

17 - Orientation

(Willa)

"Goodnight," He brushed his lips across my knuckles.

I had to force myself to turn around and fumble with my keys. I felt his presence behind me as I nally unlocked the door and turned back to him.

I had nothing else to say, actually, I had a lot to say but nothing that would even make sense, my brain was mush.

I nodded to him, "Goodnight, Caspien," I whispered closing the door.

I leaned against it, letting the coolness calm the heat coursing through my body.

"How was it?" Cali asked, I jumped, my heart pounding against my chest.

"How did you-"

She shrugged, "I've been waiting, you're back early."

I didn't know what time it was honestly, "Did they go down okay?"

"Really well actually, I think they were so full it made them tired."

"Amazing, thank-"

"Don't thank me, just tell me everything."

"Let me get out of this dress rst," I groaned. I rushed to get changed and joined her back on the couch where she wanted every d.amrn detail.

The next afternoon we dropped the kids off at her place where our sitter was watching them. I was nervous for our rst day even though it was just orientation. Cali decided to go the business route, claiming it would be easy enough and she could get some job she despised but would pay better than the diner.

I chose basic chemistry, psychology, and economics class, still having no idea what I wanted to do. I knew I was good at chemistry, I liked science in high school. Psychology and economics were new but seemed like safe bets.

"On to our new career, I hope this is worth it," Cali held up her glass of coke in mock cheers. We went for lunch after to settle our nerves. It was a lot for both of us, not just the money, but the commitment to starting something that we might not see results from for years to come. I was glad I had her to do it with me.

"It will be, it already is," I smiled at her, trying to convince myself just as much as her.

My phone buzzed and I saw my mom's face on the screen, "Mind if I take this? It's my mom," I held up the phone.

"Go on," She waved me off, "I'll be here wallowing in my self-pity and contemplating all the life decisions that lead me up to this point." I shook my head, she was so f.ucking dramatic.

"Mom, hi!" I picked up as fast as I could, we've been texting a lot but I wanted to give them space to settle back in and I knew their service was c.rap when they were moving stuff from the cottage and doing a nal clean.

"Hi, honey, how are you? We miss you both so much."

"Great actually. I just had orientation and I've made enough to pay for the rst installment of my classes," I smiled.

I had to remember that a month ago I had no clue what I was doing. No job, no apartment, no direction. It was easy to brush off my accomplishments or diminish what I was doing working in a restaurant and going to community college, but in reality, it was a big f.ucking deal and I gured it out mostly for myself.

"Oh, Willa, that is incredible. Did you like it? Do you think you'll be happy with the classes you chose?"

"Yes, honestly the professors seemed amazing and I'm actually really excited to get back into school."

"You always were so good at it,"

"Most subjects," I admitted, "How is everything there? Have you settled back in?"

"The house wasn't bad actually, Lola's parents, bless them, came and cleaned it out before we got back. We're just unpacking and settling in. We might get rid of a lot of things actually, things we left and forgot about for the past ve years. I think we're going for a more minimalistic approach." She laughed.

"Good, I'm glad to hear it." I really was, she seemed happy at least.

"Do you want anything? We can bring it or send it to you. There are a lot of clothes and dresses and some old textbooks."

"Maybe some clothes but I don't want to see any of those dresses again," I tried to laugh but it was hollow.

There was a long pause before I asked, I just had to know, "What about everything else?"

"Honey, do you really want to know?"

"Yes,"

"They have a son," She paused as if that would send me spiralling, and a few years ago, even months, it might have, "I haven't seen him around. I caught a glimpse of Nolan, er Alpha Nolan," She corrected herself but his name came out with a sharpness.

"He seemed surprised to see me but we didn't speak, as if he would have anything to say," She said with such malice but then softened her tone, "We haven't asked much about him or the girl, I don't want to know."

"But you live there again, they're your Alpha and Luna," It was still hard for me to get it out, it was the rst time I acknowledged her as Luna.

"I know, we will see how it goes. It's different here, without you. We didn't go back to the same pack we left," She admitted.

"Well, there might be another apartment opening in my building," I tried to joke but it sounded at.

"We will keep our options open," I could hear the smile in her voice, "I'll tell dad you say hi, he's getting the car looked at now. Let us know when a good time would be to visit.

"You're welcome anytime,"

"Thanks, honey. We love you both."

"Love you too, Mom."

