



Pizza Break and Coffee Cake

Lily, Amanda and Bella were sitting at a table in an Italian restaurant in town. From the outside it appeared a bit run-down, but their pizza was the best in Hood River.

"Pizza is my bestest food," Bella proclaimed with a mouth full of dough and cheese.

"It's my favorite too," Lily agreed.

The six-year-old girl smiled at her, giving Lily and Amanda a lovely view of the chewed-up pizza in her mouth. The two of them only chuckled at Bella's bad eating habits, nding her too adorable to be scolded. Lily already felt a million times better after being around them for less than an hour. Both Amanda and Bella had this incredible way of making her forget all her troubles.

Bella was looking as cute as always, wearing a light pink dress and a white bow in her hair. It was obvious looking at Bella and Amanda that they were related because they shared the same wavy brown hair and hazel eyes.

Bella put her focus back on devouring her pizza, giving Amanda and Lily a chance to chat.

"So, what happened today?" Amanda asked, the concern evident in her voice.

Her gaze kept icking towards Lily's black eye, but she hadn't asked about it, or the cast on her hand either. Lily was pretty sure Amanda knew about what was happening in Lily's home, but she couldn't do anything about it--no one could. Going against an Alpha would most denitely end in death.

"It was just...the same as always. High school kids being high school kids, you know." Lily didn't mention what Kyle had done to her, knowing there was nothing Amanda could do about it. Besides, she didn't want to bring the woman into her mess.

Amanda sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, looking stressed. "I really wish there was something I could do, Lily. You don't deserve their cruelty."

"You've already done enough, Amanda," Lily said, taking the older woman's hand in hers. "You, Eli and Bella have made Hood River bearable. I don't know what I would do without you."

"You know that we would do anything for you, right? We just want you to be happy, sweetheart."

"I know Amanda," Lily replied with a watery smile.

"Yeah, we love you, Lily," Bella said cheerily, clearly not as occupied with her pizza as they had thought. Lily had to laugh, because with Bella's lisp, the words came out as 'we wove you, wiwy'.

"I love you too, pumpkin," Lily responded. "You're my bestest person," she added with a wink.

"Did you hear that mom? I'm her bestest person!"

Bella's voice was loud enough to draw the attention of the other customers in the restaurant, all of whom were humans. They all smiled at the sweet girl; her joy too infectious to ignore.

"Yeah, sweetie, I heard," Amanda said, ruing her daughter's hair lovingly.

They spent the rest of the meal talking about Bella's day at school, which was apparently much better than Lily's. The girl loved drawing and painting, and her class had done a big art project that day, so her school had been a pleasure rather than a pain for her. Unfortunately, Lily had to go to work so she couldn't stay any longer once the pizza was nished.

"Do you need a lift home after your shift?" Amanda asked while they were waiting for the check.

"No, don't worry. You know I don't mind walking."

"I know, but I worry about you. Just text me when you get home, okay." Amanda had always worried about Lily, but lately she seemed to have been getting more concerned.

"Of course."

After paying, they left the small Italian restaurant, and Lily held Bella's hand as they walked across the street to Amanda's parked car. She helped the young girl into the booster seat in the back of the car, and buckled her in.

"I'll see you this weekend, pumpkin," she told Bella, before giving her an obnoxiously loud kiss on the cheek.

She would be babysitting on Saturday night because Amanda and Eli had a date night planned.

"Can we bake cookies like we did last time?" she asked, practically bouncing in her seat.

"Absolutely. And we can nally watch Frozen Two as well," she told Bella.

Frozen was Bella's favorite movie, and the girl had been dying to see the second one again. Lily had taken her to see it at the movie theatre when it came out, but they had been waiting for it to be available on Apple TV.

"Awesome!" Bella exclaimed, clearly happy with that idea.

"See you later, alligator," Lily said, using the cheesy phrase that Bella loved.

"In a while, crocodile," Bella responded enthusiastically.

Lily closed the car door and walked to the open driver's window. "See you on Saturday, Amanda."

"Actually, we'll see you on Wednesday," Amanda said with a big grin. "I'll pick you up after school and we're all going out to celebrate your birthday."

"Really?" Lily asked, even though she shouldn't have been surprised that Amanda wanted to make her eighteenth birthday special. Amanda and Eli had been celebrating her birthdays with her since she was ten, so this year shouldn't have been any different.

"Of course. Do you have a shift?" she asked.

"No, Maggie gave me the day off."

"Great. We have a lot planned," Amanda said with a secretive smile. "Remember to text me when you get home," Amanda reminded her before pulling out of the parking space and waving goodbye.

