tilley waits to train.

While we wait for the rest of the class, I begin some stretches with Flint and a few other guys.

"You got to be kidding me?" Flint says, looking over my shoulder. I look to see what his problem is only to repeat Flint's words.

“You have got to be kidding me?”

‘Hey guys,’ Moss smiles and waves and stretches with us.

‘What are you doing here?’ I snap.

‘I have PE,’ he smiles. ‘I’m Moss,’ he says, putting his hand out to shake mine. Instead, I stop stretching, cross my arms, and glare at him,

“Ok fellas, let’s begin with a few laps around the oval and you start now,’ Mr Tilley says and blows his whistle. I jog past Moss knocking into his shoulder and he immediately gets that I don’t like him. He races to catch up to me and keeps up with me, jogging by my side with a smug grin that just seems to never stop growing. If that smug smile gets any bigger, he’d be the joker’s doppelganger, Flint and I increase our speed to lose him, but he continues to keep up with us. He whacks his shoulder, nudging me with force. I do the same back. Then the next thing you know, we are both on the ground tackling each other. He punches me in the jaw, I punch him in the left eye, he punches me in the right eye, I punch his cheekbone. Mr. Tilley runs toward us, blowing his whistle. “Stop! Stop right now, break it up!’ He continues to yell at us but neither of us listens to him, I grab Moss’s arm and turn him onto his stomach and wrap my other arm around his neck and keep him in a lock hold cutting off his airway. He is about to pass out before he uses his free arm to grab my precious jewels and twist them.

‘Argh,’ I yell and sit back, releasing him whilst I cling onto my goods.

He turns around and we glare at each other, panting. We both have black eyes, bloody noses, and bruises in different areas of our

faces.

‘Magnus, what has gotten into you? And Moss, you are new here, you should know better getting into fights. Now both of you go see the school nurse and report to the principal’s office.’

‘Yes, Mr. Tilley,’ Moss and me grizzle.

Mr. Tilley sends Flint with us to make sure Moss and I didn't get into another fight along the way. We walk through the corridors and it horrifies students at the sight of us as we walk past the windows. Nina sees from her class and races out with a gasp. I smile and feel warm as she races out to check on me. My mouth drops open when she races up to Moss and wraps her dainty little arms around him. I can hear my growl across half the school grounds. Nina steps back from Moss. si

What happened to you?' she asks, staring at me for a moment, then back to Moss.

'I was in PE training and that guy was being unfriendly and tried to knock me over when we were told to run laps. We ended up in a fight. I've never met the guy before, so I don't know what his problem is,' he says with a glare towards me.

Nina marches up towards me in anger. 'How dare you! How dare you get into a fight with Moss like that! Just because he is my friend and treats me with kindness, unlike someone else, I know Magnus! Does not give you the right to destroy another friendship! She storms back to Moss; she takes a handkerchief from her pocket and gently dabs the blood away from his face. He cups his hand over hers and gives her a sweet, brief peck on the tip of her nose.

Thank you, Nina.' he says, smiling down at her.

My blood is boiling. I feel so angry that I could spontaneously combust and take half the school buildings with me. Flint places his hand on my shoulder.

'Best to just go see the nurse. Standing here watching is only going to make matters worse.'

I march past them in anger and stomp into the Nurse's station.

'Magnus, what on Earth happened to you?' Nurse Carla asks.

"Got into a fight.'

'Well, clearly. Who with?'

'The new guy, Moss.'

'Where is he? Did he sustain any injuries?'

"Probably a few extra bruises than I, but he's already being attended to.'

'Take a seat'

I take the seat while Nurse Carla cleans my face up as best as she could

Chapter 38

'Do you want me to call your parents to come to pick you up from school?'

'No, I'll stay,

I'd prefer you go home and put ice on your face, Magnus.'

'Look, I'm staying, okay? If it makes you feel better, then I'll rest here for the next period until recess.'

Okay, well I'll go get you an ice pack then.'

She returns a moment later and hands me the icepack; I hold it against my swollen black eye for the next hour. The recess bell goes, I toss the icepack onto Nurse Carla's table and walk to the cafeteria. Students stare and whisper as I walk past.

'I heard he knocked Moss out and almost killed him.'

