

6. The First Shift

August 19th, 1994

*** Mateo's POV***

"So what do you think my power is going to be?" Emiliano asks for the millionth time today.

It's the twins' 13th birthdays tomorrow and they were both excited for their first shift and gift revelation. I chuckle at the little man following me to the training grounds and sigh.

"Patience, manito (slang for brother). You'll learn soon enough," I laugh, ruing up his hair. "Now go bother your sister or something. I have to train."

Ever since my little outburst with my father two months ago, I've been forced to endure a ruthless training regime all summer. I rarely have enough time to even think of rebelling, too exhausted from the grueling hours at the training grounds to put up a fight with me father.

Emiliano's eyes light up instantly. "Can I watch? Maybe you can teach me a few moves."

"You know the rules, Emi. You can't train until your wolf awakens. You have a couple of hours before that happens, so just enjoy your last few hours of freedom," I sigh. "Trust me, you're going to regret wanting to train."

He shakes his head in disagreement. "Nah uh! I want to train and be the best silver wolf warrior in the history of our clan," he smiles at the thought. "I want to be like Dad or you."

I scoff, furrowing my thick brows. "I'm not the best. There are plenty of other wolves with better skills"

"Nope," He protests, giving me a smile of admiration. "You are the best warrior. Dad told me so."

I raise an eyebrow in disbelief and feel my cheeks heat up a little. "He said that?"

I found this hard to believe. My father only ever spoke to me about my short comings. I was never good enough in his eyes.

"Of course he did!" Emiliano's exasperates, throwing his arms in the air as if it were the most obvious thing. "He tells everyone you're the best. But not for long," he smirks. "I'm going to be so good at fighting and I'll have the coolest power too, you won't be able to beat me in a match."

I stare at him in amusement. "Keep dreaming little man."

--- The sunsets before I make it back for dinner and every muscle in my body aches with fury. I was exhausted. The second I step into the house, I'm assaulted by the anxious twins.

"Will it hurt? How long before our powers come in? What's it like being a wolf? Can you hear it's thoughts? What do you think my wolf's name will be?" They ask simultaneously as I settle down at the dinner table.

"Ya chamacos!" My mom chuckles. "Leave your brother alone. He's had a long day," she adds, cutting into her steak.

"What if I can control minds like you, Mami?" Emiliano trembles with excitement.

Mom frowns at him. "I do not control minds. I control pheromones," she corrects him. "I merely... 'suggest' minds."

Our mother was also a silver wolf, although not an Altamirano wolf. Her clan, the Orozco clan, had some powerful wolves amongst its ranks and she was considered the strongest. She has the ability to secrete pheromones to alter someone's behavior. So no, she does not control minds

"Same difference," Emiliano shrugs.

Mom rolls her eyes but I see the hint of a smile on her lips.

"Don't worry, mijo. You're an Altamirano. I know Moon Goddess has something special in store for the both of you," Dad beams proudly.

Now it's my turn to roll my eyes. I feel someone kick me under the table and I look up to see Mom staring at me, warning me not to ruin dinner with an argument. I sigh and focus on my dinner, remaining quiet as the twins muse over their shift.

Several Altamirano family members arrive to witness the joyous occasion including the former alpha of our clan and my father's father, abuelito Lucas. Dad's younger sisters, Monserrat and Melissa, as well as their families also arrive. Our aunts and uncles power the twins with gifts and we spend the next several hours speculating the potential power Moon goddess will bestow upon them. Valentina enjoys being the center of attention and Emiliano is more than happy to let her stay in the spot light. He was shy when it came to being around our large family and sticks by my side like glue.

"It's almost time," I whisper to him as we sneak off to the kitchen for a snack. "You nervous?" I ask, handing him an ganzito (A sponge cake with a chocolate coating and jelly/cream filling).

Emiliano forces a smile on his face but I can see the worry hiding beneath the surface.

"Hey, little man. What's wrong? You were so excited about your shift an hour ago. What's with the long face?" I ask bending down to reach his eye level and ruing up his hair.

"I-" He bites his lip, debating whether or not to share his feelings.

I rue up his hair again and give him a sympathetic look. "Come on chamaco. What's on you mind?"

He gives me a small shrug. "What if I don't get a good gift? What if I'm not good enough to be an Altamirano-"

"Stop that," I snap.

He inches at the sharpness of my words and I take a deep breath to calm myself. Sometimes, I really hated the pressure our dad put on us to be the best. I run my fingers through my hair before softening my face and looking at him.

"You are enough," I tap a finger over his chest. "No matter what your gift is, Emi, I'm proud of you. There's not a doubt in my mind that you will be the greatest warrior the Altamirano clan has ever seen."

"You really think so?" he asks, his eyes twinkling with hope.

"I know so."

He wraps his arms around me, burying his face in my stomach.

"Thanks," he murmurs.

