

## 11 - Takeaway Coffee

(Willa)

"Hello my beautiful boy," I squatted down and opened my arms as Emmett rushed me after work. I hated that I felt like I had to mask my emotions around him or my parents. Today and yesterday shook me and I knew why, but I didn't want to admit it.

I looked around, this place was starting to feel like a home but I was worried that it wouldn't feel like this when my parents left. I was terried honestly.

Even though I had found an amazing deal with Cali and Emmett seemed to really like her daughter, I had never done it on my own. It was never just Emmett and I and I was frightened that I wouldn't be enough or I couldn't do it all.

"Everything okay, baby?" My mom asked as I rounded the corner to our kitchen, my kitchen I guess.

"Yeah," I nodded, knowing she didn't buy it.

"Hungry? I set you aside a plate," I shook my head.

"I ate at work, thanks. I'll nish cleaning up," I looked at the already immaculate kitchen.

"No need," My mom smiled at me, "Let me get Emmett in a bath," She gave me a sad smile and I wasn't sure if it was because of my half-ass lie or the fact that this was one of the last bath times for a while with Emmett.

I took my time dressing the next morning instead of throwing on whatever black item I just recently found in my boxes. I didn't know why but I wanted to look nice. Okay, that was a lie, I small part of me I tried to suppress wanted to look good for him.

I re-did my ponytail twice before sighing at my reaction. It was s.tupid anyways, he left after I told him I had was a single mom, I doubt I would see him again. So much for our budding friendship, I thought dryly.

Still, my logical thoughts couldn't overrule my body from buzzing all morning.

"You seem on edge," I jumped when Cali leaned on the counter next to me.

"I'm not-"

"You literally jumped," She gave me a half smile raising an eyebrow, "Everything okay?"

I nodded, "Yeah, yes, of course," I wish I could tell her but this was one thing that I couldn't explain to a human.

"Is it about the brooding prince charming?" She raised an eyebrow.

"No," I said too loud and fast, "No," I repeated quieter this time, "I doubt I'll see him again anyway."

"Wanna bet? How about I put a hundred on it?" She tilted her head as his scent hit me. I scowled at her but it s.tupidly turned into a smile before I turned around and faced him.

He had two white takeaway cups of coffee and handed me one before I could say anything.

"Thanks?" I looked at the cup as he took his usual seat. No, what was I saying he didn't have a usual seat, "You know we have coffee here."

"You said it was c.rap yourself."

Cali snorted next to me, I already forgot she was there, "Next time bring some for the best friend too,"

"Best friend? When did that happen?" I scoffed smiling her.

She shrugged, "I don't see you spending all day with anyone else and I had a vacancy, so congratulations. Also, am a s.lut for good coffee, I don't care what title I have to steal for it."

I rolled my eyes as she turned on her heel ashing me a knowing smile.

"Thanks," I turned back to him, "Want coffee?"

"Um," He held up the cup. Right the coffee he brought and that faint smile tugged on his face for a brief second.

"You know you're allowed to smile," His eyes seemed to bore into me, "I won't tell anyone,"

(Caspian)

She seemed so unaffected by me. Well, I knew she was to some extent.

Her face turned a slight shade of pink sometimes when she spoke to me and she would shift from one foot and the other when she seemed like she wanted to look away.

But she had no problem speaking to me as if I were her equal, and I was.

Actually no, she was a f.ucking goddess and I wasn't worthy of being around her.

I just didn't expect it. Besides my parents and Beta and Gamma, I had a very formal relationship with everyone even if I didn't want that.

I used to try harder to put people at ease around me, but it was exhausting and everyone ended up still treating me as someone above them or a threat. No matter how hard I tried people still saw me as someone who could actually be connected to.

The whole Alpha and Prince title and my royal aura did nothing to help.

I ended up leaning into people's expectations of me and eventually it became me, or at least a second nature that felt more like me than who I used to be. I barely remembered who I was under the person I showed to the world.

"Try it," She went on, her eyes seemed to brighten. She was studying my lips in a way that did something to me. I knew she wanted me to try to smile so I would.

I opened my mouth and she clamped down on a laugh.

"No. That is just showing teeth," She shook her head and that brought a real smile to my face. For the rst time in ages, I felt something loosen up inside me. My carefully put-on facade seemed to ease away if only for a brief second.

