

Game of Destiny - Chapter 1

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I walked over the grass, carrying a pile of wool blankets. We were setting up for tonight's full moon celebrations. I love these monthly gatherings of the pack. We eat, laugh, tell stories of the pack's history and of the gods`. Then those that can shift will run in the woods. The rest of us, we stay behind and pretend we aren't envious of the others. For eighteen years I have been part of the group who is left by the fire to watch the pups and make sure the fire stays in the firepit. It was getting old, I wanted my wolf to come to me, I wanted to prove I wasn't a dud.

"Hi, pumpkin." I turned toward the sound of my father and smiled. He had been out checking the woods together with the Alpha and Gamma in preparation for the night.

"Hi, dad," I called as I placed the blankets down on a log and then took some of them and placed on other logs we used to sit on around the fire. They were more for coziness than for warmth, all werewolves ran hot. Even those like me who didn't have a wolf. Yet, I added.

"Looking forward to tomorrow?" the Alpha Mark asked as he, Gamma Jonas and my father walked up to me.

"Kind of," I said.

"What do you mean, kind of, green bean?" Gamma Jonas asked. He, my father and the Alpha were best friends, had been all of their lives. No one had been surprised when Alpha Mark had named my father his Beta and Jonas his Gamma as he took over the running of the pack from his father. That had been years before me and my brother were born. We grew up with the Alpha and Gamma families as an extension of our own. My brother, Elder, was best friends with James, the Alpha's son. Everyone expected me to be best friends with Cindy, Gamma Jonas' daughter. But we didn't get along at all. We just remained on friendly terms because of our families.

"I think my pumpkin is nervous. Turning eighteen is a big step," dad said, placing his arm around me and pulling me to his side.

"That's right. She will be able to sense her mate and he will be able to identify her if they both are over eighteen," the Alpha said with a big smile.

"She's too young for that kind of thing," my dad scowled and both of his friends burst out laughing. My dad and Alpha Mark were partly right. I was nervous about being able to

sense my mate. But there was more. My wolf still hadn't come to me, I had never been able to shift and for each full moon that came and went I looked weaker in the eyes of other werewolves. You started to be able to shift between the age of sixteen and twenty-five. Everyone knew the younger you were when your wolf came, the stronger it, and therefore you, would be. James had shifted for the first time a month after turning sixteen, my brother seven months after his sixteenth birthday. Cindy had been a little over seventeen when she shifted. I was almost eighteen and I hadn't even felt a slight tingle during a full moon. I was afraid that if I found my mate, he would think I was too weak.

"You're not still worried about your wolf, are you, little one?" the Alpha asked. I nodded. We had had this conversation many times in the last two years. "Armeria Rose Winstone, two years is nothing. She will come to you," he said. I flinched as he used my full name. My mother has a thing for all things growing and has named her only two children after her favorite plants. My father didn't object because he loves her too much to not let her have her way.

"I know, Alpha," I said.

"You are perfect, just the way you are, pumpkin," my father said and kissed the top of my head.

"You have to say that, you're my father," I pointed out.

"And if some boy tells you anything else, you tell us and we will beat his ass."

"Thank you uncle Jonas," I said.

"Any time," he told me and ruffled my hair. I objected and tried to get away, but my father laughed and kept me in place. I hated when people messed with my hair. It was hard to keep under control with its red curls at the best of times, but mess with it and it just became one big poof of tangles and frizz.

"Okay, enough lazing around. Move your asses. I will see you later tonight, little one, and after midnight we will celebrate your big day," the Alpha told us.

"Fine, we're coming," my father sighed with pretend annoyance. Sometimes I think the three of them are stuck in a permanent teenager mode, and it scares me a little to think of them running the pack. But they are good at it. Our pack is one of the strongest and most highly thought of packs in the world. It's a pride to all of us. As my father and his two friends continued their inspection, I got back to my tasks for the evening. Usually I would help my mother as she and some other women prepared the food. But I had been put on other duties and I'm guessing, and hoping, it's because they are working on a surprise cake for my birthday. As I walked over to Sally, Jonas' mate, to get information about which games she has been planning for the pups, I tried to remember that I'm lucky. I have a good family, I have good friends and a good pack. So what if I don't have

a wolf? Three out of four isn't a bad thing, right? And if I found my mate and he loves me as mates do, then I will have four out of five. That would be fantastic. Unless he rejects you because you don't have a wolf, a small voice in my head kept saying. It's like the voice is a broken record, playing over and over again in my head.

Hours later, I was sitting in front of the fire, laughing along with the others as Nick, one of the oldest warriors in the pack, was telling the story about how he had defeated a swarm of vampires. The number of vampires went up for each full moon. But we all loved listening to him telling the story. Most of the pack members were running in their wolf form in the surrounding forest. I still hadn't felt the need to shift, so as usual I volunteered to watch the pups and keep an eye on the teenagers. It was just after midnight when the pack started to return. In groups or pairs they came walking out of the woods, they were all smiling and looked relaxed. I wondered why they were heading back so early when my mother and Luna Joy came walking with a birthday cake between them. I could feel my eyes grow big as I looked at the amazing creation that was put down in front of me. It was three tiers tall with white frosting and covered in sugar flowers, it looked like a flower meadow. On top two candles burned, a one and an eight.

"Happy birthday, sweetie," my mother said.

"Thank you, mom." My mother hugged me, and then Luna Joy drew me into a tight hug as well.

"I hope you will find your mate soon and that he is everything you hope for and deserve," Luna whispered to me.

"Thank you, Luna," I said.

"Time to blow out the candles and make a wish, pumpkin," my dad said as he joined us.

"Not yet. Elder isn't here yet," my mother pointed out.

"He is off with James and Cindy," Luna Joy said as she snuggled up to the Alpha.

"I can wait," I offered, which earned me a smile from the Alpha pair.

"Honestly, the whole pack is here and we are waiting on our son," my mother said and I could hear the impatience in her voice. I heard my brother and our friends before I saw them. My brother came half running out of the forest, closely followed by James while Cindy took her time.

"Sorry, sorry, I didn't realise how deep into the forest we had run. You didn't blow out the candles yet, did you?" Elder asked.

“No, she has been waiting,” our mother told him, giving him a look that told everyone she wasn’t happy.

“Sorry,” he said again. Me? I wasn’t paying any attention to what my brother was saying. My full attention was on the scent of sandalwood and pineapple. Even without my wolf, I knew it was the scent of my mate. I turned towards it as I saw James standing at the edge of the forest, looking back at me with just as much surprise as I felt. James, the Alpha’s son, was my mate?

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