

## Dressed for Distress

[Six Years Later]

[Bellamy]

I sighed deeply as I watched Molly, Charlie, and April chattering about what accessories would go best with each of the four dresses we were trying on. They were making this process take a lot longer than it should. But it was for Cara, and I would do anything for her, even if it meant listening to torturously inane conversation while trying on bridesmaid dresses.

A few months ago, Cara had gone with her father and brother to renegotiate some alliances and treaties with nearby packs. She hadn't found her mate at seventeen, but didn't want to wait for the next regional singles gathering. They went to three nearby packs and she wanted to see if her mate was in one of them.

She found him in Lune Rouge. His name was Caleb Petit and he's the future Beta of his pack. When she found him, she called me and squealed and told me everything about him. I knew the exact shade of hazel his eyes were, how silky his blond hair was, how strong he was, how tall he was, how broad he was, how amazing he looked without his shirt on. I could probably pick him out of a crowd, her description was so detailed.

Now, we were trying on her top four choices for bridesmaid dresses and the wedding was in a couple months. The seamstresses in the pack had volunteered to focus only on Cara's wedding party while the ones in Lune Rouge worked only on her dress.

They were excited because no one in the ranked levels of that pack had found a mate in years. At nineteen, Caleb was the oldest of the next generation of leaders, but his mate hadn't appeared. I could imagine the worry, since Cara told me the others were all seventeen or eighteen and hadn't found theirs either.

The marriage would strengthen the bond between our packs. Maybe that was what the goddess had been going for. Maybe Lune Rouge was going to be too weak on its own and needed the connection to other packs. It wasn't really my concern.

My biggest concern was getting these girls to pick a f\*\*\*\*g dress so I could go do my ward patrol. A couple years ago, my vampire friend, Talia, had ended up in our region again and I fed her in exchange for setting up vampire wards. She'd stayed for a while to train with me and my boys. Once the number of rogues in our area lessened, we saw fewer hunters coming along, and a rise in vampires. It kind of evened it out.

Every three days, in the evening, I had to go add a couple drops of blood to the wards to keep them running. It was like a shield that made vampires avoid the area. I wasn't really familiar with vampire magic, but I would liken it to my own barrier. The one that marked the edges of my territory and kept the more violent rogues away.

"Ladies, could we please, move it along? I have places to be." I growled.

"Sorry, Amy." They chorused.

I could hear them mind linking to each other about why I was so grouchy. I'd gotten my links under control soon after I was connected to the pack, but I found I could hear mind links between people if I was in the same room as both of them. It was like being able to hear people whispering all around you.

'She's probably just jealous of Cara. Amy's mate hasn't shown up in the whole year since her shift. I heard her and Cara talking about some guy named Kyle who Amy thought would come for her, but he didn't. Guess she wasn't his mate after all.' April linked the others and they tittered as they nished dressing.

I rolled my eyes. Kyle was still out there. He'd sent me offers more frequently since I turned seventeen. I got one every three months. My reputation was the only thing keeping him from coming for me.

He'd killed his father and taken over the collective, but I'd managed to take and hold one of the three largest packs in the region since I was twelve. I'd even expanded my territory to include two nearby cities. It was enough to make any male think twice about trying to pressure me into anything.

We nally had our last votes in on the dresses and ended up with the second option. A t and are dress with a sweetheart neckline and was designed to end mid-shin. It went lower on me, as the shortest, but t the other girls perfectly. When they made mine, it would t similar to theirs. I had my measurements taken, dressed in my jeans and t-shirt, and ran out the door.

I stopped at a guard house to drop off my phone and headed for the nearest post, it was a couple miles outside my rogue border. It took a while to get to each binding area, and I didn't make it to the last one until full dark.

After I nished adding three drops of blood into the mark Talia left, I turned to go grab my phone and head home. I still had to spend some time in my oce working on rogue issues and requests. First, I would stop in the kitchen. Yuri would've made sure I had something wrapped up in the fridge and I was hungry.

I hadn't even gotten two steps when I heard voices from the other side of the vampire border. They rarely got this close, the magic made them avoid our territory like the plague. I ducked behind a tree to listen.

"... so funny when he gets all growly. Like, I can't stop laughing when he says he's going to kill us. Doesn't he realize he's never getting free?" A female laughed.

"Alphas are like that. They believe they'll get the upper hand somehow, it's really fun to watch as they get weaker and nally realize it won't happen. He's nearly there. We just need a little something to keep us held over. He's powerful, but not enough for how little we're allowed to drink." A male responded.

How had they gotten an Alpha? Maybe it was an ex-pack Alpha. They were rare, but they existed. I sniffed and could tell they'd fed on someone powerful recently.

"When I was here last, around fty years ago, I'd nd teenage wolves necking nearby. There's a little grove of trees with soft grass. You know how nature makes the furballs horny." The man snickered.

"A couple teens might be nice. Something sweet and young to counter the old guy."

"He's not that old, precious. As you age, you'll understand. He's at the peak of his power. This is when they taste best. You'll see, we'll nd a young one and you'll taste the difference." The male chided.

I heard them moving away. My mind was working to gure out what I should do. An Alpha, no matter his aliations, wasn't a safe thing to let them drain. If they decided to turn him, it would be very dangerous for all the packs in the area. I had no idea how many were in their brood. If the Alpha was too drained, he wouldn't be much help.

My vow to the pack rang in my ears. I promised to take care of them and to defend them when I joined. If Kieran heard this, he'd try to nd out where they were hiding the Alpha as a point of pride. Pack wolves and their hero complexes.

'You should go. We can't defend against an Alpha turned vampire. If you kill their sire, they'll die. Remember what the little bloodsucker said.' Aurora, my wolf, told me.

'Stop calling Talia 'the little bloodsucker'.' I groaned internally.

'Stop being a wimp. Go save the wolf. Even if he isn't one of ours, he's one of our people. Plus, you might be able to get rid of most of the vamps who are stalking our territory. What if one of the pups wanders out this way looking for adventure one night? What if Dilly comes out here with one of his boyfriends? Are you prepared for losing pack members because of this?'

She had a point. Dillon would often come to the woods with a guy who was on the DL and have some fun. He'd told me about the place the male vampire was talking about. It was one of his favorites. My youth elites were always daring each other to do something stupid. That gave me an idea.