

Chapter 1 - His Hunt for Redemption

BRYNN

“What about this?” Maya asked.

My eyes slid over to the top that she was holding. It was a plum off-shoulder crop top. I knew exactly what it would pair with.

“Gimme,” I said excitedly.

She laughed at my excitement and handed it over so that I could change. Maya and I had been best friends since elementary school, so she knew me well enough to know my style.

There would be a big bonfire celebration in honor of the team that our pack was sending off to the Alpha Games. It was an annual week-long competition for packs from across the country to gather and battle it out to see who the strongest pack was. The Dark Moon pack had always done well. We placed third last year, so the pack was excited to see if everyone’s hard work would place us again.

Our pack was a larger pack in Virginia with roughly a thousand members. I was very proud of Dark Moon and loved living here. My grandparents joined the pack when they were newly mated back in the day.

I stepped in front of the mirror and really liked how well the top paired with the black high waisted skinny jeans which had a few rips along the front of the thighs. They hugged my frame perfectly. I was 5’8 and had a solid C-cup, trimmed waist, and muscles from being trained by my father. He was a renowned warrior, so he ensured that I could protect myself and hold my own if I ever needed it.

I was a pup when my mother was murdered. My father always worried about me potentially being in a similar position. I was all he had left in our family, so I took it as seriously as possible because I knew he was terrified of losing me.

I set to work on the rest of my look. In the end, my auburn hair fell in cascading waves to the middle of my back. My makeup was simple with black eyeliner, a smokey eye, and light pink gloss.

Maya wore a black bodycon dress which fit her like a glove. Her black asymmetrical bob had her signature silver highlights. It was natural to her even though everyone thought she did it for a fashion statement.

“You look hot,” I told her.

“Ditto,” she said, smirking.

I peeked my head out the back door and smiled when I saw my father manning the grill. It was Thursday night which was his guy night. It was a tradition that he took very seriously. He and two of his best friends got together every week. It helped him quite a bit once my mother died. It was still hard for him from time to time, but the length of time between those occurrences grew further apart as the years went on. This year would mark the seventh year.

My parents had been childhood sweethearts. They fell in love with each other before the mate-bond ever snapped into place. They had agreed that if the other's mate ever showed up that they would end their relationship because the mate-bond was a sacred connection chosen and blessed by the Moon Goddess. Luckily, that was never an issue for them.

"Have fun with Clint and Tony," I called out.

"Will do. You girls have fun at the bonfire. Is Sebastian going with you two?" he asked me.

Sebastian was my other best friend and one of the coolest guys I knew. We had been joined at the hip since our diaper days.

"Mhm. We're meeting him on the way. Love you, Dad," I said, walking over and pecking his cheek.

"Love you too, sweetheart."

Sebastian was already waiting on his porch as we approached his house. He lived just down the street from me and a few streets over from the packhouse.

"Who do we have here?" he asked with a lazy grin as he leaned against the railing.

"Surely you recognize your partners in mayhem and mischief," I said with a scoff.

He waggled his eyebrows at us before walking down the steps. He looked very handsome in his dark jeans, white tee, and leather jacket. Sebastian was a pack heartthrob but extremely selective with the females he spent time with. He hated pettiness and bitchiness, refusing to deal with fake she-wolves.

He walked in between us and threw an arm around both of our shoulders.

"What's on tomorrow's agenda, B?" he asked me.

Tomorrow was the big day. I would finally turn eighteen. A shifter's eighteenth birthday was a big cause for celebration. First, it was the marking of adulthood just like it was for humans. Second, it was the turning point when we could begin to sense our mates. Not everyone found their mate in life whether it was because of distance or death. Sometimes there was even an age gap between the two. Many factors played into two souls meeting each other.

“Same as always. I’m going to meet you all at Bessie’s Diner for the famous b-day breakfast she always makes me. Then we’ll hang out while Dad puts together the surprise party that he throws every year. It’ll end by the Main Event,” I said, grinning widely.

