

## Chapter 7

Latency meant I couldn't shift; I had a wolf trapped inside of me that wouldn't come out no matter how much I tried. My kind shifted at eighteen, with Alpha wolves shifting earlier – at seventeen. I would be twenty in a few weeks which meant for two years, I bore the stigma of being a traitor's daughter and that of a latent wolf. I couldn't shift until that night.

Pain bloomed on every inch of my skin. Tiny pinpricks, sharp stabs. I felt them all at once as my body changed. The worst of them happened in my head, my skull. As if an external force pressed my skull together, I felt my head squeeze, my brain seemed to be crushed. It passed with excruciating slowness, my ears drums and eyes, nose, everything, changing all at once. If someone took a broken shard of glass and ran it into my eyeballs, they may not hurt as much as they did then.

I hit the ground face-first as I fell, my half-open mouth taking in sand and leaves. I hunched over but when the second wave came, it hit harder than the first, devastating me from head to toe and reawakening the ringing in my eardrums. Something cold trickled out of my ears, my eyes, and my mouth. It would be tears, sweat or snot. It could be blood.

When I couldn't feel anything but the stabbing in my stomach, the banging in my head and the fire on my skin, I let the pain take over me. It washed over me like a tide and then caught in one or two places, unable to record fully. My heart calmed after the panic of impending doom but my bones continued to ache.

I scrambled to stand, falling at least five times before I took a wobbly step forward, only to fall on my stomach again. Although I couldn't

remember what it felt like walking for the first time as a child, I knew it wasn't much different from this. Albeit no one supported me or caught me when I fell. No one taught me to put one step ahead of the other making me stumble much more. I had no guidance, no one to celebrate a shift I prayed for two years, no one to ask the color of my wolf or how it felt to shift. If I howled, no one would answer. If I cried, no one would care.

'You're choosing self-pity on our first shift? Seriously?' Artemis didn't sound the least impressed at my silent lament. 'This is the happiest day of your life, second only to when we find our mate!' She snapped at me while moving at a slow pace to avoid taking in a mouthful of dirt for the nth time.

"We already found our mate, remember?" I found my mate on my eighteenth birthday as most wolves do but unlike most wolves, I didn't shift and my mate rejected me.

'Lucien was never worthy of us. We will find someone else.'

If mates were so easy to find, people would not be scrounging the earth to find theirs. Many people died without the privilege of meeting their second half so what chances did I have of finding a second chance mate in one lifetime?

I spent the rest of the night exploring as a wolf, picking up scents that had gone unnoticed to my human nose and appreciating the beauty of the moon that washed over me and acted as a light to my path as I moved about the small woods close to the pack house.

By the time I'd explored the ground to my wolf's content, by the time I'd successfully hunted a rabbit and made a mess, my wolf was ready to retire for the night. First shifts, I'd heard, were always the most difficult and it left the body weak for hours afterwards. Exhaustion already made my eyes droopy and my body felt like a large sack of rocks that my tired legs couldn't hold up.

I shifted back to my human form without being conscious, my body unable to hold my other form for much longer. Shifting back was another exercise in extreme torture where my body turned from wolf to human, snapping bones and sending shards of sharp stabs into all my organs, kicking me in the head and stealing the breath from my lungs as I gasped and gasped ten times more.

At the end of my shift, I battled the problem of being naked. I wiped a tear from my eyes as I stared at the shreds of one of the few clothes I had, a simple blue dress that Celeste got me last year. My bra and panties too had shredded up, my slippers missing some parts. Without the fur of a wolf, I grew cold quickly, standing stark n\*ked in the woods on a cool night.

With a hand covering my breasts and the other covering my nether region, I dashed out of the woods at lightning speed, hoping and praying not to run into anyone. I hadn't completed my prayer when I smacked into someone – the last person I wanted to see in a state of undress.

“Hey, watch –“ The words died in Lucien's throat as he put his hand on my shoulder, trying to scold me for running into him. I wrenched out of his hold with all my might, flying into the pack house and racing to my room in the basement, my skin hot all over and my eyes stinging.

He saw me n\*ked!

I hurried into faded jeans and a big shirt as if putting on clothes at record speed would negate the effect of having intrusive eyes on me. I wished I could scrub the look in his eyes from my memory. I wish I could wash off the sense of exposure, of being bared – I wanted to scrub it all off but I couldn't so I settled for dressing in the blink of an eye and huddling beneath the covers of my bed.

Every bone, tissue and cell in me jammed, freezing when my new, heightened senses picked up his scent. Without meaning to, my body

began to shake as if I'd been submerged in snow and pulled out to be sprayed with ice water.

“Hey.” I felt his weight on my bed, sinking the already flat bed. I closed my eyes, wishing he wouldn't do this, wishing he would avoid me the way I wanted him to avoid me but he didn't. Instead, he placed a hand on my shoulder. I jerked away from it, still hiding underneath my covers. He'd seen me exposed. I didn't think I could face him anytime soon but he'd come seeking me out, knowing I would be embarrassed.

Where were his friends? When would the jeer start? Had he taken a picture? No, he couldn't have but the impossible became possible with Lucien.

“You shifted. Congrats.” I still didn't answer him. I couldn't even pretend to be asleep as my body vibrated violently against the bed. It was because of him. He couldn't pretend not to know that his presence made me uncomfortable but I guess he didn't care about that.

After a long silence with me wishing he would leave, he pulled off the cover from my head, exposing me.

“Are you still afraid of me?” He asked, his eyes on my chest. Even dressed, he still looked at me as if he could see my naked body. I looked at my shirt to be sure it didn't have a hole in it. “You grew up.” He swallowed. I frowned at the thickness of his words and the weird look in his eyes.

“Please leave.” I managed to push his hand off my shoulder as I spoke in a quiet voice.

Was I still afraid of him?

He humiliated me in front of the entire school, rejected me, cursed at me and bullied me. I didn't have the physical strength to fight him. I didn't have the mental strength to heal from the injuries he never apologized for. I was powerless against him, so yes, I was afraid. Especially now

with his eyes roaming my body, making me feel even more exposed than I did with my private parts open.

“I just want to talk.” I didn’t want to talk but it didn’t matter. “I made mistakes that I’m not proud of. But maybe we can have a fresh start?”

Stop looking at me like that!

I wanted to scream at him. It made me feel disgusting but I didn’t have it in me that night to say anything.

“I accepted your rejection,” I muttered to my legs as his hungry eyes still ravaged my body.

“We haven’t mated with anyone else. We can reverse it in a few minutes.” I shivered at his callous words.

Mates rarely ever rejected each other – I mean, they were sacred – but if you’re someone like Lucien, a powerful wolf, future Beta of a powerful pack and a drop-dead gorgeous man, refusing a traitorous latent omega mate made sense.

When mates rejected each other, they broke the sacred bond of the goddess but the goddess loved mate bonds so much that she made a loophole for rejection. The loophole was s3x.

If I did it with Lucien, the bond he broke by rejecting me would begin to form again. He could mark me during the act and I would be bound to him for life.

The Alpha’s Call saved me from the unwanted heat in his eyes. We’d both shifted now so we couldn’t avoid an Alpha’s Call.