I hung up the phone and held it to my chest waiting for the dull throb of pain to start.

I was surprised when it didn't. Even though talking to my mom made it all real, Camilla being Luna I knew already but the fact that they had a son too, didn't hurt as much as I thought it would. It barely affected me actually.

It ared my anger still, that they could just carry on as if they didn't ruin everything for me. But it wasn't the all-consuming rage I was used to.

They didn't take everything from me. I had Emmett, I had a life I was building for myself, I had a new incredible friend, and I had Caspien.

Maybe this was always the life that I was supposed to lead. Either way, it was blatantly obvious that I wouldn't have been happy as The Luna of Blue Ridge, even if Nolan didn't stop caring.

"Wowey," Cali slumped over the counter I was cleaning at work.

"Didn't expect that word to come from your mouth," I laughed, "What's up?"

"The rst payment for the summer classes just went out, I mean it's community college like what are they charging for?" She leaned back.

"The building? The professors?" I shrugged, sighing.

I had to make sure the payment went through. I scanned the restaurant, we were slow the lunch rush just ended, and our manager usually hid in the oce if he showed up at all. I appreciated that they kinda left us to it and I got the feeling that Cali was like a supervisor without the pay raise.

"I hope this is worth it," She groaned.

"Me too," I agreed, at least we could ease into it, but if for some reason this didn't work out I had no clue what a backup plan would be.

"Careers are overrated," Cali pushed off the counter.

"How would you know?" I teased.

"They cost too much to get," That I could agree on.

I pulled up my banking app on my phone and braced myself for the impact, hoping I had enough left to cover my bills, I knew what my rent was but I hadn't received a water or electric bill yet and that scared me, the not knowing or be able to plan for it. I hoped by the end of summer classes I could save a little, even a few hundred as a buffer.

I frowned refreshing the page, and then again.

"What is it?" Cali asked.

"My money wasn't taken out," I refreshed it again, "When did yours come out?"

"I think this morning, I just checked it in the kitchen though," She shrugged, "I'm sure it will go through."

"What if I did it wrong?" I started to get nervous, "Let me call them real quick, watch my section?"

She nodded twirling a red curl in her nger. I headed through the kitchen to the alley and looked up the number.

"Hello? I'm calling about my payment for classes, it didn't come out today and I want to make sure you have my correct bank details on le," It was my rst time with a bank account and the routing and account numbers confused me.

The woman on the phone asked for my details, "Hm, Wilhelmina Balfour, let me check." I heard her typing away in the background, she didn't stop for a few moments, "Your payment has been received."

"Really?" I sighed in relief and pulled up my bank app again. Nothing changed, "Sorry, ma'am it hasn't come out of my account yet."

"It should show a pending transaction,"

"There aren't any,"

More typing, I had to make sure. I just felt like there was something that I must have done wrong.

"It was paid yesterday, Ms. Balfour," She conrmed, that didn't make sense.

"How?"

"I can't share any of the bank details-"

"Is there a name?"

"Uh, Dracos Group. I can't share anything besides the name-"

"Thank you," I hung up and gripped my phone.

"Willa?" Cali came out, "Did you gure it out?"

"Caspien paid it," I said atly. I didn't know what I felt but I didn't like it.

"Wow," She whistled, "Does he want to pay off my debt too?" Her eyes were wide.

I shook my head, "I don't like it, I didn't want him to do that. Why did he do that?" I turned to her.

"He's smitten," She shrugged.

"He didn't say anything about it when he was here earlier, they said it was paid yesterday." I didn't want him to think that I couldn't take care of myself or that he had to step in and save me. I wanted a relationship where I was an equal, and this annoyed me.

"I bet he was trying to do something nice, I wish someone would do that for me," Cali looked at me.

I get it, he was trying to be nice. It was a nice gesture, but I didn't want it.

"I don't feel good about it, I don't want his money. I feel like, I don't know, he has something over me."

"Then go talk to him," She crossed her arms.

"He's not here,"

She rolled her eyes, "You have his business card, I'm assuming you kept that thing close," She gave me a deadpan stare "Go to his oce."

"We're not done with work," I couldn't imagine traipsing into his fancy oce in this pink apron.

"We're almost done, I'll cover you just cash out now and I'll do the rest. Maybe leave the apron," She looked me up and down, "Come by my place after to get Emmett,"

"Okay," She pushed me back toward the kitchen before I could think about all the reasons why this was a bad idea.