'Well, I heard he picked Moss up with one hand and threw him halfway across the oval,'"

Well, at least the whispers and rumors were to my liking. Entering the cafeteria, Claire lets out a gasp and races towards me. She cups my face.

'Boo-boo, I heard there were rumors a fight broke out. I did not know it involved you. Oh, my poor snookums,' she says, embracing me. I notice Nina and Moss watching Claire smother me with concern and worry. My face lowered closer to hers and I pecked her on the lips without even thinking about my action. Nina looks away, but Moss's steely glare intensifies.

'Oh Boo-boo,' Claire blushes. I place my arm over her shoulder and pull her as close as I can to my side. Josie brings a tray of lunch over for me.

'I heard you got into a fight with Moss. You know Mum and Dad are going to flip beans when they see your face, right?'

Yeah, I know, but that's the least of my problems," I say, taking a glance at Nina. My fist slams down onto the table as I see Nina and Moss kissing. Everyone at the table jumps.

Boo-boo, what's wrong?'

Josie gives me a sympathetic, knowing look.

They forgot to put the cheese in my roll,' Ilie.

Oh, here have mine then,' she offers and swaps them over. She has been so infatuated with me she even ordered the same lunch as me May joins us and angrily plonks her tray of food down in front of us and bites into her ham roll as if she was biting the head off

a small critter. She glares at Claire and chews loudly.

Gee, everyone is such a grump today,' Paul says with a nervous laugh.

We sit there in silence for the rest of lunch. The bell goes and I realise I have Science with Nina now. Moss walks her to science and

gives her a long Kiss that involved eating her face. He smiles at me and leaves to go to his next class,

Nina places her books on the mangled table we had made together. I take my seat next to her but we both sit silently refusing to speak to each other

Okay, today you will fill out this questionnaire with your lab partner, if you don't know the answers then it will tell you what page in your textbooks you can read to find the answer. You have forty-five minutes,' Mr Thomson says.

He places a questionnaire sheet on each table. Five minutes go by and neither of us has moved

"The questionnaire isn't going to fill itself out Nina and Magnus, get to work or i will fail you both in science

We both grumble and mutter under our breaths and take our pens to fill it out We both go to take the sheet at the same time but grab each other's hands instead I don't want to let go but Nina pulls her hand away in a flash We both take the end of the paper. She glares at me

'Let go, I'll fill it out,

'Let me at least fill a couple of questions out I say

The sheet of paper tears in half and Mr Thomson walks over and slams the sticky tape down.

'Again, you broke it, you fix it, then fill it out,' he growls:

Without speaking I hold the two strips of paper in place while Nina tapes them together.

Till fill out the first half and you do the rest,' she snaps.

Fine,' I say and cross my arms.

Once she has answered eight questions, she angrily slides the sheet toward me. I pause and gaze at her.

What happened to us, Nina? We were getting along so well the other day, we almost... and now we are worse than ever?’

‘The other day should never have happened. Besides Moss asked me to be his girlfriend today and I said yes.’

You only just met him; how could you go out with someone you don’t know. What if he is some kind of axe-wielding maniac or has bad intentions of you?’

Why do you care Magnus, you have never cared for me. I think it’s obvious to both of us that you are jealous.’

Jealous?’ I laugh.

‘Yes, you are jealous of Moss and feel threatened by him otherwise you would not have taunted him into a fight. I highly doubt he is dangerous, if anything he has been extremely sweet, loving, and caring towards me. You should be focusing on your girlfriend and go back to your old ways of pretending I don’t exist.’

‘I don’t want it to be like this,’

‘Magnus, you are the one who made it like this. Now you get to live with it.’

Sadness consumes me, I take the questionnaire and fill the rest out slowly and hold back my tears.

Mr Thomson collects our sheets as the bell rings

As I walk to English, I see Pipsqueak is cornered and Sean the well-known school bully is harassing her. He flicks her glasses off your face.

‘Now empty your pockets,’ he growls in her face. Scared she does as she is told and empties her pockets of any coins.

Swiftly I grab Sean’s neck and hold him two feet off the floor against the wall.

‘Got a problem with my friend here?’ I snarl in his face.

Oh, sorry I didn’t know she was your friend,’ he says nervously.

Whilst holding him up I look at Pipsqueak shaking.

‘How often has been taking your money?’ I ask her.

