

## Chapter 1 - The Claim!

Zara's POV

"Wow!" Levi gasped beside me and pointed to the door where one of the pack Alphas had just entered. "That one seems even more appetizing than the one before him!"

Two beautiful she-wolves, who looked like twin sisters, anked the Alpha, and his Beta and Delta followed closely behind.

"Yes, Levi," I said, raising my glass to my lips and taking a sip. "He certainly does."

Levi is my best friend. We grew up together, and we were inseparable from the age of four. He towered over my small 5'2 frame at 6'3. He had an impressive physique, featuring massive biceps, a six-pack to die for, and a rnyet powerful body. He had the most beautiful golden locks that stood proudly in every direction, giving him the iconic appearance of having just rolled out of bed. To top it all off, he had the most beautiful deep blue eyes I had ever laid eyes on.

Levi was awless in every way, and even though he drew attention wherever we went, he had one little secret: he was gay.

A breath escaped my lips as I rolled my eyes for the hundredth time.

We were at our annual Mating Festival, hosted by the Full Moon Pack, who was selected to lead the celebrations this year.

I was not overly thrilled to be here, but Levi wanted to come. He was hoping to nd his fated mate tonight.

My gaze traveled over the sea of wolves; a few had already found their mates, and the joy and happiness radiated around them. Some were anxiously waiting and hoping; I could sense their worry. Meanwhile, I hid in the ballroom's shadows, praying that no one would notice me.

"Take a look at that one!" Levi yelled above the music to me. "He is even more attractive than the last one!"

Unwillingly, my eyes darted to the door, and my heart skipped a beat and dropped to my shoes.

Noah Finch!

One of the most desirable Alphas on the continent, yet the most arrogant one I have ever met.

"What the f\*ck is he doing here?" Kaya, my wolf growled. "He is mated; he should not be at these kinds of celebrations."

Noah and I locked eyes, and when he brieiy smiled, my heart leaped inside my chest.

"F\*ck, he saw me!" I muttered under my breath, dropped my gaze, and turned my back to him.

Maybe he did not realize who I was.

"He is coming over," Levi mused next to me, licking his lips hungrily as his gaze scanned over the delicious 6'5 wolf with ash-blond hair, green eyes, and honey-colored skin.

"Oh, Goddess, no!" I muttered in disbelief. I didn't have the stomach to talk to him.

Levi furrowed his brows, perplexed by my unexpected response.

"What's gotten into you?" He asked, bewildered.

"Long story," I replied. "Hide me!"

"Why?" he asked, surprised by my plea. "He seems to be interested in you."

"That is exactly what I do not want!" I let out a groan.

"Well, it is too late now!" Levi said, and I glanced up to look at him.

Levi had this smirk plastered on his thin lips.

Was he having fun with this?

"Evening, Zara," Noah's deep voice chimed in my ears.

I turned to face Noah, dropping my shoulders in defeat and glaring at Levi.

"Alpha Noah," I uttered while attempting to compose myself. "What a surprise!"

"Sure is," he said, extending his hands for me to take. "I was hoping to nd you here tonight."

I xed my gaze on Noah's hand as though it were a snake about to strike.

Levi rescued me by taking Noah's hand in his and shaking it.

"Nice to meet you, Alpha," Levi said, glancing between the two of us. "I'm Levi Hallowell, the Beta."

"Likewise," Noah replied, keeping his eyes xed on me.

With each passing second, the tension between Noah and me grew.

Levi observed us for a minute, and then a smile appeared on his lips.

Was it possible for him to sense that something was off?

Could he sense my hatred towards this wolf?

"Are you acquainted with him?" Levi mind-linked me.

"Yes," I replied with a hiss.

Shocked, Levi narrowed his eyes.

"I wonder why he is here?" Kaya commented.

"I do not give a damn about his reason," I snarled. "His presence is uncalled for! He has no place among unmated wolves!"

With a quick glance toward the door, Levi's eyes brightened slightly. Something must have alerted his wolf.

"If you would excuse me for a moment," he suddenly said, and before I could say anything, he left my side and headed toward the door.

"Sh\*t!" I groaned to myself. I couldn't believe he just did that!

"Finally," Noah grinned and returned his focus to me. "I was wondering when your bodyguard would get the message and walk away."

I refocused my attention on Noah and squinted at him.

"Why do you look so upset about seeing me?" Noah asked, scratching the back of his head nervously at my response.

"Wouldn't you be too?" I growled lowly at him. "You reject me; remember!"

"Let bygones be bygones," Noah said, and anger sprouted inside me.

"You are so full of yourself!" I snapped and turned to leave. "Go sell your bullsh\*t to what's her face!"

"I am unable to," he declared calmly.

I stopped dead in my tracks and slowly turned back to confront him.

"Why not?" I asked. "You two looked so cozy together!"

"We broke up," he replied, keeping his composure.

Was he kidding me right now?

Was this some kind of sick joke?

My heart prickled in my chest, and my breath caught in my throat as my mind raced back to our last encounter.

I met Noah Finch a year ago at a similar festival.

It was only a week after my eighteenth birthday.

