

Chapter 17

The closer we get to my uncle's pack, the more nervous Casen becomes. Temperance is still passed out cold in the back seat. However, I had moved to sit in the front, so I could try to work out the puzzle inside the scrapbook of horrors Casen had found.

Pulling over, we stop to get fuel. The moment the car stops and Casen climbs out and shuts the door, Temperance stirs. Malachi presses forward, nervously watching her. She blinks, rubbing her eyes, and stretches on the back seat. However, the moment she does, she jerks wide awake.

“Nova?” she whispers, and her heart races, pounding in her chest loudly as she frantically looks around before her eyes fall on me. The seat belt that was left loose wraps awkwardly around her body, and she panics, thrashing yanking on it trying to make it release her. Leaning over the back, she freezes. I hold my hands up in a placating gesture, trying to show her I am not hurting her, and press the button on the buckle to unclip her. The moment she is released from its awkward stranglehold on her tiny body; she snatches the blanket, tugging it around her body.

Her eyes are wide as she stares at me, petrified for a second. “Your mate?” Her brows furrow like everything is coming back to her, and I can feel her confusion through the bond loud and clear. Almost like she believes she dreamed everything and expects to wake back up in the cage.

“I’m right here,” I tell her as she presses back against the seat, her knees tucked to her chest when Casen returns, opening the door. She jumps, scooting across the seat back toward me to get away from him. “I didn’t know what she would like, do you think—” Casen’s words cut off when he notices she is awake and he hesitates to climb back in the car.

“It’s Casen, my friend. Remember, Temperance?” I ask. I hate seeing her so confused, like she has trouble differentiating between hallucinations and reality. Temperance nods slowly, her eyes wide as Casen waits for me to tell him to get in the car.

“I am going to climb over the seat and into the back with you.” I tell her, unclipping my belt. Her pink and blue eyes dart to me, and I move between the seats, she watches me warily and it irritates Malachi how skittish she is toward us. He understands her fear. We lived it for years alongside her, she is untrusting, and since we still can’t sense either of her wolves, we know this is not only a new experience for her, but one where she knows she is completely vulnerable and on her own.

I fall into the seat beside her. Her nose twitches as she sniffs the air, inspecting my scent, like she thinks I am not who I say I am. Finally, she exhales. And I do too. I nod to Casen, he climbs in the car and I don’t miss the way her eyes track his every move, her heart rate spiking when he shuts the door. “He won’t hurt you, we have just stopped to get fuel and food,” I tell her.

Casen opens the bag, taking out a sandwich and bottle of water before turning in his seat to hand the bag to me. He gives her a small smile, and I take the bag from him. Rummaging through the bag, I offer her a bottle of water. Her eyes on it, she hesitantly takes it pressing back against the seat as far as it allows.

“I didn’t know what she likes, so I bought...”

“Half the store.” I chuckle at him, opening the bag to find nearly every pie, sausage, and sandwich you could think of. I set it between us waiting for her to grab something, but she is too busy trying to open the cap on the bottle. Her hands shaking and knuckles pressed tightly under the skin as she tries to twist the cap off before resorting to bringing it to her mouth. Reaching over, she stops looking at me, pinching the cap between two fingers as she clutches the bottle, I twist the cap cracking it.

“I don’t like how weak she is, she can’t even open a bottle,” Malachi growls.

“She’ll grow stronger, plus she is used to Nova and Shadow doing everything, I don’t think she has spent this long in control of her own body,” I remind my wolf. Malachi growls in my head, upset at my words. Temperance drinks her water and I pick up and offer her food, holding them out to her, but she declines. Yet I can tell she is hungry, feel it through the bond and hear her stomach gurgling, yet she only holds a death grip on her water bottle.

“Eat Temperance. Take what you want,” I tell her, but she shakes her head.

“Why won’t she eat?” Malachi demands, and I notice Casen’s eyes dart to us in the back, they flit to her worriedly and even he tries to coax her to take something; still she refuses.

“If you eat, Nova might return faster,” I tell her, and she looks at me but shakes her head.

“What will you make her do for it?” she asks me and my eyes move to Casen’s in the mirror. His eyes flicker as her words slowly sink in.

It sickens me that her pack would use food against her. “They made you do things to earn food?”