E-everyday, she replies in her squeaky little voice. I turn my attention back to Sean.

‘Empty your pockets,’ I tell him.

‘What?’

‘You heard me, empty your pockets or I’ll make your face look as pretty as mine,’ I say. He looks over my bruised and banged-up face and quickly empties his pockets.

Releasing my grip, he falls to the ground

“If you ever go near Pipsqueak or any of her friends again, you will face my wrath.’

Sean scrambles to his feet and bolts down the corridor

‘The money is yours, take it,’ I say to Pipsqueak and continue to class,

‘W-wait’ she says running up to me,

‘What?’

‘T-thank-you for s-stopping him, Magnus,’

No worries, Pipsqueak,” I say walking away. I notice Nina is standing with Josie waiting for their class door to be unlocked. They had both witnessed me protect one of the school nerds.

‘It’s P-Pippa... by the way.’ Her words cheerily echo down the corridor behind me.

Chapter 39

It’s the end of the school day. Josie and Flint meet at my locker.

‘Hey, bro, ready to go home?’ Flint asks.

Td rather them not see my face, but I don’t really have a choice. I suppose we better get home so I can face the music.’

Nina was home before us and, as expected, mum and dad were standing at the front door looking as mad as the hatter himself.

“Magnus, we received a phone call from the school today stating you got into a fight with the new boy and, from looking at your face, I’d say they gave us accurate information.’ Mum says, unimpressed. Dad walks to me and places his hand on my shoulder.

‘Son, what were you thinking? You are going to be Alpha before you know it and here you are beating up the new boy. You have some explaining to do.’

‘I may have accidentally nudged him at PE and it turned into a fight.’

‘And why did you accidentally nudge him?’

..!

Perfect timing. I look over his shoulder at Nina approaching. Dad raises his eyebrow at Nina, then back at me.

‘I see... Well, I hope we don’t have a repeat of this terrible situation, but I’m glad you are okay, son.’ He pulls me in for a hug and whispers in my ear.

‘Next time knee him good and hard in the balls son, that girl is worth fighting for.’ Shocked, I contain my tiny smirk and give dad a small nod instead.

I remain in my room until it's time to join the Packhouse for dinner. Leon, Seth, Mia, and Amelia cringe at my face. Mum, of course, sits on dad's lap.

'Your father and I have been organising your wolf ceremony. We have invited five different packs.' She smiles.

'Why so many packs?'

'Well, since you will be eighteen and have your wolf, you will find your mate and become Alpha. I figured just in case your mate isn't in this pack, we would help you find her quicker by having as many unmated she-wolves present for the ceremony.'

'Mum, are you for real?'

"Yes, I'm for real. I'm so excited for you! You know, when I met your father while working at the diner, I didn't even know wolves

existed and didn't even know I was one. Your father entered the diner like he owned the place and kept talking about vanilla and cookies. Jim and I thought that was what he wanted to order, but it turned out it was my scent. It's funny now that I think about it. I fled from your father and tried to pull a runner when he said we were mates and had explained it to me.'

"You really ran from dad when you found out he was your mate?'

"Vep.' Mum laughs.

"You actually fled from me a few times, but before I knew it, she couldn't get enough of me.' dad laughs.

Seth, Leon, and Amelia laugh.

"So true,' Mia giggles

"What if the she-wolf I want isn't my mate? What if I want to choose my mate instead?'

Mum drops her fork and the colour from her face fades. Everyone has stopped laughing and stares at me instead. Mum seems to have come to her senses and stairs at me

'Magnus, it's frowned upon for good reasons choosing a mate instead of accepting the mate the Goddess blessed you with.

'But.

'But, nothing.'

'Mum!

She is right son choosing a mate instead of accepting the one the Goddess blessed you with can cause a lot of problems not past for you but your entire family,' dad frowns

What I don't like my mate

"Why don't you at least want and find out who she is first?'

would be easier to just choose,' Mum abruptly stands from dad's lap.

it's too dangerous Magnus, just please wait and find out who she is first

I don't see what the big deal in choosing is.'

.

Mum slams her hand on the table.

