

CHAPTER 3: MEN AND MONSTERS

LILY'S POV:

I had only escaped today by the skin of my teeth. Whatever I had faced at Gold Crest was child's play compared to what the bluebloods at Shadow Cove academy were prepared to do to me.

Like mindless sheep they had taken Aiden's words as law and set out to get me. I had hid in the girl's toilet for most of today, where I knew the boys couldn't follow me.

The girls hadn't been too interested in getting their hands dirty. Satisfied with watching and snickering as I was practically hounded around school.

By tomorrow, when everybody has heard of the greenlight Aiden gave, things are going to become much worse.

I winced as I tied the apron around my waist, holding a hand over my spleen where a baseball bat had grazed my abdomen. I was sore all over. My feet were throbbing from running around the fucking school. I have been tripped more times than I can count and I had barely attended classes today.

Is this how it's going to be? Is this what I'm going to face in every institution I find myself?

My lips trembled. I was going to break down in pieces and cry my eyes out.

"What's the matter, hermosa?" I heard my best friend holler as she walked into the ownershop.

I glanced up and saw her taking off her wool hat, coily chocolate brown hair tumbling over chocolate brown skin. Dark brown eyes pierced mine as if she was trying to see through my soul.

Bia has been my best friend for almost two years, as human as they come. Since I dropped out of Gold Crest and started a homeschool curriculum with my mother, she insisted I needed some social interaction. And because nobody in Shadow Cove was going to dream of befriending me, I decided to look for day jobs outside the protected walls of Shadow Cove.

Every week for the past two years, I take a thirty minutes bus drive to Theo blooms ower shop to work and get my social x.

"I'll tell Theo to lay off of you today. You look like you need a minute." She frowned, "do you need a minute?"

I gave her a shaky smile and shook my head.

Theo, the owner of the ower shop we work in could be her stepfather but he would never tolerate a worker slacking off on the job.

Her frown deepened. She placed her hands on her curvy hips and opened her mouth to say something but was interrupted by Theo coming in through the backdoor with a basket of fresh owers.

"Who needs a minute?" He asked, pushing up his bespectacled glasses.

"Lily needs a minute."

His concerned brown eyes looked me up and down. "Do you need a minute?"

"I DON'T NEED A MINUTE!" I yelled, so close to pulling out my hair.

He huffed, giving me the basket to arrange the owers in their respective bouquets.

I winced in pain when I grabbed the basket, not realizing it was heavier than it looked but I masked the pain like a pro, succeeding in placing the basket down in front of me without dropping it and making a mess of things.

It hadn't gone unnoticed by Bia and Theo. Bia immediately came to my side and shoved my tank top up, revealing the brown and purplish bruise that was forming below my ribs.

"What the hell, Lil! How did you get this?!"

I pushed her away and shoved my shirt back down, shooting her an ugly look. "I got it at school. It was an accident."

"Seemed pretty intentional to me," Theo said, looking at me in shock. "Didn't you just start school at that fancy academy? Was that where you got this?"

My lips trembled at the worried look in their eyes and I cracked open like an egg. "Yes, it was."

I was immediately swarmed by their array of questions.

"What?!"

"Why?"

"That's it! I'm running up on those motherfuckers!"

"Language, Bianca!"

"Sorry, Theodore," Bia muttered, not sorry at all.

I sighed and sat down, wincing slightly at the sharp pain that shot through me at the action. "The academy isn't what it's made out to be in the media," I sighed, pulling the petals off of a stray dandelion I found. "I made the mistake of mouthing off at this guy, Aiden, without thinking."

"Aiden Vanderbilt?" Bia blinked, "son of the deceased owners of Vanderbilt Corp?"

"Yup." I wasn't shocked that she knew who he was. Aiden was from the strongest and most ruthless lycan families with as much power, money and connections in the human world as they did in the werewolf world. Vanderbilt Corp was a leading fortune500 real estate business that grossed over fty billion dollars according to forbes, and Aiden was going to be the proud own of all that in the next few years.

Last I heard, his uncle was Keeping the CEO seat warm for him until he's old enough to take back his father's business. I shivered, unable to imagine how much worse Aiden would get with even more power. The little he had at the academy was already going to his head.

"He's treated like a god at the academy. His word is law. He singled me out to be bullied and the rest of the students are a little too happy following his orders."