Lily walked the two blocks to Coffee on Pine, the place she worked at. It was an adorable little coffee shop in the predominantly human part of town. With its rustic furniture, the coffee shop was homey and charming. It had white walls, beige couches with baby blue pillows, and light brown wooden tables. The walls were decorated with quotes about the importance of coffee, paintings of owers and a large clock. There were only three customers in the place when she entered the shop, leaving it nice and quiet. Her boss, a pretty twenty-ve-year-old human, was behind the counter wiping down the coffee machine.

"Hey Maggie," Lily greeted her.

"Hi Lily," she responded kindly. "Do you mind packing away the stock that was just delivered? I'll cover your station."

"Sure, no problem." Lily went to the back of the coffee shop and started moving boxes to the storage room.

It took her a good half an hour to unpack the boxes and restock the shelves, but she didn't mind the work. Sometimes it was better than being at the front and interacting with customers, many of whom were students from Hood River High and could be awful to deal with. Thank goodness very few werewolves made an appearance at the coffee shop, or her job would have been an absolute nightmare.

"All done," she told Maggie. She got behind the register after donning her light blue apron which matched the pillows on the couches.

"Thanks, Lily. I'm going to leave you to it then," Maggie said, moving towards the door. "I have some errands to run, so I'll see you around closing time."

"Okay, see you later," Lily responded.

There were no new customers, so Liily killed time by cleaning the already spotless counter. Eventually a new customer came in and Lily took their order

"What can I get you?" she asked the middle-aged woman.

"Just a cappuccino and a slice of that coffee cake please," the customer replied with a smile.

"Of course." Liily got to work making her cappuccino and placing a slice of the delicious looking cake on a plate.

The customer thanked her when she handed over the items, which put Lily in a good mood for the rest of her shift. It always helped when customers were friendly. The rest of her shift went by similarly, and she was relieved that there had been no dicult customers. Towards ten o'clock, Maggie came back to the shop and helped Lily clean up, and the two of them left together.

"Bye Maggie. I'll see you tomorrow night." Lily waved at her boss who was locking the door.

"Get home safe," the woman replied, before walking to her car, which was parked just outside the coffee shop.

Since it was ten at night, it was dark as Lily made her way home. She was used to walking at such a late hour, so she didn't feel bothered by the shadows and darkness around her. Like many aspects in her life, she had grown used to it out of necessity. Fortunately, it was only a fteen-minute walk to her house from Coffee on Pine, so she was walking through her front door in no time. However, what greeted her as she walked through the door wasn't fortunate at all.

As soon as she entered the house, she could feel the tension in the atmosphere. It was as if she could sense the bad mood emanating from her father who, it would seem, had been waiting for her. She closed the door behind her but made no move to walk further into the house. She knew it was best to wait for her father to make the rst move.

"I got a phone call from your school today," he said with narrowed eyes. He looked just as intimidating as usual with his arms crossed across his chest.

Lily avoided his eyes by looking down at her feet. She had no idea what the call might have been about, but she suspected it may have something to do with Mrs. Montgomery.

"Would you like to explain to me why your English teacher thinks you're having issues with bullying?" Alpha Mason asked in irritation.

Lily knew better than to say it was because she was being bullied, so she tried to ease her father's anger. "She asked about the bruise on my face, so I told her it was someone from school. I didn't know what else to say," she explained, hoping he would appreciate that she had lied for him. Not that she had been trying to protect him--more like she had been protecting Mrs. Montgomery from unintentionally angering an Alpha.

His eyes lost some of their anger, but he didn't seem completely satised with her answer.

"I hope you don't expect things to change now," he said.

Lily gave him a confused look to which he replied, "You deserve everything those kids are doing to you, and the sooner you realize that, the better."

Now she understood why he was angry. He didn't want his daughter's bullying to stop and he was worried her teacher would be able to improve things for her. He wanted the people at her school to be mean to her. He wanted them to be cruel. Lily knew that her dad had been aware of the bullying but knowing that he was actually happy about it was especially twisted.

"I don't expect it to change," she said truthfully. She knew that she was stuck being the punching bag of the school. "I know that this is how it has to be." Her second statement wasn't truthful like the rst. She hated how people at school treated her, and she desperately wished it would change.

"Good. I'm glad we're on the same page." His words belied his next move though. He stalked toward her, grabbed her by the hair and jerked her head back. "But you better watch your next steps," he spat in her face. "I don't want any more calls from that school."

With those words he shoved her into the front door and stormed off to the living room. Within seconds, Lily heard the sounds of a sports channel coming from the tv. She breathed out a sigh of relief. He had only added one bruise to her body from where her back had hit the doorknob, and she knew that it could have been much much worse.