

Chapter 86

Skylar's Past (14 Years Old)

I hate social gatherings, and the only reason I'm here at Alpha Daisy's son's birthday party is because my best friend, Irma, dragged me here. Unlike me, who grew up in the orphanage, her parents are important members of the Bloodmoon pack that owns the orphanage where I live. Irma's father, Caleb, is Alpha Daisy's Beta, while her mom, Lola, is Alpha Daisy's best friend. It unnerves me that my best friend's family is such close friends to the Alpha family since it means I might be forced to endure unwanted attention. Something that would be a nightmare for someone like me who hates people, especially men.

I haven't told anyone, and neither have I spoken to a therapist about it, but I am a rape victim. As an orphan, I'm not important enough to matter, and the person who took my innocence is an important member of the pack. Five different Alphas rule the Bloodmoon pack: Daisy, Logan, Yato, Xavier, and Aron. And one of them well...he didn't treat me very nicely. But it can't be helped. No one would believe me if I told them what's been happening behind the scenes at the orphanage for most of my

life. Therefore, I intend to keep my secret and just stay the hell away from men. Who needs a man anyway? Not me!

“I’m thirsty.” Irma complains, but her unhappiness doesn’t last very long. When a cute waiter walks past with blood drinks... her whole face lights up. “Oh, that’s exactly what a hybrid girl needs!”

“Won’t your parents be mad?” I ask her. I’m pretty sure there is alcohol in blood drinks.

“Eh,” she waves away my concerns and gives me a flirtatious wink. “I’ll just use some magic to make myself look older and pretend to be someone else if my mom starts looking for me.”

With that, Irina sashays away from me, her waist growing more slender and her height increasing dramatically within seconds. I’m left standing there, amazed by my best friend. Irma’s powerful vampire magic is such an amazing tool. It makes me wish I was a hybrid Unfortunately, I’m just a typical werewolf. This means that I’m stuck with my unimpressive height. I’m stuck at 5’1, lacking any curves or attractive physique to flaunt. But I suppose it’s a good thing. Guys never look my way. They are all too busy giving my best friend heart-eyes even to notice my presence. It keeps me out of trouble, though, so I’m not complaining. Yet, sometimes, I wish I was more beautiful. I don’t know what my parents looked like, but I’m a ginger. My fiery red hair is the most striking thing about me. I often wonder if mom or dad had similar locks or if it was something I

had inherited from some distant relative. I sigh as I look at myself in the window. My freckled face and the unmanageable curls that tumble down like a cascading fire are things I wouldn't hesitate to trade away.

I turn away from the window, pulling my gaze away from my reflection and back to the bustling room around me. The sounds of laughter and clinking glasses fill my ears as I saunter toward a quiet corner. I notice a group of children kicking around a ball, their laughter infectious as they chase each other. I can't help but study them, widening my eyes when the ball rolls up to my feet.

"Hey, lady, can you get that for us?" one of them asks. He sounds older, around thirteen or fourteen.

"Sure." I reply, bending down to pick up the ball. When I stand back up, my whole world tilts on its axis. Standing before me is the most beautiful boy that I've ever seen black hair, mismatched eyes-one blue and one red-and although he is shorter than me. I can tell he is going to be stunning once he grows up. The problem? He is my mate, which honestly should be impossible-you don't feel the mate bond at our age, but I can feel it as clear as day.

I don't know how long we stand there, staring at each other, but this is a problem. My mate is a boy, and I couldn't be more afraid of him even if I tried. The other gender scares me beyond relief, and who can blame me? Men are physically bigger than

women. They are also stronger and more than capable of inflicting everlasting wounds. I would know since that disgusting Alpha who always visited the orphanage at strange hours came into my bed every single night. At first, I thought he was there to comfort me after I had lost my parents. But I was wrong. He took from me every single night until there was nothing left to take. I feel disgusted simply thinking about it. He destroyed my innocence and took something from me that wasn't his to take, and now, I have trouble trusting men. And even if my mate is a young, short guy who looks defenseless, I know he will physically change with time. His face will mature, and he will grow taller and stronger than me within a year or two. Therefore, I must reject him now while I'm still brave enough to utter whole sentences around him to prevent a future I don't want: being in a relationship with someone who terrifies me.