Magnus, choosing a mate is taking her away from her true mate. Is that fair to him or her? People die, people get hurt when you choose a mate. How do you think my mother died when I was a child and your grandfather and our entire pack of Mooncrest? Unless your mate has passed away and the she-wolf, you like has also had her mate pass away, then it will not happen' Mum storms from the room, leaving me in shock.

'I did not know that. I didn't mean to upset mum; I say to dad.

She will be okay, she has had a very rough past and just wants the best for you kids.'

"Great, now you upset mum too.' Josie sighs and crosses her arms.

Josie," scowi.

Who else have you upset today? Leon asks. The room goes silent No one dares answer, not even Nina herself.

Im going to bed' I say, standing up. I walk up the stairs and crash land down onto my bed.

,

The dreaded sun hits my face. I don't even remember falling asleep. I must have been exhausted. It's Saturday. I put my shorts and tank shirt on and spend the day at the Packhouse gym. I've got Claire's party tonight Part of me wants to go, the other part doesn't, but everyone will expect me there. I shower and put the black jeans on with the silver-grey shirt on and my belt with the silver wolf buckle. A lot of the swelling and bruising has gone down. There is a knock at the door. I open the door to see its mum.

Mum, I've been meaning to talk to you. I did not know the effect choosing a mate could have. I'm so sorry mum I never meant to hurt you'

She welcomes the hug and embraces me back with a tight, loving squeeze. She is so tiny she can barely reach around me

I was coming to let you know Claire rang and is hoping you will arrive at her house soon to help her greet everyone.'

Yeah, I guess I can go now, thanks, mum.'

She smiles. You have a great night and no more fights, okay?

Til try my best to behave, mum.' Walking downstairs, my breath is taken away. Nina stands by the window near the front door, looking out. She has a red fitted dress that sits just above her knees with black little heels and a matching clutch purse. I want to tell her how beautiful she looks I take a step towards her.

“Wow, Moss is a lucky man,” Flint says as he and Josie approach, Nina. Flint is wearing a white shirt tucked in suit pants and May is wearing a black dress with straps, Flint sees my steel gaze on him and laughs nervously.

“I’m assuming Moss will be here to pick you up any minute?” Flint asks her.

“Yep, any minute”

“What?” I say

Nina ticks her head to look at me

“Moss is taking me out for dinner, then we are going to Claire’s party afterward” She smiles I want to punch the front door but I know I will knock off as hinges and Mum and Dad would be angry. Instead, I walk out the front door and do not say a word

Flint and Josie run outside after me

“Aren’t you going to get a lift from Seth with us?”

“No thanks, I’ll walk. The fresh air will do me good” I huff.

Chapter 40

Claire stands on her front lawn looking for me. She is wearing a pink fitted dress that has one sleeve with some frills. Her hair dangles over one shoulder. I notice she has curled the ends of her hair. She looks simply gorgeous. She races up to me with a smile on her face

“Oh Boo-boo, I’m so happy to see you,” she says, giving me a peck on the cheek. I realise I may have been ungrateful towards Claire all this time. She seems to like me a lot and although she can be quite overbearing, she has been nothing but supportive and sweet towards me. I can’t help but feel Nina will never forgive me and never want to be my friend again. It’s a hole inside me that will be there forever, but I shouldn’t make other people that care about me suffer for it. Nina has clearly moved on, although I would have preferred her to move on with anyone other than Moss. I can’t help but sense something is off about that guy, but I need to focus on what is in front of me.

“You look lovely, Claire.”

She steps back and does a twirl. “I’m glad you like it. Let’s go inside.” Her house is very tidy. She leads me to the kitchen to a very large island table. There are a few different platters she has prepared.

“Wow, this looks great, Claire.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, can I try one of these things?”

“Of course you can. It’s called a vol-au-vent, by the way. There are a few different flavours.”

I pick one up and take a bite. It’s delicious. I can taste creamy cheese with broccoli.

These are delicious.' I say reaching for another. Claire takes my hand away from the food. Let's wait till everyone gets here.' She smiles,

'You know maybe you should consider becoming a chef?'

