

## Warm Welcome

Kelsey

A pair of crystal blue eyes staring directly at me from across the field caught my attention. I'd recognize those eyes anywhere. They were burned into my memory like they belonged there, haunting me in my dreams for the past four and a half years.

I watched him until he finally disappeared into the forest. I could feel Asher whip his head in the direction that I was so consumed in, silently acknowledging what had just happened.

What a fucking asshole.

Why was I expecting anything different from a douchebag Alpha who rejected his mate on her birthday? I know he saw me, I caught him staring directly at me. I was sure that he had felt it too, the invisible magnet tugging to pull us together. He could have at least come over as the pack Alpha and acknowledged me after four and a half years.

I shook my head, trying to replace my irrational thoughts with the fact that I now had Eric in my life, a true gentleman through and through. I didn't care about Alpha Blake. Right? If he wanted to avoid me, then I would happily let him.

"So whatcha say Kels? The Wolf's Den tonight like old times?", Asher repeats. I'm sure he noticed that I've been distracted since I saw Blake across the field a few moments ago.

"Ahh yeah... just a couple of drinks though. My check-in with Alpha Max is in the morning and I'd rather not sabotage my chances of a smooth meeting by showing up reeking like I had just gone on a bender", I admit.

Asher's eyes crinkled at the corners as he let out a full-fledged belly laugh, "Who you? Never! I think Alpha Max already knows your trouble, Kels, he did watch you grow up".

I couldn't help the playful growl that bounced off of my chest, immediately knowing what he was referring to, "I do believe fine sir, that it was you who convinced Mia and I to steal those tractors".

A smirk quickly formed on Asher's face, "I never told you two psychos to drive them into the lake! That was all your own doing".

Mia was like a sister to me. Her family had transferred to Crimson Pack when she was in high school. All of my favorite stories in Blackclaw had her involved in one way or another. Since graduating from business and administration at the nearby college, she took over her parents' café in town. Even though we spoke daily on the phone, I hadn't seen her for almost five years. When I finally got unpacked into my old bedroom, I couldn't resist the mouth-watering smell of the pecan pie sifting in the kitchen. My father told me that it was Mia's mother who had actually brought it over as a welcome home gesture. I had come out to the training field to come find her and thank her for the pie and there was still no trace of her anywhere.

"Yeah, yeah. As if you don't remember when you almost set the pack house on fire. Clearly, Alpha Max forgave you for that one", I shot back holding up my finger like I was scolding a child.

Suddenly, I felt slim arms wrap me from behind, "So this is what the entire pack is buzzing about". I turned toward the brunette beauty and threw my arms around her, "MIA! I've been looking everywhere for you! AH! I missed you so much".

Asher piped up, "if you move back home, you won't have to miss anyone anymore" and winked at me before he took his exit towards the pack house.

"Augh, that man doesn't know how gorgeous he is I swear. I don't know how you two haven't ever hooked up. I would've been all over that like honeybees to honey", Mia whispered into my ear.

I rolled my eyes, "Ugh Asher?! He's like a brother to me! Just ask him out already, he won't bite, I promise".

Asher was definitely attractive, his entire body was shredded and he had gorgeous amber eyes that I was sure glowed when he was excited about something. He had dark blonde hair in a crew cut and had enough tattoos for the entire pack. I don't know how I would have survived Alpha Blake's rejection without him basically holding my hand every step of the way. He had called every day for a year until he took the Beta position. I knew that Mia had always had the hots for Asher. I guess not much has changed since I've been gone.

Mia insisted that I had to come check out the renovations she had done to the café, The Aroma Mocha. She was adamant that I had to try their supposed legendary caramel latte that they were known for, which was undoubtedly the closest thing I have ever tasted to liquid gold. She was one of those friends that no matter how much time had passed, you instantly pick up where you left off like it was just yesterday that you saw each other. I didn't have to ask twice if she wanted to come to the Wolf's Den. She got all giddy like a school girl, apparently the guy she had been dating for the past three months is in a band that was performing tonight at the bar. I could tell she was really into this guy already.

Just as we were getting up from the table to leave, Mark entered with a few of his enforcer buddies who all gawked at Mia and I like we were their next dinner. Mark squeezed my cheek, causing it to turn red just like he did when we were kids, which resulted in me to dramatically roll my eyes. "If it isn't the ghost of Blackclaw herself, sorry I couldn't come pick you up with mom and dad, baby sis", he said.