“I... I don’t know. I think so.” She looks confused, and I can feel it through the bond.

“How do you not know?” I ask.

“Nova.” She glances down at her lap nervously, playing with the cap of the water bottle. Her shame hits me like a slap in the face. “She used to pretend to be me, I...think they did things to her if we needed food. I don’t remember eating except the other day,”

I glance at Casen, my teeth clenching at her words. Grabbing a sandwich from the hoard Casen brought back to the car, I open it, setting it in her lap.

“Eat!” I order. I hated commanding her, but she needs to learn she doesn’t have to do anything in return for basic necessities, and until her wolves come back, I know she would have held off on eating.

Tears stream down her face as she is forced to eat, and I reach over to her, gripping her hand that has a death grip on the water bottle.

“You don’t need to fear us, we won’t hurt you, Nova or Shadow,” I tell her, and she looks at me.

“Shadow...” she breathes out.

“Your other wolf,” I tell her. But I can feel confusion once again.

“You said Nova pretended to be you?” she nods, guilt flooding to me, and it makes me angry that she feels that way when she glances at me.

“Remember, she can feel us, it will feel foreign to her, Eziah. Keep your emotions in check,” Malachi snarls at me. I bite back the urge to reply to him, instead taking a deep breath.

“Nova?” I ask her again.

“My wolf, she answers. But I suppose Shadow is my wolf too?” She looks at me like she needs me to verify that. Malachi presses forward, and I feel Casen’s eyes on us in the mirror.

“Yes, Shadow is your wolf. Did you not know?” I ask her, she shakes her head.

“No, I used to talk to her. Satish used to talk to her, I thought...” she shakes her head. “I saw her cage.”

“There was a mirror in the basement. What you could see was yourself.” My mother's words once again return to me from all those years ago, and

her confusion only proves them right. She isn't of sound mind, but I don't care. I still want her.

"Did Satish talk to Nova too?" She chews her lip, but shakes her head, and I watch her for a second.

"Did Satish know Nova pretended to be you?" She shakes her head.

"No, I... I don't know," she answers.

"That explains why in all our dreams he always called her Temperance or Shadow, he didn't realize she had two wolves," Malachi says, and I think he is right. My mother told me her wolf's name was Nova, and until recently, I too, believed Shadow was another girl trapped down in the dark beside her.

Deciding not to question and confuse her too much, I leave her to eat. The moment she finishes, I try to offer her more, but she refuses anything else, instead huddles under the blanket. When I reach over and grip her hand, I tug on it gently.

I pull her closer before tugging her down against me. I force her to lay back down, and she rests her head in my lap. I run my fingers through her hair gently and after a few minutes she relaxes and I exhale, relieved. Resting my eyes, knowing we still have a few hours to drive before we reach my uncle's pack. However, I must admit it will be strange not having Casen by my side. I can never repay him for what he has done over the years, he stuck by me even when my family shunned me.

Hours pass, and I drift off to sleep, waking to her moving when the car stops. Opening my eyes I see we are parked by the long dirt driveway. Sitting up, Temperance peers out the window, and I notice we are at my uncle's pack parked alongside the highway. Glancing at Casen, I see him frozen in his seat, clutching the steering wheel.

"Casen?" I ask, and he jumps. I lean forward to grip his shoulder.

“You alright bro?” He glances at the long driveway and nods. It is evident he is petrified of coming back home after all this time.

“What if she refuses to speak with me?” he murmurs, and I exhale.

“Then you ring me and I come back and get you, or I can wait here, until we’re sure you can stay.” He shakes his head, glancing at Temperance.

“No, get her home. I will ring you tomorrow,” he tells me, opening the door. I open mine and move to the front of the car and pop the trunk. Casen goes to the trunk, grabbing his duffle bag and tossing it over his shoulder, and he stops in front of me.

“You’ll be fine,” I tell him, and he nods once.

“Eziah... I...” he runs his fingers through his hair.

“Whatever happened between you and Rose, it can be fixed.” But he exhales and shakes his head.

“I’m not so sure about that... What I did...”

“Was to protect her,” I tell him.

“And if it wasn’t?” he asks, and I stare at him.

“Casen.” My brows pinch. I know there is more than he has told me, more than my mother told me about that night. But his words make no sense to me.