"Well, this is surprising." The guy says after what feels like an eternity. He then takes the ball from my stiff hands, smiling radiantly at me. "I'm Lucas," My eyes widen into saucers. This guy is Alpha Daisy's son, the future Alpha of the Bloodmoon pack?! I know there are more than one Alpha, but this guy is supposedly a fucking tribrid. This couldn't get any worse!

"Are you alright?" Lucas asks, his voice laced with concern as he looks up at me. "Your face is pale."

Those words make something snap within me. "I'm always pale!" I exclaim defensively. "It's just the way I look, okay?!"

Lucas looks startled by my sudden outburst, and I instantly regret it. His eyes carry a mixture of surprise and confusion, though no hint of anger or maliciousness, as he raises an eyebrow at me.

“Okay,” he says after a moment, holding his hands up in surrender, “no offense meant. I was just concerned.” His words, while simple, still hit like a slap.

Here stands a future Alpha who could easily use his authority to remind me who I’m speaking to. Yet, instead of using his standing within the pack to lecture me, he responds with kindness and understanding.

It’s embarrassing. I bet people are looking at us, too; some of them have gone quiet. “I need to go,” I stammer. yet.” Lucas releases the ball and grabs my hand.

“But you haven’t even told me your name.” His simple touch sends panic coursing through my veins, and I immediately think of those nights when I was taken advantage of. That Alpha was smiling while I was screaming in my bed. He enjoyed taking my innocent, and remembering him is my breaking point. Without thinking, I blurt out, “I, SKYLAR PARKER, REJECT YOU, LUCAS REEVES, AS MY MATE!”

Lucas blinks, stunned. The mild amusement that had been shimmering in his eyes a moment ago is now replaced by a dull

shock. His grip on my hand tightens momentarily as if in denial before slowly releasing me.

“B-but...why?” Since telling him the truth isn’t an alternative, I examine his appearance carefully before using it as an excuse.

“Because you’re shorter than me and a year younger, too. I can’t take you seriously,” I spin the words out without thinking. I see a flicker of hurt cross his face before a wall of neutrality replaces it. He is still a future Alpha. After all, he has to maintain an image.

“I see. regardless, I respect your decision,” Lucas replies, his voice calm and steady, but his eyes betray a shadow of disappointment. The silence that follows is suffocating. Everyone is staring at us, including Irma and her family. Even Lucas’s parents are staring at us, and my face flames with humiliation. What have I done?

My heart begins to pound faster, and the whole room feels like it’s spinning. I hate being the center of attention, and before I know it, I’m backing away from Lucas, scrambling to escape the pressure of everyone’s eyes.

I bet they think I’m an idiot. I bet no one wants me here. Stupid, stupid, stupid-why did I reject Lucas in front of everyone?! The image blurs into a whirlpool of colors and faces as I stumble toward the archway leading outside.

“Skylar!” Lucas shouts my name, but I ignore him as I flee from the ballroom and the piercing gaze of those around me.

My chest is tight, and I come to a stop when Alpha Daisy stands in front of me, seemingly wanting an explanation for my sudden departure. I fear being interrogated, but then I do the impossible for a werewolf my age. I shape-shift for the first time. In an explosive burst of energy, I turn into a wolf. Daisy is so shocked that she stands entirely still for that moment to run past her and out of the mansion.

My body hurts from shape-shifting for the first time, but the pain doesn't matter. I have to leave this place and never return. I've made a fool out of myself. I race through the woods, my paws cutting through the grass and crunching on fallen leaves. My lungs are burning, but I push on, ignoring the chill from the midnight air that gnashes against my fur. Inside of me. I can feel my inner wolf screaming at what I'm about to do, but it can't be helped. I would rather be a rogue than the girl who made a spectacle of herself in front of the entire pack. I rejected the future Alpha on his thirteenth birthday-something no one will ever forget. But who cares? I'm better off alone.