I wanted to lash out with some smart ass comment since my cheek was still pulsing, but I didn't have the heart. It just felt so nice to be here, to finally be home and with the people I loved. Instead, I raised my hands up in surrender, "I heard you had pack training Mr. Big-Shot-Enforcer".

He stifled a laugh and shook his head, "Don't you know it Kels. Some of us around here have to protect this pack. Speaking of which, Alpha Max wanted me to let you know that while you're in Blackclaw, you're expected to train with the warriors".

If looks could kill, I was certain that Mark would have been dead by now. "Really?", I whined. "I just got here after five years and he throws me into pack training already? How is that fair?"

He flashed me a sympathetic smile, "don't shoot the messenger: 3pm tomorrow" and returned to his buddies whose eyes could have very well rolled out of their heads if they stared any longer.

Mia and I quickly retreated to my parents' house to get ready for what was supposed to be a laidback night out. I decided to wear my new black long sleeve bodysuit which conveniently plunged down so low that I opted to go braless, with a short black leather skirt. Mia had curled my hair into these beautiful soft beachy waves that I could never seem to get right when I tried to do it myself. I finished it all off with a sharp cat eye to showcase my eyes and my favorite shade of nude lipstick. I stopped in front of the body-length mirror in my bedroom to check out the final results. Perfect, I muttered to myself.

Mia narrowed her eyes at me as she did her make-up in the mirror and bit her lip, "if I didn't know any better I'd think you were trying to be seen by someone tonight".

I could feel the heat penetrating on my face. Fuck, was it that obvious? I didn't care about Blake anymore, but was it bad that I just wanted a taste of sweet revenge? The fact that he didn't even bother to come over and say hello today on the field still infuriated me. "It's my first night back in five years. Is it too much to ask to look presentable?"

"Presentable? Girl, you look like an entire happy meal. Guys are going to be drooling all damn night", she said and tossed her head back in a laugh.

Mia puckered her lips together and stood up in the mirror to take a final look, "not too bad", she said under her breath. I'd given Mia a dress to borrow which seemed to look better on her than it ever did on me. She wore a short white bandage dress that emphasized every single curve on her body. The white dress contrasted against her long natural bouncy dark brown curls that I had always been envious of and her glimmering light green eyes. She reminded me of one of those exotic supermodels you would see on TV.

I was thrilled that the walk was short and sweet, but I felt my wolf getting restless for no apparent reason. We approached a glowing sign at the corner of the block that read "The Wolf's Den". The line to get into the bar had wrapped around the building. I shot Mia a concerned look and began to complain, "you do realize by the time we get inside, it'll already be last call". It had been clear that this place had become extremely popular, but I didn't spend the last couple of hours dolling myself up to stand in a line all night.

A huge hand grasped mine and pulled me towards the door abruptly, "Not when you're with the band", a low husky voice taunted. Whoever this dude was, held both Mia and I's hands, one on each side. We approached the front of the line and a bulky bouncer nodded at him, "Band is here!", he belted out to the man in the all-black suit behind him. "Have a great nice ladies", he said as he unclipped the velvet rope, side stepping and granting us access into the bar.

The Wolf's Den hadn't changed a bit since the last time I was here, the entire place had a rustic vibe to it. Once we got inside, Mia grabbed the back of this guy's neck and impatiently kissed him. Serious PDA alert, I thought to myself. After a few moments of watching them exchange spit, Mia pulled back and turned to me. "Kelsey, this is my boyfriend, Jake. Jake, this is THE Kelsey I've been telling you about!" He pulled me into a tight hug, "welcome home", he whispered in my ear.

Mia and I gutted straight towards the bar while Jake took off to get ready for his set, "two tequilas!", she shouted to the buff bartender. He slid over the tequila shots with a lemon rimmed on each glass and smiled at Mia, "I got it, it's on me".

I gave Mia a knowing smirk but didn't dare to say anything as she passed me my shot. She lifted up the tequila shot and cheered, "just like old times" and clinked her glass with mine. I enjoyed the burning sensation of the tequila running down my throat for a moment before I stuffed the lemon into my mouth.