Casen glances at the dirt driveway. “You’re right. It will be fine.” He nods before grabbing me and hugging me.

“And if it's not, you have a place in my pack.” I hug him back.

“If my fathers hand it down and decide not to kill me,” I add with a laugh.

“I’d be less worried about your fathers and more worried about your mother,” he laughs, gripping my shoulder. I smirk, knowing my mother is more feared than my fathers and for a good reason too.

“I’ll catch you later,” Casen says, and I nod. He turns, heading toward the long driveway, and I move to climb in my car. Sitting in the front seat, I see Temperance sitting up in the back.

“Climb over,” I tell her, patting the passenger seat. It takes a few moments, but reluctantly, she climbs over, and I reach over, clipping her seatbelt in before starting the car.

“Where is he going?” she asks me, watching him walk off.

“Home to his mate,” I tell her, pulling onto the road.

“And we are going to visit my sister, niece and nephew,” I tell her.

“Your sister?” she asks, her head whipping to the side to look at me.

“Your sister, as in a girl?” she asks. I laugh, glancing at her.

“I hope she is still a girl, or otherwise she is now my brother,” I tell her, pleased that her mood has seemed to brighten. .

“You seem excited,” I tell her, and she nods.

“Another girl,” she says, and I reach over, gripping her hand. She jumps but doesn’t pull away as I lift her hand to my lips. Sparks rush across my palm and up my arm, where I grip her tiny one. Pressing my lips to her knuckles, I then set it on my thigh, holding it there.

“You’ll love Marabella. She is my better half,” I chuckle, and she peers over at me.

“Better?”

“She is my twin,” I answer, glancing at her.

“Daddy told me I was a twin,” she murmurs, looking out the window.

“Do you know what happened to your twin?” I ask her. She looks out the window.

“Same thing that happened to my mother. I killed her.” I peer over at her, slowing down for the intersection.

“Your father said that?”

She shakes her head. “No, he said it wasn’t my fault, but Satish said it was. He said I killed her and my twin,” she says sadly.

Letting go of her hand, she looks out her window but doesn’t pull her hand away, so I head to the city.

Chapter 18

Casen

Tension rolls through me as I near the pack border. The place hasn't changed much since I was here. Though unfamiliar in recent years, it smells like home. It saddens me that I've been away for so long. Walking around the bend, the training grounds come into view, and I slow, hearing the running steps of the border patrol. Within seconds, they surround me, growling at me. I place my hands up in the air, dropping to my knees when a huge mated wolf, his fur graying at the end steps out of formation. He is the biggest wolf out of all of them, and I glance at him when he suddenly shifts back. The snapping of bones forces my attention to him, and he stumbles toward me as my eyes take him.

"Casen?" he murmurs, earning a growl from the other wolves. He holds up a hand to silence them.

"Malik." I smile getting to my feet, and he moves closer, instantly embracing me before holding me at arms length. Malik I hadn't seen in years, Rose having cut off all communication with the pack. This man practically raised me and Vince when the pack fell victim to a rogue attack, so seeing him after four long years threatens to overwhelm me.

"You're back?" he states, glancing over his shoulder toward the pack.

"If Rose will have me back," I tell him.

Malik glances over my shoulder and his eyes dart around. "Eziah?" he questions.

"Heading to his sister's," I answer. Yet his next words startle me.

"You shouldn't have come here, at least not without seeing Kat or speaking to Andrei first," he tells me. My brows furrow in confusion.

“Well, I am. So I want to see my mate.”

Malik shakes his head and nudges me toward the road.

“No, go Casen. It’s not a good idea you being here. You shouldn’t have come back.” I stare at the man that was like a father to me. How easily he could shun me all over again.

“Malik, step aside, I will speak with Andrei before going to see her.”

“I can’t let you do that, not after what you did.”

I press my lips in a line and shove past him, the wolves surrounding us instantly stepping into my path.

“Tell them to stand down, Malik, or I will go through them!” I snarl, and Zyan presses forward, my skin ripples at the challenge when Malik speaks behind me.

“She doesn’t want you, Casen, she’s moved on. You need to too,” he says, and my entire body tenses, I swallow turning to face him.

