

## Prologue

I could hear my half brother laughing from the moment I woke up. It was a school day and I had been really looking forward to a full day of not having to deal with him or his horrible friends. Seeing any of them was literally the last thing I wanted to do today. I had wanted to have a lie in before I headed to the local library but then again I seemed destined to never get a single thing I wanted. I sighed.

I would have to get out of bed anyway now, it wasn't like I could spend all day hiding in my room. Besides if I didn't make sure that Ezra went to school my step dad would not some way of blaming his absence on me. Just like everything else that went wrong in either of their lives over the last two years.

I got washed and dressed as quickly as I could, pulling my dark brown hair into a messy ponytail. I was dressed in my standard fare of black t-shirt, black jeans and an oversized black hoodie. It was the same kind of thing as I wore practically every day. There really is no point putting any effort into your appearance when nobody else in the pack seems to even notice that you exist.

Of course there were a few exceptions to my invisibility and they were my stepfather, Ezra and his friends. All of them seemed determined to make up for the quiet that I got from everyone else and make my life difficult at every possible moment.

I took a deep breath to mentally prepare myself for the barrage of insults I was about to receive as I stepped into the living room. I opened the door and immediately froze. I had expected to see Ezra playing video games with some of his school friends but instead he was serving our future alpha coffee.

"I thought that you were meant to be at school today," I said.

I was mostly trying to cover up how flustered I was and justify my presence in the room. I briefly toyed with the idea of running out of the room and barricading myself in my room for a few hours until everyone left me alone but I decided that was a childish idea. At almost seventeen years old I should be able to be in the same room as the future alpha without making a complete fool out of myself.

I mean that didn't seem like a lot to ask for, right? To be able to be in a room with a man that I found attractive without turning into incoherent mush. If only someone could tell my body that it would be great.

Grayson Ward always seemed to have this effect on me. I have had a crush on him ever since the first time I laid eyes on him when I was fourteen. He had the typical alpha build of being tall and muscular but it wasn't something that he played up to. He always seemed to dress more casually than any of the other alphas or future alphas that I had met and yet he seemed to somehow possess the same level of authority when he spoke.

He had dark brown hair which came to just above his shoulders and sapphire blue eyes which were so striking that you had no option other than to lose yourself in them. He also had the kind of smile that could turn women into a gibbering mess from the other side of the room. I would like to say that I wasn't as bad as the rest but with how flustered I was after simply walking into the same room as him, that would clearly be a lie.

For a long time I had a super secret fantasy where Grayson was my mate and when I turned eighteen we would recognise the bond and be together. It was probably the same fantasy that most of the other women in the pack have had at one time or another but I no longer felt this way. My mom was killed and after that my whole life changed.

My stepfather (the only father I had even known) started to be cold towards me and blame me for everything that was wrong with his life. Ezra picked up on this and he saw it as an excuse to start bullying me along with all of his friends.

He took over the beta position from my mom because I was too young to take over. I was not sure with this at the time but a few months later he had convinced the alpha that I wasn't worthy of taking up the position. They stopped my beta training and started training my brother instead.

I never found out what reasons he gave them for me being unworthy but the part that hurt me the most was that Grayson didn't fight for me. He stood in the room with me while my stepfather delivered the news which changed the whole course of my future in a cold and detached manner.

I remember that moment with crystal clear clarity, I remember begging them to let me prove myself worthy. I was a strong fighter and an even better strategist, I knew I could ace any test they threw at me but nobody would give me a chance. I remember looking towards Grayson for support because he had seen me fight on many occasions in training and yet he wouldn't even look at me.

That was the moment that I stopped believing in fairy tales and started hitting the books. I wasn't going to sit around and wait for anyone else to save me. I was going to work hard and I was going to save myself. That was why I pushed myself to graduate high school over a year early and that was why I now had three full scholarship offers. If only I could tell my heart to stop missing a beat everytime I laid eyes on Grayson then my life would be right on track.

"Oh my god Molly, you are such a geek." Ezra said, pulling me back to the present.