A group of people we went to high school with starting gathering around us, each one insisting on buying another round. Ugh, there's no way I'm going to make my meeting with Alpha Max tomorrow morning sober. While it was nice to see so many familiar faces, Mia could tell that I was being overcrowded. I lippped "thank you" to her when she asked me to come with her to the washroom.

We strolled into the ladies' room quickly and touched up our makeup, neither of us actually needing to use the washroom. "I swear that bartender definitely has the hots for you", I teased as we walked out of the washroom, both of us breaking out into a laughing fit.

"ARIZONA!" came shooting from my right side and I turned to see Asher enthusiastically standing up from his chair at the table that was too close for comfort. I forgot to breathe when my eyes shot past him and locked with Blake's. Oh shit, this is how this is going down. This is not how I expected this play out. Blake looked like a deer in headlights and I was pretty sure I had an identical look pasted to my face.

My wolf was howling inside, desperate to rise to the surface and claim her mate. In that brief moment, I noticed the silver swirls in Blake's mesmerizing blue eyes. His wolf was pushing forward too. What was going on? He rejected me almost five years ago, I shouldn't still feel this way about him.

Asher looped his large arms around my waist and pulled me close to his body so I could hear him over the loud music, "Give me five minutes to get away from work, I gotta buy you a drink".

Just then the other man that was sitting with them, pushed his beer up to his lips and said "come on Asher, you're going to keep these beauties all to yourself?" His eyes bolted up and down my body, I had felt violated like he had just eye fucked me right there.

My wolf immediately picked on his strong Alpha aura, he demanded dominance on a level that almost made me shutter. Admittedly, he was strikingly handsome. He was tanned and jacked, he had dark purple eyes that made him look dangerous and a faded buzz cut. I could feel Asher's hesitation rolling off of him when he struggled to introduce us, "Well, this is my old friend Kelsey and Mia from Crimson Pack. Kelsey, Mia: this is Alpha Theo of the Black Moon Pack and his beta, Luke. You already know Alpha Blake obviously, so I'll skip the introduction there".

My heart was pounding outside of my chest being so close to Blake, all those memories that I'd fought so hard to forget came pouring down. I had to ignore the urge I had to jump over the high top table that they were sitting at and throw my body against his. That same chiselled and rock-hard body that lit something explosive deep inside of me.

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## Night On The Town

Mia and I quickly retreated to my parents' house to get ready for what was supposed to be a laidback night out. Mom had dragged Dad to get ready in the city she had been talking about for months which left us home alone to get ready. I decided to wear my new black long sleeve bodysuit which conveniently plunged down so low that I opted to go braless, with a short black leather skirt. Mia had curled my hair into these beautiful soft beachy waves that I could never seem to get right when I tried to do it myself. I finished it all off with a sharp cat eye to showcase my eyes and my favorite shade of nude lipstick. I stopped in front of the body-length mirror in my bedroom to check out the final results. Perfect, I muttered to myself.

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He quickly diverted his uncomfortable gaze onto the beer bottle label he had been playing with, avoiding making further eye contact with me at all costs as if he couldn't care less that I was standing right there.

My wolf was howling ecstatically inside, immediately recognizing Alpha Blake's seductive scent of sweet butterscotch interlaced with a musky sandalwood, which she missed so much. It had been pretty much the reason why I avoided going to bakeries in Arizona, one whiff of butterscotch in the air and it felt like my heart was breaking all over again at reminder that my destined mate, the man I was fully in love with, had rejected me all those years ago.

In that brief moment, I could see silver swirls dancing in Alpha Blake's memorizing blue eyes. His wolf was pushing forward too. What was going on? Why was the bond still so strong between us?

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Just then the other man that was sitting with them, pushed his beer up to his lips and said "come on Asher, you're going to keep these beauties all to yourself?" His eyes bolted up and down my body, I had felt violated like he had just eye fucked me right there.

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My heart was pounding outside of my chest being so close to Blake, all those memories that I'd fought so hard to forget came pouring down. I had to ignore the urge I had to jump over the high top table that they were sitting at and throw my body against his. That same chiselled and rock-hard body that lit something explosive deep inside of me.

Blake lifted his beer to his lips as if he was looking for some liquid courage and before he set it back down on the high top table, he calmly nodded at me and said, "Kelsey. It's been a long time". I couldn't control the anger that was suddenly building up inside of me at his casual acknowledgement and nodded back, "not long enough" and turned my attention to Alpha Tate.

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