“I’m not leaving without speaking with her,” I tell him. If she tells me to go, I will but until then, I am not leaving. Turning back, I move toward the training grounds only to be blocked off once again.

“We know it wasn’t Vince,” Malik states, and my hands fist at my sides.

“Is that what Rose said?” I ask him. I knew she hated me, I don’t blame her, I hate myself for what I did.

“You lied to me. When I asked what happened between you and Vince, I asked and you lied.” I grit my teeth. How long were they going to hold this over me? I admitted it to Rose. I told her, I tried to make up for my mistakes, she wouldn’t let me.

“You go in there, I won’t intervene, you’ll be on your own,” Malik tells me. I nod once. “Let him through, I’ve alerted Andrei already,” Malik says, and I take a step forward.

“She lives in the same house,” Malik says, nodding to a house in the distance. The other pack members begrudge him and step aside, snarling and growling but I pay them no mind. Walking across the training grounds, the houses come into view as I reach the crest of the hill.

Home.

Although there are a few minor changes. For one, there are more houses now, a park built out the front of the packhouse that Alpha Andrei shared with his mate Luna Sage. However, my eyes move to the house at the far end where Rose moved into after she and mother had a falling out when she was seventeen. It wasn't long after her 17th Birthday, and for a while, I lived there with her. Kept watch over her until everything turned to shit. I never should have told her. Yet the guilt would not leave; it gnawed at me.

However, as I move past the packhouse, nervous glances follow me. The packhouse opens. I glance at them and curse when I see Andrei step out of the house. It was more like a fort, huge and industrial looking. Rose hated it, it's why even after she took over after her father, she never moved into the packhouse. She said it was like living in a prison.

Andrei storms out of the house and his imposing aura hits me. But I'm so used to Eziah's that I find it has barely any effect on me at all. Sage is quickly behind him, and I pause before I reach her porch steps. Glancing around, I see pack members stepping out of their homes; faces I haven't seen in years.

“You need to leave, you're not welcome here!” Andrei snarls, storming toward me. I place my hands in the air, stepping back.

“I just want to see Rose, I am not here to cause any trouble, Andrei. I just want to see my mate,” I tell him.

“No, you leave!” he bellows at me, and I glance at the house and grit my teeth. Zyan shoves forward and a furious growl escapes me as pack

members murmur and move closer to see if I will challenge my old Alpha. I stare into his eyes when I hear a child's voice, followed by a small girl who comes rushing out behind Sage.

“Poppy, poppy,” the little girl says, and I see Sage gasp, rushing toward her, but the little girl ducks. I blink at her, staring at the child, her long blonde hair hanging to her shoulders, and she reminds me of Rose when she was a child.

“Casey, inside now!” Andrei bellows, turning on his granddaughter, while all I can do is gape at her. She stops, looking at him in shock and Sage rushes to grab her hand when she looks at me. She appears to be about three to four years old, and it takes me only a second to realize she is mine.

“Daddy?” the little girl squeals, rushing toward me. Andrei moves to intervene, but I scoop her up, only when I do she pulls away from me.

“Where is mommy? Is she back from greenery?” she asks me, and I look at Andrei, who has his hands held out for her.

“Give me Casey,” Andrei snarls, but I pull away. All I can do is stare at the angelic child in my arms. Rose was pregnant when I left?

“Daddy, did you—”

“Casey, enough, you were told to stay inside,” Andrei scolds her once again, trying to take her from me.

“Give me my granddaughter,” Andrei warns.

“You all didn’t think to fucking tell me I have a daughter?” I snarl furiously.

“Rose didn’t want you to know,” Sage butts in, and I scoff, glaring at her when I hear Rose’s familiar voice echo behind me.

“What in the hell is going on?” she demands, and I turn to face her. Rose looks just as beautiful as I remember when she steps out of the trees, furious. She storms toward me, and her aura is magnificent, she truly did

become an Alpha. However, the moment she spots me, she freezes in her tracks, her eyes go to our daughter in my arms.

“Casey, come here,” Rose calls out, and she turns her little blonde head to look at her mother.

“Mommy,” she squeals, kicking her legs, wanting to be put down. I let her go and watch as she races toward her mother.