He groaned and kicked a rock. The Main Event was a birthday right of passage for me every year. It was Sebastian’s turn to fight me this year. This had been our tradition for every birthday since I was fourteen. We waited until I got my wolf, Moira, since she would help heal me.

“You asked for it when you called me dainty,” I reminded him.

“I was nine. You were really fucking dainty at the time. Who knew you would hit a growth spurt that matched your ability to hold a grudge?” he asked.

I just shrugged because he should have thought about that before he called me dainty. I did hold a grudge like no other. I had no issue giving forgiveness to those who deserved it, but those who did not then could reap what they sowed.

“Are you afraid to face me?” I asked with a pout.

“Hmm. Let me think about that. You were trained by the great Mike Fullilove, warrior wolf extraordinaire. I’ve seen your private training sessions, B. You could probably go toe-to-toe with Alpha and hold your own. Speaking of. Why haven’t you ever competed in the Alpha Games?” he asked me seriously.

I shoved my thumbs through my belt loops as I thought about the best way to answer that. I sighed and looked up at my him. He had about five inches on me since I was wearing flats.

“It’s the same reason why I don’t train with the pack. Dad got the approval from Alpha’s father after I first shifted because of the bullying that went on,” I told him.

Moira was a larger wolf than some of the other wolves, and I got tormented because of it on a run one day when other pack members saw her.

“Bullying is a light term for what went on. The proper terms would be ganged up on, beaten, and degraded. Call it what it was. Neither you nor she deserved that,” he said sternly and kissed the top of my head.

I bit my lip to give me something to focus on other than the memories of the three assholes. Apparently, she-wolves could not be larger their forms because they were insecure jackasses who could not handle their own insecurity.

“That’s why. I have enough to deal with, and don’t need to pile more drama on top of it all,” I said, shrugging.

Maya kissed my cheek before speeding off to greet her boyfriend. Sebastian and I laughed as she launched herself at him. Poor Trevor. He was in for a world of chaos if he turned out to be her

mate. Although, they would be great for each other. They spent the past year dating and got along better than any other guy Maya had ever been with. He mellowed her out too which was damn near impossible.

This was a big deal tonight, so a good majority of the pack turned out. The team was leaving early tomorrow for the Alpha Games. It was about a four-hour drive, so it was not too bad.

There was a bar set up so that people could get alcoholic drinks if they wanted to. We made a beeline for there and waited our turn. It was very difficult to get a shifter drunk, but I still did not drink often.

“Sorry, Brynn. You’re not eighteen yet,” Dustin teased me.

Dustin was a warrior who was a few years older than me. He was close to my father since my father mentored him. Dustin had a shit upbringing, so my father took on a more parental role and encouraged his success.

“C’mon. That’s mere hours away. What’s it going to take?” I asked him, leaning against the counter with my best negotiator face on.

“Tell me who’s up against you in the Main Event since I won’t be there this year,” he bargained.

A sinister smirk tipped my lips upwards as I threw my arm around my best friend. I heard him groan again which just filled me up with pre-victory butterflies.

“Seb’s the Main Event victim,” I said proudly.

All of the warriors around us knew what the Main Event was. My father always bragged to his men and women about the fact that I was undefeated. Nobody went easy on me because they knew I would kick their asses harder if they did. My father trained me relentlessly, and I had asked him to find my limits and push beyond them. I wanted to be as strong of a fighter as I could be.

The warriors’ laughter had Sebastian growling at the lot of them even though everyone could tell he did not mean it.

Dustin made my drink the way I liked it. Vodka Cranberry with light ice and a cherry. He slid it over to me with a wink.

“Make sure your father sends it to me. I’ll be visiting my sister for a few days, and she loved the video of the bloodied mess that was last year’s victim,” Dustin said, shooting my friend a wink.

