

## Chapter 3

The passenger door opens and two men hop out. They are dressed well: clean, crisp clothes, not a hair out of place, looking picture-ready. Neither looks like what I would expect so-called royalty to look like, though. Mrs. Daley rushes out in a flurry, whizzing past us before stopping.

She looks over at the two men as they approach the small brick fence surrounding the place. "You must be..." she stops trying to figure out who they are. "I thought the Lycan King was coming today?" she asks, looking slightly upset. Abbie nods toward them, and I shrug, looking them over.

"The King couldn't make it, so he sent us instead," says the man who eased out of the driver's seat. He is tall, dressed in a suit. His light brown hair shapes his high cheekbones and sharp solid features and he is built solid, making me wonder if he is Lycan as well. Though, I have heard that only Lycans work for the King and are allowed to live in his kingdom.

Lycans differ from werewolves in some pretty significant ways. For one, they remain upright when they shift and are faster and more powerful. They are pureblood; descended from the Moon Goddess herself. They can also turn a werewolf into a Lycan. Werewolves, on the other hand, are like dogs compared to them. We are smaller, less

powerful, and cannot change people into werewolves. This is why the Lycans have ruled over us for centuries. In fact, werewolves like myself are considered half human.

Lycans are also immortal, which is ironic because there aren't many left. As I look the two Lycans up and down, the wind shifts and I get a whiff of something strong and masculine. My insides warm as I take in a deeper breath, wanting to savor the scent. My mouth waters, and I shake my head, wondering what came over me as my senses try to hone in and focus on it, searching for the source of that wonderful smell. I look back at the men, and my eyes land on the one who had left the passenger seat. He is staring back at me, his expression indecipherable. He appears to be curious for a second, but I shake the thought away when he turns his gaze away quickly. I know I imagined it.

There is, however, something off about him. He seems stronger, in a sense, to the other men. This man commands attention, seemingly without trying. His suit does nothing to hide the bulk of muscle pressed tightly beneath it. My eyes roam over his high cheekbones, firm jaw, five o'clock shadow, and dark, almost black hair. His silver eyes glow back at me when he cocks his head to the side, watching me yet again. Abbie grabs my arm, tugging my attention away from him, and I realize my mouth is hanging open as I openly gawk at him.

"We should go," Abbie whispers, pulling me out of what feels like a trance. I nod to her when another car pulls up, both men looking at it. We walk out the small gate until the man with silver sparkling eyes grips my arm, tugging me to his side. I jump in fright as a whimper leaves my lips.. His hand is warm against my arm, making my skin tingle under his touch while my breath hitches in my throat.

"Rogue?" he says. His voice is smooth as velvet, making me shiver with its depth. He looks at Mrs. Daley and his brows furrow, creating a line between them. He lets my arm go, then looks at Abbie, and we both duck our heads in submission. I hear him growl and I realize the intoxicating scent I smelled earlier is emitting from him.

"Yes, sir. They are just on their way. Run along, girls," Mrs. Daley says, a hidden venom in her voice. We nod quickly and shuffle out of there swiftly. I hear him ask where we are going, but we rush off up the street, getting away as quickly as possible before Mrs. Daley can find another reason to hurt us.

We eventually slow down once they're out of sight. We've found our way into town. This side of the town is run-down, almost desolate. Most of these houses had been destroyed by a storm that blew through the town a few months ago, leaving them abandoned or in ruins.

I hug myself as much as possible without pulling on my torn back too much, running my hands up and down my arms, trying to warm them from the chill in the air. We pause when we come to the cross-section. One way leads to the town, the other leads away. This is the only way in and out of this town, as it only has one road leading in and is on a mountain. The forest surrounding it is vast and dense.

Both Abbie and I look to the forest longingly. If only we could escape. If only we could actually make it. Abbie's mind, I can tell, is also calculating our chances before she sighs. We would no doubt be dead within seconds of stepping into the forest. Border patrol would catch us

instantly, and they would make an example of us. Or else we'd starve or get attacked by the other creatures in the woods. We are already doomed. There is no point in making our deaths more painful by attempting to run. The best thing we can do is simply accept our fate.

"Come on," Abbie says, grabbing my hand. We walk toward the town square. As we approach, we can hear people in the town getting ready for the Alpha's arrival. He rarely comes to town; he has no need to, with servants at his beck and call. However, his presence is required today.

It is the Alpha who gets to decide our fates. Those wishing to join the pack or who are caught are herded to the square once a month and put on display. The Alpha decides whether they let you join, cast you out, or kill you. Abbie and I are hoping to be cast out. We know even the cast-outs are probably dead before they get out of the forest, but we stand a chance as a cast out. We could at least try to run.