Rose is quick to snatch her up, ordering her to go inside. “But Daddy promised,” the little girl whines, and my brows furrow. She took a mate. Rose whispers something to her and nods for her mother. Sage instantly rushes in after her granddaughter.

“You need to leave, you’re not welcome here,” Rose says, pointing an accusing finger at me.

“You kept her from me,” I snap at her, and she growls at my challenge when I see the mark on her neck. My heart skips a beat as I take it in, and I swallow down the urge to hunt him down and kill him. Zyan howls in anguish in my head.

“Leave, now!” Rose demands.

“Just hear me out, I am not the only one that has explaining to do, but you.” I point at her house. “You kept my daughter from me.”

“She’s not yours, she doesn’t know, you weren’t here.”

“I would have been had I known!” I scream at her. She shakes her head, and I notice how the pack moves in around her, boxing us in. Rose rubs her temples in frustration.

“I don’t want to hear excuses, Casen. It is unforgivable what you did, and then to lie about it. To all of us!” she screams back at me.

Tears well in her eyes. “I loved you, loved Vince!” she screams.

“But you ruined everything,” she says, shaking her head. “I can’t trust you, not anymore, and certainly not with our daughter,” she snarls. Her words hurt, like she carved out my chest and ripped my heart out.

Hearing voices, everyone looks to the treeline, including Rose. A panicked look takes over her face, and I don’t miss the gasp that escapes her. I can’t take my eyes off the mark on her neck.

“Is that your new mate?” I snarl as we hear the voice grow nearer. She says nothing, and I growl, feeling Zyan shove forward furiously. He is outraged that she claimed another. That she let another man raise *our* daughter. I shove past her, moving toward the sound where men are talking, oblivious to what they’re walking into.

Hands suddenly grab me, and Zyan reacts, turning on his heel and hitting them. Andrei stumbles back, clutching his face as Rose shrieks and Andrei growls menacingly. His body ripples as he starts to shift. Rose, however, is quick to get between us.

When I hear her mate call out to her and the sound of footsteps growing closer. “Rose?” the voice says, and I try to remember where I’d heard that voice before.

“What’s going on?” people start murmuring and glancing behind me. I turn, a vicious snarl tearing out of me when I come face to face with her new mate.

I stagger back, horrified at what I am seeing when Casey squeals excitedly. Once again escaping Sage’s watch.

“Daddy, Daddy,” she squeals and he turns to face her.

“Back inside Case, go on,” she pauses, glancing between me and him. I can’t seem to wrap my head around it, can’t fathom what I am seeing. Goosebumps rush over my skin and it suddenly makes sense of why Malik is angry, why all of them hate me.

Casey looks up at me curiously, and the man she has called father for years.

“Rose take her,” he orders, and I take a step forward, looking at my own mirror reflection.

“Vince?” I murmur, my heart races in my chest. I shake my head. “No, you... you’re dead!”

“If you had your way I would have been,” he says, his voice low and menacing .I stare back at my brother, the man who is a mirror image of me. Yet he’s also different. It is like seeing a ghost, one of my past. Bile rises up my throat, yet relief that he’s alive fills me. I take a step toward him, sure my eyes are deceiving me.

“Don’t... Casen. Not after what you did, and then to point the blame at me.” He shakes his head and I swallow guiltily.

“I made a mistake,” I tell him.

“A mistake? You fucking killed me! If it wasn’t for Kat, I’d be dead!” he screams, taking a step toward me. Rose places a hand on his chest, and he stops, my eyes go to her hand.

“Vince,” she whispers, glancing back at her house where Casey stands on the porch. Sage is trying to get her in the house.

“No, Rose. Go, go inside.” He nods toward the house. Rose gives me one last parting glance, and I move to stop her, but Vince steps in my path and growls.

“Move, Vince.”

“Or what? You’ll throw me off another cliff. All because you couldn’t handle that I was her mate too?”

Zyan growls.

“What lies will you tell this time, Casen?”

“For years, I watched from the shadows, trapped that way. Fucking years!” he screams at me. His words confuse me, and I glance around at everyone. “All because I tried to stop you from marking her, yet you told everyone it was me that kidnapped her when it was you. The only thing I did wrong was try to protect her from you,” he snarls, and within seconds, Zyan shoves forward at his challenge and shifts.