“Don’t count me out just yet. I have a few tricks up my sleeve,” Sebastian said as he grabbed the beer from Dustin.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned around and saw Jerry. The sheer look of amusement on Jerry's face had me laughing. Jerry was last year's victim. He was much bigger and a stronger fighter than Sebastian was. Sebastian was good, but Jerry was a seasoned fighter.

"I thought the same exact thing," he said as he patted Sebastian's back.

Alpha Theo called for everyone's attention, so we made our way over towards the bonfire that would be lit after his words.

Alpha Theo was a few years older than me. He was twenty-three, but he had only been in the grade above me in school since I was advanced and tested out of grades. I already held a two-year degree in Psychology because I wanted to help trauma victims learn to heal. It was something that felt strongly about given my past. I gave my all to anything I did in life.

I always had the biggest crush on Alpha Theo – well, crush was a light term – but he never noticed me. He was an amazing man, person, and leader for this pack. He officially took over as Alpha two years ago, but he was amazing even before that.

Not to mention, my Alpha was a fine specimen. I had honestly never seen a man more attractive than him. He radiated dominance with his broad shoulders, defined muscles that looked like they were carved from stone, and the sexiest emerald eyes.

"Tonight, we celebrate all the hard work that our team has put into preparing for the XXII Alpha Games. I'm proud of each and every individual who has trained harder than I'd ever seen before. Dark Moon will be represented once again by a phenomenal team. Enjoy the night!" he called out.

Beta Jackson passed over the torch to him, and we cheered as the bonfire was lit. Music was blasted from the speakers, and the party officially began.

Sebastian guided me over towards the side where Maya was making out with Trevor. I cleared my throat, but she still paid me no mind.

"Want some of my alcohol, Maya?" I asked sweetly.

Maya was a few months younger than I was, so it was safe to say that she did not even try her luck.

Those had been the magic words apparently because she batted her eyelashes at me, so I handed it over.

"How did you get this?" she asked, taking another sip before handing it back.

"Dustin wanted to know who the Main Event was since he isn't going to be here. Not to mention that I'm only like a few hours shy of eighteen anyways."

Trevor asked what the Main Event was, so Maya explained it in detail to him. It was a one-on-one human-form match. No shifting, partial shifting, or weapons were allowed. It continued until someone either submitted or lost consciousness.

Then she pulled out her phone and showed him the winning picture of last year's match where I was standing over Jerry's bloodied body after he tapped out. The match lasted twenty minutes. I was bleeding too, had bruises all over, and a cracked rib. However, I was still happy as hell with the turnout.

"Seb's my opponent this year. You should totally come and celebrate my victory. Dad's grilling his famous steaks and ribs," I tempted him.

The near-drooling look he gave me was answer enough. Nobody could say no to his cooking. Not even Satan himself could.

"I'll be there. I'll even bring you a victory gift," he said slyly.

"Everyone's just underestimating me," Sebastian huffed. "C'mon champ, let's go dance before you break my ability to walk."

I finished off my drink and handed Maya my glass before following him to the dance floor. The bass was thumping, and the beat was perfect to get caught up in.

My arms were wrapped around his neck while his arms were wrapped around my waist. Sebastian and I were best friends and never had anything romantic whatsoever. He was a masculine version of Maya. If we ended up being mated together tomorrow then it would be really strange. There was just a part of me that knew he was not my mate.

Sebastian would make the best mate for someone. He was fiercely loyal and gave his all to those who mattered. A friend could call him up in the middle of the night, asking for help, and he would not even have to think twice about dropping everything.

We spent the night celebrating, laughing, and having a blast with everyone. Maya and Trevor ended up bailing, but I could not blame them.

I spent a while looking up at the moon that night once I went home, worrying about this coming year. There was no rhyme or reason, but I just had this sense of foreboding.

'Happy birthday, B. Have sweet dreams, and we'll see you in the morning,' Sebastian linked once the clock struck midnight.

'Thanks, Seb. Sweet dreams to you too.'

Shana Allen

Here is the first step of this story.

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