"Don't be so mean to your sister." Grayson said.

I bit my tongue, it was far too late for him to start trying to stand up for me now. I would be so glad to leave this place in a few months time and with any luck I would never have to come back again.

"Of course. I will head to school now." Ezra said. He smiled and waved at Grayson before leaving us alone. He didn't normally act that polite even around his friends, he was so fake.

"I am not sure where my stepfather is but I can call him and let him know you are here." I said. I wanted to get this over and done with as quickly as possible.

"I wanted to talk to you actually." He said, indicating for me to join him on the sofa.

I wanted to say no. I wanted to tell him that there was nothing for us to talk about but I was still a member of this pack and he was still my future alpha. I sat down on the sofa next to him making sure to put as much distance between us as the small two seater sofa would allow. Hopefully that would be enough distance to make sure that I was thinking clearly.

"How can I help you?" I asked, keeping my tone formal but polite.

I looked at him. That was a huge mistake. He was looking at me directly and I was hit with the full force of his brilliantly blue eyes and stunning smile. I could feel my heart skip a beat before picking up again at a much higher rate. I am sure that Grayson could hear it too but thankfully he didn't acknowledge it.

"Your brother came to me last night and told me about your college application." He said

"Oh." I replied.

Of course he was fucking did. He had already ruined so much in my life and now he wanted to take this away from me too. There was no way that I was going to let that happen, I had worked too hard for this. At some point you have to stand your ground and this was my time to do just that.

"Have you told the alpha about your applications?" He asked me.

There was something in his eyes which I had never seen before, it almost looked as though he was nervous. That can't be right. Alphas don't usually get nervous, I must be imagining it.

"No. I didn't think anyone would mind though. It isn't as though anyone wants me around anyway." I said. Saying those words out loud hurt. I may have known that I was unwanted for a long time but it still hurt to admit it so bluntly.

"You are not and you will never be unwanted." Grayson said.

"How can you say that? My stepfather took away my position in this pack and has since done everything he can to make me feel unwelcome. My half brother and his friends bully me relentlessly and the rest of the pack pretend I don't exist." I said.

I could have said more. I could have told him how there were rumours about why I lost my position and these rumours had caused me to be ostracised from my friends. I could have also told him that until my mom's death I had been the most popular girl in school and now I had a grand total of zero friends. In a way I wanted him to know what his inaction had cost me but in the end I decided to keep it to myself. If I started off down that particular rabbit hole I would probably end up crying my eyes out in front of him. As though this whole conversation wasn't embarrassing enough.

"I am so sorry." He said.

He started reaching out to comfort me but at the last moment he changed his mind and put his hand back onto his own lap. I could tell that he was waiting for me to respond but to be honest I didn't have a clue what to say. The silence in the room was starting to become oppressive.

"So now you know why I want to leave." I said. He nodded his head in agreement.

"I can understand it but that doesn't mean I like it." He said. He looked as though he was a million miles away, deep in thought. We sat there for a few minutes, him thinking and me trying to avoid looking into his beautiful blue eyes.

"Maybe we should see what my father thinks about this." He said.

He stood up and held his hands out for me. I hadn't realised that he meant to do this now but it was as good a time as any. I took a hold of his hands and let him pull me to my feet.

We were standing so close together that I could feel his breath on my skin and smell his scent, he smelled like the forest in the middle of summer. I could hear his heartbeat, it was racing almost as much as mine was. We were so close that I could kiss him, all it would take would be for me to tilt my head slightly and lean forward.

Maybe the old me would have taken that chance. She wouldn't have cared that Grayson was our future alpha. She was brave and confident, she would have kissed Grayson without a second of hesitation but that felt like another life.

I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks as I started to blush. He was so close to me and as much as I didn't want this moment to end I needed to get some space from him so I could think more clearly. I tried to put some distance between us but he was still holding my hands. He was running his fingers over the back of my hands while looking at me intently. Was he thinking about kissing me too?

