

Nightmares and Numbness

"RUN!" her mom shouted at her, but her legs wouldn't move, couldn't move.

She could do nothing but watch as the man snapped her mother's neck, taking the life out of her beautiful green eyes. Her father and brother appeared in front of her and they pushed her to the ground.

"It was your fault!" they screamed over and over again while kicking her.

Suddenly they were gone, and her mother was standing over her in their place. Her skin was white and her lips blue in her death. She bent down next to Lily and reached out to stroke her hair lovingly. Lily leaned into her mom's palm, relieved to feel the comfort of her mother's touch. Only, now the strokes of her mother's hand were becoming rough and violent, pulling at her hair and bruising her head.

She pulled Lily's hair, wrenching her head back so that they were looking at each other. Her mother's eyes had gone cold and hard, the anger inside of them scaring Lily.

"It's all your fault!" her mother spat in her face.

Lily jerked up, waking from her nightmare. She looked around frantically, not sure where or when she was until her eyes registered the familiar sparse furniture of her bedroom. Her clothes were plastered to her body with sweat and she was shaking and breathing heavily.

She could still hear her mother's words ringing in her ears. It's all your fault. She tried to shake off her nightmare, but the feeling of her mother's rough hands wouldn't leave her, and the image of her cold eyes seemed permanently xed in Lily's mind. She had had many nightmares over the years, but none had left an imprint on her like this one had.

Even though it was just a dream, Lily's heart ached at the thought of her mom blaming her for her death. There were only so many times Lily could hear her father and brother placing the blame on her before Lily started to believe it too. Up until that point, a part of her had still clung to the idea that she hadn't been responsible. After the dream though, she could feel her hold on that hope was slipping.

It was true that had she just run home after falling, her mother would probably still be alive. It was also true that if she had run faster to get help, she would still be alive. What it came down to, was that if Lily had acted differently on that day, her mother wouldn't have died. So, Lily nally started to fully accept her role in her mom's death and with that acceptance, any ght that was left in her seemed to drain from her body.

She felt numb as she got ready for the day. She barely felt the heat from the shower, and she didn't even feel the usual tenderness from the bruises on her body. Her senses seemed mued and dulled. If it weren't for the cast on her hand, she probably wouldn't have even remembered or noticed that her hand was broken. She didn't bother about her appearance, leaving her hair in a sloppy ponytail and choosing random and probably mismatched clothes.

A brief glance in the mirror let her know that she looked haggard and exhausted, and her black eye didn't help improve her appearance. She didn't have any make-up to cover the bruise with, not that she cared enough to mind. Uncaring and unbothered by the way she looked, she went downstairs. The house was already returning to its usual state, but this time she couldn't care less about the mess.

She grabbed a banana from the kitchen, not feeling hungry even though she hadn't eaten at all the previous day. Her brother was in the kitchen, making himself a big breakfast before school, but neither of them acknowledged the other. She left the house, starting the forty-minute walk to the high school. Her brother had a car, but as the shunned daughter, she had to make do without one.

She used to take the school bus when she was younger but had started walking to and from the school after one particularly humiliating day. The entire school bus had chanted 'you're a freak' at her until she got off at her stop, at which point they cheered as if her leaving the bus was cause for celebration. It hadn't been the most inventive or creative chant, but it had been effective in kicking Lily off the bus for good.

Lily arrived at the small high school with a few minutes to spare before the rst bell rang. She navigated through the busy halls to get to her locker, ignoring the sneers and insults thrown her way. They had no effect on her that day because they were unable to make it through the numbness she was feeling. She made it to her locker in time to switch out her books before homeroom.

Hood River High was the only high school in the town, so the student body was made up of both werewolves and humans. Unfortunately for Lily, the werewolves ruled the school because of their typically better good looks and the intimidation humans felt from them. There was a danger in werewolves that humans could somehow sense, making them fearful and uneasy around Lily's kind.

The pecking order at the high school didn't help Lily because the humans naturally followed her packmates' example in shunning her. Most of them were too nervous around her to outright bully her, but none of them were friendly either. All of that meant that Lily had absolutely nobody she could call a friend at her school.

Homeroom went by uneventfully, but when she was walking to her rst class, a werewolf stuck out her foot and sent Lily falling to the ground.

"Filthy mutt," she heard the werewolf sneer. It was Jessica, her brother's mate.

She heard snickers from the students in the hallway, but calmly collected the two books that had fallen from her hands and went to her English class without a backwards glance.

Kyle was in that class and his seat was the one behind hers. He had probably chosen that seat to be in as close proximity as possible to Lily, so he could throw taunts her way through the whole class. English was one subject that Lily actually enjoyed, but it was hard to concentrate on what the teacher was saying with Kyle whispering in her ear.

"Where did you get that black eye from, Mutt?" he asked while Mrs. Montgomery explained the paper they would have to write on The Great Gatsby.

It was the third week of school and Lily already knew that her senior year was going to be painful with the amount of homework they were getting.

Lily didn't respond to Kyle, even when he said, "I wonder who will be unlucky enough to get you as a mate. I hear your birthday is on Wednesday, so I guess we'll nd out soon."

His words were cruel as always, but Lily just didn't have the energy to care anymore. The words her mother had spoken in her dream were far worse than anything Kyle or her other pack mates could ever say to her—even if they were a gment of her imagination.

"What's the matter with you today, Mutt?" he asked, using the ugly nickname he had given her. "Did the punch to your face leave you brain damaged or something?"