'I am hoping to open my own restaurant one day.' She says opening the fridge she hands me bottles of soft drinks. I set them up on the table and walk over to a cupboard and take a few stacks of cups and place them near the drinks. Claire stands back and looks around with hands-on her hips. "What am I missing?... Music of course.' She runs into the loungeroom and turns the stereo on. 'Everyone will start arriving any minute.' She says dancing towards me. The doorbell rings and we answer the door greeting six guys and two girls from our school. A few minutes later Josie, Flint, Zak, and May turn up. I place my hand around Claire's waist. 'Hey, come in, good to see you all.' Claire says. May glares at my hand on Claire's waist and stomps past us. Paul and a few others turn up with him and join the party. Within twenty minutes the house is packed full of teens dancing, chatting, and playing card games.

I notice Paul following May around trying to flirt with her.

"Let's dance Boo-boo.'

"How bout we have a drink first, lemonade or cola?'

"Cola, please Boo-boo.'

pour her a cola and sit on the couch and pat the seat for her to sit next to me. She sips her cola and places it on the coffee table and leans her head on my chest. I wonder where Moss has taken Nina for dinner, are they laughing and enjoying each other's company? I notice Sean the school's notorious bully has joined the party.

'Ready to dance? Claire asks. I was about to say no until Nina and Moss entered through the front door giggling and laughing. Moss immediately wraps his arms around Nina and dances with her.

'Sure,' I stand up and pull her close and keep both hands on her hips.

'This is so much fun! Claire yells over the music

I try to dance along with Claire trying to keep as calm and cool as possible and show everyone I'm not fazed about Nina and Moss.

Claire wraps her arms around my neck and pulls my face closer to hers. We share a long kiss as Claire's hands now move down to my chest. My mind keeps telling me to just relax and enjoy the kiss My shoulders relax and one hand leaves her hip and slips

behind her head pulling her in for a more passionate kiss. The room fills with 'oohs' and wolf whistles at our show. Not wanting to dance anymore I take her hand and go to the kitchen for the delicious food she made.

This is the best food I've ever had.' I say chowing a bit of everything down.

Oh, Boo-boo, stop it, you are just saying that.' She blushes.

No, I'm serious Claire. You can cook for me anytime.' I smile.

Once half the platters are empty, she pulls me in for another long kiss she gives me a seductive look and takes my hand leading me up the staircase to her bedroom. Nina and Moss watch as we go up the stairs.

We spend half an hour making out on her bed, she goes to unzip her dress but I grab her hand and stop her. She gives me a worried look

'What's wrong Boo-boo, I thought you wanted this? Don't you want me?'

'Claire, I want this but I'm not ready for us to take that step yet.'

Why not? Don't you find me attractive?'

Of course, I find you attractive, it's just that I'll be eighteen in a few weeks and I want to wait and see if you are my... mate or not.'

Her bottom lip trembles and her eyes well up.

Are you saying that you don't think I'll be your mate?'

'No, well, no one knows but the Moon Goddess, let's just wait a few more weeks until we take that step, okay?'

'Even if we aren't mates, we can still... you know make love to each other.' She says trying to flutter her eyes at me.

'I don't want to hurt you Claire I don't want to hurt more people than I already have, okay?'

There is also the chance that I could be your mate so we can still be together in the meantime, right? Like boyfriend and girlfriend? Until we at least know?'

'Sure.' I say and kiss her forehead. 'We should go back and join the party?'

'They probably all think we have been doing the deed up here.' She giggles. She is probably right; great I've probably pissed more people off now.

We return downstairs, Claire has a big grin on her face. Everyone is staring at us but most are trying to be discreet about it. I sit on the couch and Claire clings onto my arm and sits next to me. The next thing we know May comes stomping out from the kitchen with a bucket filled with ice cubes and water and throws it over the both of us.

'You bitch.' Claire says as she is about to strike May across the face, I gently grab her wrist in time.

Claire, she's upset for obvious reasons. I'll handle May, go upstairs and change.' I say as I watch Moss sneak out the front door alone

May, I know you have wanted to be with me, I know how it feels to not be with the person you want to be with.'

No, you don't.'

I'm telling you now May, I do. I know you're hunting right now but I am with Claire now. Be angry at me all you want but don't take it out on her

Josie runs up to me with a small towel

'Are you okay?

"Yeah, I'm fine Josie. I'll be outside drying off I want to see what Moss is up to. I look around and can see him jogging in the distance towards the trees There is someone there waiting for him, I can just make out the silhouette of the person. As I'm about to jog closer I can hear Nina in distress in the backyard