She stared at me, it didn't seem like she was breathing, and that slight pink ushed her cheeks as she swallowed.

"Did I do it wrong?" I asked.

"No, that was, that was really good," She seemed to regain her composure, "Is there anything I can get you?"

"I'm good with my coffee," I nodded gesturing for her to do her thing as a couple sat down near me glancing my way nervously. I knew she didn't need my permission, and I doubt she would have ever asked for it anyway.

I pretended that I didn't notice her glancing my way every so often.

(Willa)

I nally got to really look at him, past my initial, well, running, and then my brief interaction the day after.

Under his perfectly manicured beard, he hid a jawline that could just -

"That guy's jaw could cut glass," Cali whispered to me. I looked at her.

"I was literally just thinking that," I whispered back, "Even though I don't know what that means."

I appreciated that she didn't bring him up to me, didn't ask really even though it was written all over her face that she wanted to.

I had no idea what to say to her if she had asked anyways. That we were friends? That word felt so one-dimensional, it didn't encompass everything that we were to each other.

He didn't seem to soften, or he rarely did. His face was always impassive, stoic, and I had never seen someone so unaffected by, well, anything.

When he let that mask slip for a second, well, it did things to me. For those few seconds when he forgot himself or whatever happened, there was a warmth that pooled from him. It only slipped out for a second before I sensed shock from him, and he picked back up that mask.

He was a mystery, something that I wanted to keep unraveling. I wanted to gure everything about him out. He intrigued me, and the more interested the more confused I was.

He kept confusing me day after day when he showed up. Always after the morning rush, but never at the exact same time. My heart knew the schedule better than I did, I felt like it was in overtime a few minutes before he came in.

"Willa," He gave me a smile and slid a coffee cup toward me.

"You've been practicing," I grabbed the cup appreciatively and it earned me a real smile from him, "Do you always come here? Or did you?" I nally asked the question that was at the back of my mind.

I was curious why he was here and Cali didn't seem to recognize him. It didn't seem like the type of place someone like him would frequent. I imagined him being more at home in some nice sushi restaurant where everything was white, modern, and gluten-free.

He shrugged, sliding into the chair across from me. Even when I wasn't serving the counter it was an unspoken rule among us all that I would take care of him.

"My oce is close," I waited for him to go on but he didn't.

I shrugged, going back to my section and cleaning a table, and taking an order before I came back to him.

"What pack are you from?" I asked. I feel like we've talked a bit, but we hadn't asked any questions really. I gured it was time to circle back to the small talk we completely skipped.

He paused for a moment, his eyes narrowing, "Crescent Moon."

Oh d.amn.

They were the biggest pack around, Blue Ridge and the others were basically under their jurisdiction. Even though every pack was its own entity, Crescent Moon spoke for this area with the werewolf elders and what was left of the royals.

"Willa?" His ice-blue eyes seemed to soften as he said my name.

"That is one fancy pack," I managed to get out.

"It is," His lips pressed into a line, "A bit different than what I'm sure you're used to as well, but it's all I've ever known."

"What do you do for work then?" He was always dressed nice, in a suit, I'm assuming he didn't do it for comfort.

Again, he paused, studying me.

"I work in real estate development for one of the pack companies, under the Dracos Group." He took a long sip of his coffee.

"Ma'am," Someone waved me down and I excused myself.

This guy was way out of my league. I already knew he was polished and commanded respect but the pack he was from and the job that he had. I knew he must be someone important.

Mate bond or not, what would he want with a single mom, without a pack, who technically hasn't even started her college courses?

I tried to push that thought away, but it lingered in the back of my mind and pricked at my chest. This, whatever this was, would probably be over before it began.

I had to remind myself that I was the one that wasn't sure about a mate, even though that uncertainty seemed to slip away each time he looked at me.

D.amn mate bond.

It was just, the more I got to know him, or the more used I got to his presence. I didn't know if I wanted to let him go. Not like that choice was just up to me. After I said I wanted to be friends he didn't mention the mate thing again.

He just stopped by with coffee for me, and then started bringing some for Cali after she practically demanded it. He would sit for a few minutes a day and talk to me and then leave.

Every day it was the same until I didn't see him again.