"I, erm" I stuttered. He smiled at me. His smile seemed kind and genuine but in reality he was probably thinking I was a complete idiot.

"I know. We should get going." He said reluctantly. He held my hands for a moment longer before letting go and heading towards the door. I followed him, I was still shaken but at least now that we weren't so close I could think more clearly. I can't believe that I almost threw myself at the future alpha, how embarrassing. I cringed thinking what Ezra would say if he ever found out about this.

As we are the beta family we lived next door to the alpha's mansion, although their house makes ours look like a dolls house in comparison. We started to walk the short distance between the two houses in silence. Grayson looked relaxed so I decided to spend the walk appreciating my surroundings.

I had a feeling that after today things would never be the same for me regardless of the outcome of this conversation. Whether I left this place forever or I was trapped here I would never look at this place the way I saw it now. It was the middle of spring, the days were getting longer and life was starting to return to the world. It was still cold but then again this is Alaska so it is always cold. I loved this time of year, it was probably what I would miss the most if I was allowed to leave this place.

I followed Grayson into his dad's office. His dad was sitting at his desk staring at the screen of his computer with his head leaning on one of his hands. He looked a lot like his son but his hair was starting to grey and he looked a lot rougher around the edges. I guess that is what happens when you have to run a pack and a large business at the same time. I couldn't help but feel sorry for him for that.

Usually an alpha hands over the alpha title to their son or daughter before taking over the business but in order for that to happen the future alpha has to meet their mate. Grayson was twenty one and he was still searching for his mate, he had visited every pack and there was still no sign of her. Most people thought that this was because she was still under eighteen and so the bond was still inactive but that didn't make things easy for our current alpha.

"Hi dad, I need your help with something." Grayson said.

His father stopped what he was doing and immediately turned his attention towards his son. I felt a pang of jealousy, it had been years since anyone had been so willing to listen to me.

"Molly has been accepted to study bioinformatics at the University of Alaska Anchorage." Grayson said.

My eyes shot in his direction. I hadn't expected him to know that many details about my course let alone remember them. It made me feel important, I wasn't used to feeling that way. Maybe I had been judging him too harshly these last couple of years, maybe he wasn't as bad as my stepbrother and his friends after all.

"That is very impressive but I am afraid you know pack policy in these matters. We can't fund further education unless there is a tangible benefit to the pack." Alpha Ward said.

"I don't need funding, I have a full scholarship. All I need is your permission to study outside of our pack." I said.

"Well I don't see any real..." Alpha Ward started before he was interrupted by a mindlink from his son. I could tell that they were mindlinking each other because of the way they were looking at each other. Alpha Ward was looking at his son with interest while Grayson looked stressed. I was angry, it was beyond rude to have a secret conversation about me when I was still in the room. Not that I dare say that to them.

"I have decided. You can go." Alpha Ward said. I could feel the smile spreading across my face.

"No. You can't do that." Grayson shouted. He looked absolutely horrified, causing my anger to surface again. A few minutes ago I was on the verge of giving him the benefit of the doubt over what happened in the past. Was I really that gullible? This man seems determined to ruin my life and I seem determined to let him.

Now I know what he is like. Even when he seems to care he is only looking for a way to stab me in the back. I am never going to trust him again and I am never going to let him make me feel like this again.

"I can't hold her back just because of what you think Grayson." Alpha Ward said.

"No please, you can't let her go." Grayson pleaded while I stood perfectly still. I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of knowing he had upset me.

"That is enough, I have made my decision. I do have a few conditions though." Alpha Ward said.

"Of course." I replied.

"Firstly, you have to come home for the summer holidays at the very least." I nodded my head in agreement.

"Secondly, you are still a member of this pack so you will need to attend pack events as usual and if the pack needs you then you have to do what is required." He said.

"Of course alpha." I said, trying my best to keep my excitement in check. It wouldn't be long before I could escape this place and get on with my life. With any luck I could complete my qualifications and get a job far away from this pack. Then I would never have to see any of them again.