The hustle and bustle echoes loudly as we enter the square while pack members go about their day like we aren't about to be slaughtered by their Alpha. Technically, I shouldn't even be put up yet, but because Abbie is already eighteen and has shifted into a wolf already, and I am only two months out from my eighteenth birthday, the Alpha decided to deal with me today since I would be the last rogue orphan living in the orphanage. Most of the orphans are pack members' children that had been lost in pack wars.

Yet despite everything, I feel grateful that I can stand up on the podium with my best friend and have someone to die with; it seems less lonely. I can accept my fate as long as she is beside me.

People step away from us as we enter, giving us disgusted looks as if they believe we are diseased or contagious and they can suddenly catch the disease of being a rogue.

Rogues have a particular scent to pack wolves, alerting them to intruders, and that's how those here in the town square look at us, with judging, unwelcoming gazes. Abbie squeezes my fingers tighter. People are watching as we make our way to the stage and take our seats next to it. Townspeople stare at us and spit at our feet, yet they think we are filthy animals? Glancing around, I notice the butcher in the distance watching Abbie.

I peek at her, hoping she hasn't spotted him. She has. I grip her knee when he licks his filthy lips and blows a kiss to her while grabbing his crotch. Abbie drops her gaze instantly, seeming to shrink next to me while she fiddles with her fingers and keeps her eyes downcast. I have despised no one more than I do that disgusting man after what he did to her. While waiting anxiously for the Alpha, I notice the square filling with pack members wanting to watch our hearing, or should I say slaughter; it's not like we would be given an opportunity to plead for mercy.

Unlike the way we just came, this part of town is lovely; it has fruit stalls, homemade crafts and goods, and stores lining the sides, making it into the town square. The dead center of the town is where most of the people congregate. It is always bustling with shoppers and people just wanting to hang out and talk. It's also where all social gatherings are held. Not that Abbie and I could attend those; they are strictly reserved for pack members only.

Silence falls over the crowd, and they take their seats, which proves the Alpha is near to arriving. Usually, the town square is an open space, but someone has assembled rows of chairs for onlookers. Some are still standing around when I hear car doors in the distance. Alpha Brock walks down the aisle between the chairs wearing only a tank top revealing his tattooed arms, and a pair of shorts.

Alpha Brock looks to be in his thirties and only took over from his father a few years ago. He has a reputation for being cruel. Since he has taken over, no rogue has been let go, so we know we are doomed with him as our judge. No doubt he'd also be our executioner. We are seen as less, not worthy of breathing the same air as pack members, let alone actually becoming one. We are considered outsiders and apparently, that is a good enough reason to hate all rogues. It is instantly assumed that without a pack, us rogues are unsafe or are defiant against pack ranking.

I swallow as he approaches. He sneers at us before walking up the steps and addressing the crowd. Alpha Brock isn't bad looking, but his cruelty makes him deeply unappealing. He's also arrogant. He once slapped me for accidentally stepping in his path the last time I saw him. That was the day Mrs. Daley sent me into the town square for supplies. It was humiliating. I was sent to get milk with Abbie. We were carrying the crate of milk and turned, bumping into him. An innocent mistake; one that left me red-faced once his large handprint was etched into it. I had dropped the box, but before I could even apologize, his hand had connected with my cheek.

I shake the memory away, reminding myself why I avoid the town square unless forced to come here. That was the second time I met him in the eight years I have lived here. Today will be the third and hopefully last.

The Alpha calls us up to the stage, and the butcher snickers as he takes a front-row seat. I grit my teeth and reach over to clutch Abbie's hand, who is focusing on the small cafe that has blue and white little umbrellas out the front, doing her best to avoid his eye contact. I pull her with me, and we walk up to the stage.

"Ah, choices. Now, what should I do with these filthy rogues?" The Alpha laughs; he knows exactly what he is going to do with us. He is just taunting us and dragging out the inevitable.

I clutch Abbie's fingers when the Alpha grabs my arm, but I refuse to let her go as he motions to the butcher. He climbs the stairs, and my lip quivers as I watch Abbie tense as he pauses behind her. She yelps when he grabs her, his hands wrapping around her middle as he jerks her back against him, one hand squeezing her breast.

"Brock, let me keep this one," the butcher whines. Her entire body tenses as he yanks a hessian bag over her head.

"What do you want her for?" the Alpha demands.

"She has a tight ass," he says, running his hands down her arms and gripping her hips, making her whimper.

The Alpha huffs. “No, I want them gone. Besides, you can have any of the girls at the brothel. Why would you want filthy rogue pussy?” the Alpha tells him, and I let out a breath of relief. Death would be preferable to whatever sadistic torture the butcher has in store.

The butcher makes a strange noise behind her before he bumps his crotch against her ass. “Feel that? All you, baby. Goddess, you make me hard,” he purrs before shoving her away.

The Alpha gives his usual speech about what a great Alpha he is and how the pack will thrive without a rogue presence here to tarnish this great little town before he hands down his sentence.