Lily refused to respond, trying to focus on Mrs. Montgomery's words instead. Kyle obviously didn't like that, so he icked the back of her head.

"Hey, Mutt. I'm talking to you," he said loudly enough to get the attention of the whole classroom.

"Is there a problem over there?" the teacher asked. She sounded annoyed at the interruption.

"No, Mrs. Montgomery. Lily just dropped her pen and I was giving it back," Kyle said smoothly.

"Is that so? Well, that's awfully kind of you, but I'm afraid I'm still going to have to send you to the principal's oce for using the word 'mutt' towards another student." Mrs.

Montgomery's sarcastic words surprised Lily.

The teacher was a human and to stand up to a werewolf as intimidating as Kyle was quite an achievement. Not only that, but Lily wasn't used to having people stand up for her. She must have surprised Kyle as well because he stuttered his response.

"Ex-excuse me?"

"You are excused," Mrs. Montgomery responded haughtily, making the rest of the class c***k up in barely contained laughter.

A red-faced and furious Kyle stormed out of the room and the class continued pleasantly now that Lily could pay attention to the teacher, who had just become Lily's favorite human being. Her actions meant the world to Lily even though she knew that the principal wouldn't give Kyle any consequences. Seeing as he was a werewolf, the man was unlikely to have an issue with Kyle's bullying considering Lily was the one being bullied. The members of Alpha Mason's pack had been trained over time to see Lily as the 'mutt' of the pack, as Kyle so eloquently put it.

With Mrs. Montgomery's defense of her, some of the numbness had left Lily. She had few people to count on in her life, so any kind actions meant more to her than she could explain.

"Miss Mason, can you stay behind for a minute, please," the teacher said once class was over.

Lily let everyone else leave before walking to the front of the classroom.

"Lily, there's no easy way for me to ask this," she started, "But how did you get that bruise on your face? And what happened to your hand?"

Lily swallowed nervously, knowing her English teacher wouldn't believe it had been some kind of accident. The 'I walked into an open cupboard door' excuse wouldn't work with that woman.

"Is someone hurting you at home?" she asked softly.

"No! No, it's nothing like that," Lily lied, knowing it wouldn't end well if she told the truth. "It's...it was someone at school." It was the most reasonable explanation she could come up with. She already got bullied at school, so it wasn't a huge leap to believe that another student had hit her.

Mrs. Montgomery sighed loudly. "I have noticed that the other students pick on you—it's hard not to. Have you gone to the principal?"

"Umm...no," Lily said honestly. Even if another student had hit her, she wouldn't have been able to count on the principal to help her.

"Look, I can't force you to tell us who did that to you, but I really think you should report it."

"I'll think about it," Lily promised her, mentally crossing her ngers behind her back.

"Good. You better get to your next class."

Lily nodded and turned to leave, but stopped when her teacher added, "Lily, if you ever need someone to talk to, I'm here."

"Thanks Mrs. Montgomery," Lily replied sincerely.

It felt good to have someone in her corner for once. Unfortunately, her good mood didn't even survive a single day—Kyle made sure of it.

Lily was walking through the near-empty hall after her last class when he cornered her and pushed her into an empty classroom. He grabbed her throat with both hands and slammed her against the wall. His grip tightened around her neck, cutting off her air supply and making her panic.

She clawed at his hands, feeling desperate and frantic. It was the rst time Kyle had laid hands on her. His light blue eyes were as cold as ice and it was the rst time Lily had been truly afraid of him. The draw she usually felt towards him was gone, and its place was terror.

"Did you think that stunt you pulled in English was funny?" he sneered.

Lily tried to say 'no' but couldn't get the words out so shook her head instead.

"That's what I thought," he spat at her, releasing his grip on her.

She slid down the wall, coughing as she lled her lungs with much-needed oxygen. She knew her neck would be bruised from the lled grip he had used to pin her to the wall.

"You better watch yourself, Mutt," he warned her. "Next time I might not be so forgiving."

"I didn't even do anything," Lily coughed out, knowing it was stupid to talk back to him, but unable to hold her tongue.

"What did you say?" he said, taking a threatening step towards her. He looked massive standing over her while she was slumped on the oor.

"N-nothing," she stuttered, backing herself up against the wall in fear.

"God, you're f*****g pathetic," he said in disgust. He turned and left the classroom not sparing her one more glance.

Lily hated to admit it, but the words hurt. It hurt that the guy she had once thought might be her mate was looking down at her like he couldn't stand the sight of her. His words brought the numbness back into her body, leaving her feeling drained and empty.

She barely remembered the walk home, but somehow she was back in her room and lying on her bed feeling just as pathetic as Kyle had said she was. She ended up doing what she always did when she felt dejected and lost. She phoned Amanda, one of the only people who could cheer her up even at her lowest lows.

"Hey Lily. Is everything okay?" she asked when she picked up the phone.

"No. I really need you right now," Lily admitted, her throat feeling sore from the tears she held back and from Kyle's attack.

"I'll be right there," she replied immediately, proving that Lily could always depend on her. "Bella and I will pick you up and we can go out for pizza before your shift. How does that sound?"

"It sounds perfect," Lily responded, already feeling better. Amanda always had that effect on her.

"Okay. We're on our way," she said before hanging up.

Not for the rst time, Lily wondered what she would do without Amanda. She wondered if the numbness would have taken over and forced her to do the one thing she had thought of often, but never considered as a real option because of Amanda, Eli and Bella. They were the only thing keeping her from ending it all.