Levi couldn't come; he hadn't gotten his wolf yet. He did not seem too disappointed that I was not bringing him along to the celebrations, but he did appear anxious.

Levi, however, did not stop me from attending the ceremony, and I was impressed by his selessness.

That night, just like Levi wanted to do tonight, I looked forward to nding my fated mate.

My mind wandered, and images from that evening suddenly appeared in front of my eyes.

"Have fun, Zara-bear!" Levi said, tucking my black, curly hair behind my ear and lifting my chin. "You know I can't, but I wish I could go with you to the festival tonight."

I smiled at my best friend and wrapped my arms around his waist to hug him. I was certain that a nice, cozy hug from him would instantly dispel all of my worries and anxieties.

"When I get back, I will tell you everything," I said, bubbling with excitement as I made the promise to him. "I may even have the opportunity to introduce you to my mate later on!"

Levi threw back his head and laughed. He had such a powerful laugh that whenever someone heard it, they had to stop, turn, and look at us. Fortunately, we got smiles in return, and the best part was that I got to hear it every day.

"I will love that!" He gave me a quick kiss on the forehead and then assisted me in getting into the car.

Ever since my parents, the Alpha and Luna of our pack, the Silverback Pack, met, their story was reminiscent of a fairytale, and I always wanted mine to be equally lovely and unique.

It was not a long drive to the rival pack, and before I knew it, my parents and I were standing at the massive wooden doors that led to the ballroom—the venue for the festival.

My inner wolf began to pace tensely up and down my head. I have never seen her act like that.

A second later, when the guards opened the enormous wooden doors, my nostrils were lled with the aroma of grasslands.

"F\*ck!" I muttered to myself. "It smells so good. I wonder whom it belongs to."

I accompanied my parents to our table and waited for the proceedings to begin, but I became restless and uneasy in my seat. I needed to nd the owner of that scent.

How much longer?

Why can't they just skip the proceedings?

I shot to my feet as soon as the speeches ended, excused myself from the table, and followed my nose down the ballroom.

It didn't take me long to nd him; my nose led me right to him. He smelled even more lovely than before.

"Mate!" Kaya yapped excitedly in my mind.

I could not believe I was paired with someone as attractive as him!

The blonde Greek deity was seated at the bar, chatting idly with a she-wolf that was perched on a bar stool next to him.

I watched him in silence, taking in his powerful, commanding stance. He was handsome, and his laughter was powerful.

Kaya purred at the sight of him.

"He must be an Alpha," she said. "Let us go meet him!"

I felt a lump form in my throat, and butterflies bloomed in my stomach. I was incredibly anxious.

I began to take a step forward, forcing myself to calm down as I swallowed hard, but I stopped when my mate abruptly leaned forward and kissed the stunning brunette she-wolf.

Unable to comprehend what I was seeing, I let out a growl, which caused the two to pull apart.

The she-wolf let out a gasp behind her hand.

"It looks like you have found your fated mate," she said, wide-eyed.

He helped the girl off the bar stool, lifted her hand, kissed it, and grinned.

"Rather, she found me," he said sourly. "My darling, I will see you in a minute."

Darling?

Has he found a mate?

With a blush and a giggle, the girl nodded and headed back to their table, and with a seemingly annoyed look, my mate turned to face me.

"What is your name?" he asked, and a cold chill went down my spine.

"Zara." I stumbled uneasily.

"Zara," my name rolled over his lips, and for a moment it sounded so pure, so perfect. "I don't want to be with you."

I squinted my eyes in disbelief, unable to process the information. Did he just say what I think he did?

Kaya howled and ran off to the depths of my mind; sadness radiated from her.

He went on when I remained silent.

"She is my chosen mate," he explained. "And I love her."

He turned to face his table, and a foolish smile appeared on his lips. He shot her the kind of look I had always desired coming from my mate.

"I want to mate her by the end of summer," he said, gradually turning his gaze to face me. "I, Alpha Noah Winslow of the Red Howl Pack, reject you, Zara, as my mate and Luna."

I gasped for air as the most excruciating pain shot through my body, leaving only a cold feeling in my heart.

"You need to say that too," Noah remarked nonchalantly. "If not, you will be in agony when I am with my mate."

I had no desire to be aware of the times when my mate was busy screwing someone else! I inhaled deeply.

"Alpha Noah Winslow," I uttered as my throat constricted. "I, Zara Silverwood of the Silverado Pack, accept your rejection."

Noah gasped, his eyes wide, but before I let him say something, I headed for the door.

"Who needs a stinky mate anyway?" Kaya growled, clearing my mind.

"Why?" I growled and turned my focus back to Noah. "Has she found her fated mate and turned her back on you, just as you turned your back on me?"

"No," he said, shaking his head, and stepped forward.

I arched my eyebrows in confusion.

What does he want from me?

Why did he come here?

"Then tell me why the sudden change of heart?" I asked, looking him square in the eyes and straightening my back.

While most Alphas would nd the gesture a challenge, Noah simply grinned. His breath fanned the side of my neck, making me shiver as he lowered his head to my ear.

"I came to claim you, little mate!"

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