"Bastards! All of them!" Bia hissed, pushing back a strand of coily brown hair that fell over her eyes. "I wish I was smart enough to get into that school like you did, Lily. We already know I'm too poor to even dream of going there."

I smiled sadly because even though Bia was the strongest person I knew, she was still nothing compared to the strength and might of the werewolves and vicious rich kids out for my blood. Still, I appreciated her good intentions.

"Oh well," I shrugged, mentally pumping my sts in the air when I didn't wince while standing up. "let's get to work. These bouquets won't arrange themselves."

"Stop right there, Beauregard," Theo said, stopping me in my tracks. "You're going to go back home, tend to your injury and don't even dream of coming back here until you're all healed up."

"But--"

"No buts, young lady! Bianca and I will hold things down here. Go get some rest."

With that, he booted me out of his shop.

I was up before the sun the next day. I thought that I could slip into school before the monsters start trickling in.

I was wrong.

"There she is! Get her! Don't let her escape this time!"

Fear seized my heart for a second before I kickstarted my legs to get me the f**k out of there.

Like yesterday, I ran into the girls' bathroom, thinking they would have the common courtesy to not follow me in.

My lungs ached from the unnecessary cardio and the injury in my abdomen ached up again.

I locked myself in one of the stalls, sitting on the clean tiles and hugging my knees to my chest, praying to every deity out there that they don't come in and nd me.

The deities must have been deaf because somebody kicked the door the my stall, knocking it right off it's hinges.

Three boys with spiky brown hair grinned down at me, maliciously. "You didn't think you could hide from us, did you?" One of them asked as the other two grabbed me kicking and screaming out of the stall.

I thought they were going to beat me up like they did yesterday, but oh god, what they had in mind was a lot worse.

One of them, the biggest of the three, held me down while his friend ripped my blouse open, buttons ying everywhere as they guffawed at me.

"Stop!" I screamed, trying and failing to kick them off of me, my heart beating erratically in my chest.

T- This has never happened before. This has never happened to me before.

"Stop! Please!" I cried, treacherous tears falling down my cheeks.

"I heard she gave it up easy for Corrigan and just yesterday she tried to get Vanderbilt's attention." The third one said, a wicked sneer on his face as he held up his phone, recording me and my topless body. "What? You think your p**y is only good for the founders? Why don't we have a taste and see if it's even worth the hype."

I thrashed and kicked, screaming at them and trying to ght them off but they only laughed, the one that had ripped open my shirt started unbuckling his belt.

"Help!" I screamed. "Help me! They're going to rap--"

"Shut up!" He sneched me right in the head.

My face snapped to the left as the entire room swam out of focus. A piercing static sound deafened me momentarily. This is it. This is how I'm going to lose it.

I felt my body giving up the ght. All the re seemed to leave me. What's the point in ghting? I should just let them do what they wan--

Suddenly, the door pushed open and the boys stopped from pushing up my skirt.

"What's going on here?"

That voice. So soothing. So soft.

My consciousness clinged to that voice like it would to a raft oating in the middle of the ocean during a treacherous storm.

"I asked a question." The voice demanded, righteous rage dripping from his voice.

"Aiden... Aiden said to rough her up a bit."

"Aiden told you to rape the new girl? I wonder how that will look on your record."

Their hands melted off my body.

"Y- you can't man. My dad will kill me. We were just doing what Aiden--"

"I'll let you know if I need your opinion on the matter." my savior said, cutting him off. "Leave us." He commanded and they yeeted out of there.

As soon as it was quiet again, footsteps made their way to me and before I knew it, someone was helping me sit up, cradling my head in their lap.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," the voice murmured, pulling my shirt up and feeling the skin around my ribs with soft ngertips.

Before I could protest, the throbbing pain in my abdomen numbed to a dull ache.

"This is the best I can do without arousing suspicions. I'll take you to the inrmary and let the healers do the rest. You'll be okay. I promise."

My eyes uttered open as he lifted me up in his arms. I caught a glimpse of white blonde hair, falling over smooth porcelain white skin.

It felt like deja Vu all over again.

"Cade?!" I asked, hope aring inside of me, my heart squeezing painfully in my chest .

He looked down at me and I swear, I just died and went to heaven and the person looking at me was not man or monster but most dentely an angel.

"Ren," he said, in that gentle but rm voice, a kind look in his light brown eyes. "Ren Hawthorne."