As midnight approaches, we all make our way into the jungle, finding a suitable clearing for the twins to shift. We come prepared with cloaks, spare clothes, and snacks to replenish our energy for when we do the clan run. Tomorrow, the twins would become social members of the clan and join the mind-link.

With only a couple minutes before midnight, Emiliano and Valentina are asked to stand in the center of the clearing wearing only their cloaks.

From where I stand, I can tell they're both nervous and I wish them both a reassuring smile.

"You can do this," I mouth to them and they nod back anxiously.

Valentina is the first to scream as the pain of the first shift courses through her body. Emiliano squeezes her hand and whispers words of encouragement to her, helping her to relax. Tears spill onto her cheeks as her fingernails transform into claws and tufts of silver fur begin to sprout across her body.

Suddenly Emiliano doubles over in pain, signaling that his transformation has begun as well. When he turns to look at us, his eyes glow a bright turquoise blue.

Tears of joy roll down my mother's cheeks, leaving glistening trails in their wake. She too had turquoise eyes and it pleased her immensely to know their wolves resembled her own.

Several minutes pass by until the twins stand fully shifted in their wolf forms. Their fur gleams metallically in the moon light and while they were small in stature, like true Altamirano wolves, a powerful aura emanates off of them.

Since they are young wolves who will have little control of their powers until they train, we wait patiently near the edge of the clearing for them to reveal their gifts.

It is said that the gift of a silver wolf is a testament to their character. I am strong of mind and so Moon Goddess gifted me the ability to move objects with my mental power. My father, on the other hand, could be as calm as a peaceful summer's day but could quickly become a storm of fury. Therefore, he can literally conjure up a storm on a whim.

One might think my mother is a very manipulative woman given her gift, but in fact, she is quite the opposite. Mom is a very observant and peaceful woman. She was not one to act on impulse and she felt others shouldn't either. Hence, she could manipulate pheromones. As she likes to put it, she merely "suggests better behaviors."

Valentina's tail wags excitedly when she suddenly begins to glow with a turquoise hue. Out of thin air, a wolf identical to her own materializes beside her. Emiliano and the rest of us stare wide eyed at this new wolf and watch as it mimics Valentina's movements. They sniff each other before howling in excitement. Suddenly a second wolf appears, it too resembling Valentina. Within minutes, over 20 replicas of Valentina's wolf fill the clearing.

She barks and Emiliano's wolf licks her face in congratulations. The replicas merge into her until only she and Emiliano remain in the center once again. We all lean forward expectantly for Emiliano's turn but after a few minutes, nothing happens.

I stand at the balls of my feet, suddenly nervous for Emiliano. I can practically hear my heart pounding against my ear drums as the minutes drag on.

Emiliano begins to whimper, disappointed in himself for not having a gift when suddenly his fur begins to shimmer with hints of turquoise.

I let out a sigh of relief but grow anxious once more when again, nothing happens.

Emiliano's eyes icker with fear as he looks around frantically, searching for any sign of his gift. His tail hangs between his legs and his ears curve back to the side of his head. Ashamed, he sprints off into the jungle.

Valentina is the first to run after him and I quickly join in. I hear Mom and Dad run after us and we find him cowering in some bushes, tears welling up in his eyes.

"Emi," I coax him. "Come out of there."

His wolf shakes his head.

"Emiliano, salte ya! (Come out now!)," my father orders.

Emiliano whimpers but slowly crawls out of the bushes, tail between his legs. Our father is a stern man and I fear he might humiliate Emiliano even more for crying.

Dad, however, is full of surprises, and gently embraces his youngest son, stroking his silver fur like a doting father.

"You have nothing to fear, my son," Dad soothes. "Some powers don't manifest unless provoked. You just need to be patient."

Emiliano whines and Mom seems to understand his concern.

"It's okay, mijo," she says, kissing his forehead. "We're already so proud of you." She leans into his ears. "You have a beautiful wolf, you both do." She add turning to Valentina. "Two perfect little wolves, just as Moon Goddess designed you."

Valentina nips at Emiliano's ear and he readily runs after her. With the mood lightening up, Mom, Dad and I shift, joining the twins for a game of tag.

When my little sister attempts to pounce on me, I easily evade her attack and jump away in time before she lands on me. Unfortunately, she accidentally loses her footing, twisting her front paw and colliding on the ground. We hear a crack and she lets out a whine as she attempts to get up, limping on her injured paw.

Emiliano rushes to her side, his fur glowing once again. As if in a trance he stares at his twin and places a paw on her injury. The contact makes her wince in pain.

After a few seconds, however, she lets out a sigh of relief and gets up in her feet. Her eyes grow wide as she takes a step and doesn't limp.

Dad's wolf jumps up and down happily at the revelation of his gift and nuzzles his son, almost as if to say, 'See? I told ya!'

Unable to contain my own excitement, I howl into the night and pretty soon, the forest fills with the clan's song of glee.

Emiliano has the gift of healing, the rarest gift of all.