

I Love You

[Six Months Later]

I stretched in the passenger seat of Lyd's car. We were heading back from our trip a little early and it was a ve-hour drive to get home. We'd switched off at the rest stop halfway home.

One of our favorite authors was doing a book signing in Boise, Idaho the Monday before Thanksgiving. We decided to make it a big trip. The last one before I was marked by my mate. Next week, on the thirtieth, I would turn eighteen and I'd talk to Michael again about marking each other.

Ever since we started being intimate, back in May, we were doing it at least a couple of times a week. None of the passion Michael had for me seemed to die down. He was always eager and enthusiastic.

When I came home from the family camping trip, he took me out two nights in a row, then paid for me and Lyd to go have a couple nights in the human city with a spa day and a hundred dollars just to spend on books. He gave me his credit card for the hotel he booked and our meals.

Part of me was certain it was because he regretted how rough he got with me. He was like a madman both nights. It was as if he couldn't get enough. I didn't mind, but he was too sweet and kind to let a simple apology stand.

In fact, when I told him about this trip with Lyd, he booked the nicest hotel in town for four nights and gave me his card again for food, road snacks, and books. He had the biggest smile on his face after he gave me a kiss and hug as I was getting in the car. He really wanted me to be happy. I was so lucky.

Lyd was particularly quiet as she drove us back home. She wasn't normally chatty, but we'd just met one of our favorite authors and bought a bunch of new books. I thought she'd still be riding that high and talking a lot.

"What's wrong, Lyd?"

She sighed and pursed her lips. I could tell she was on the fence about talking to me. Lyd never had trouble talking to me. We told each other absolutely everything. She was my very best friend.

"Come on, Lyd. You know you can tell me anything." I pressed.

"I met my mate." She said softly.

"When!? Where!? I only left you alone for a little while at the bookstore. Was he there?" I asked excitedly.

"You weren't gone for a 'little while', you were gone for well over an hour! I was sitting in the café area of the bookstore... he came up and sat with me. He was so hot, Heather. He was tall and buff with that boy next door sort of face. And he's so smart. It's just.... He's a rogue. The rst thing he said to me was; 'Please, let me talk to you before you make any decisions'. His name is Barry and his pack was wiped out when he was young." Lyd told me.

Rogue classes were added to the high school curriculum back when we were in seventh grade. Wendy complained a lot about having to learn about them. I liked the class. It was great to learn how wolves lived outside of packs and how rogue born wolves were different from pack born wolves.

"Oh, no. Is he in a collective? He would have to be, or he might have tried to kidnap you or mark you right in the store." I replied.

"Yeah. He said he's going to transfer to another collective because he got accepted into a college in Oregon. Barry told me a lot about himself. He asked me to wait for him to nish school and decide if I was going to keep him then. Barry wants to be in a pack again and said he'd go to whatever pack I was in to be with me."

"It sounds like he's a good match for you. I'm sure the Alpha will accept him. I can talk to him about it. Since I'm going to be the Gamma female, my opinion will mean a lot more. I'm so excited for you." I grinned.

Lyd got quiet again. The scent of her nervousness lled the car. What else could have happened?

"He told me what packs were near the school he was going to. Barry said we could date and get to know each other if I wanted to transfer to one of the other packs. He also said he was ne with talking to me on the phone and online and possibly visiting the area during breaks. It's just.... I really want to transfer, Heather. I want to be near him." She admitted.

"Oh.... I want you to be happy, Lyd. You should transfer. We can always call and text. I'll stay caught up with you no matter where you go. Plus, I can always come visit you and you can come visit me. It's just Oregon. It's not like it's thousands of miles from Washington. It's a day trip." I told her.

"Really? I'm so happy! I was worried you'd be upset with me for abandoning you." Lyd smiled.

"You're not abandoning me. It's how our world works. I know you can't transfer until you're eighteen. That means we have all the way until June to hang out and do everything. Why did you want to rush home, though? We still had one night left at the hotel." I asked.

"I want to go tell my parents and start planning everything. You said 'all the way until June', but that's only seven months away. I have to get my petitions in order and see if any of the packs will accept me. My mate is a rogue. Not all packs would be cool with that. I have to be open with the Alpha of the nearest pack and see if he'll still accept me. It's a couple hours' drive to the next nearest pack if he doesn't." She said.

"What packs are they?" I asked.

"Lune Rouge and Daylight Moon."

"Wow. I've heard of them. Those are both strong packs. Isn't Lune Rouge where that unmated Alpha is? Wendy has her eye on him. You might end up with her as Luna." I chuckled.

"No Alpha with a real brain would make your sister his Luna. Plus, I think he just found a mate back in the summer. Wendy's too late. I'm sure she'll nd someone. The unlucky man has to be out there somewhere." Lyd laughed.

"That's my big sister, you know?"

"I do, that's why I can talk with so much knowledge of my subject. Your sister is vain and selsh. Her looks are her best quality. I still think you got switched at birth or something. There's no way you're really related to her."

I shook my head. Lyd always said I was either adopted or switched at birth because I just didn't into my family. She had some big conspiracy theory about it, which I generally disregarded. Lyd always says there's a vain, selsh redhead out there annoying the hell out of some nice, down-to-earth, plump werewolves.

The rest of the drive was full of us making plans to make the most of our last few months in the same pack. I hoped she would get into the pack closest to where her mate was going to school. It would be wonderful for her to be able to see him without having to drive for a couple of hours.

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When we nally reached the pack lands, I was excited to be home. I loved spending time with Lyd, but I missed my mate. I wondered what he was up to.

We pulled into the driveway at Lyd's house. I grabbed my bag from the trunk and gave her a quick hug. We planned to have lunch the next day so she could tell me how the talk with her parents went.

I wanted to go take a shower and call Michael. Lyd and I left after school on Friday, so I hadn't been with him since the weekend before. He was probably going a little crazy without me. I headed across the cul-de-sac, to my house.

It was about ve in the afternoon. Mom and Dad would probably be working out in the yard. They were both teachers at the pack high school, so they didn't work this week. It was a perfect time for autumn yard work. The last leaves had fallen from the trees and the garden was already covered for the winter.

The smell of the dry leaves crisping in the dim sunlight was rich and heady. I loved the scent of the world as it switched from autumn to winter. The crispness of frost in the early morning. The rich, earthy scent of leaves in the afternoon.

Soon, we'd have our rst real snow of the year, more than just a light powdering on the ground that we'd had off and on since mid-October. It would blanket everything and make the world take on an extra sparkle. Maybe I'd have my mark by the rst real snow.

It would be amazing to have it before the new year, or even on New Year's Eve! Starting a new year as a marked woman.... The idea made me grin.

I opened the front door and took off my jacket, hanging it on the hooks near the door. I kicked off my shoes and went into the kitchen. Getting a glass of water, I looked out the back window and saw my parents out in the yard with rakes, bags, and other things.

They looked really happy as they worked on getting all the leaves raked up. They'd be coming in soon to start the rolls for dinner. It looked like Mom had a big pot of stew simmering on the stovetop. It was a perfect meal after a day of working out in the chilly late autumn.

I wanted that sort of future. I knew Michael and I would live in the packhouse until our rst child was old enough to take over the Gamma position, then we could pick a house or have one built on the pack lands for our retirement. It was traditional.

Gamma was a paid position in most packs, just like Beta and Alpha. It was a small amount of money which was put into an account that was rarely touched. Most meals were eaten in the pack dining room; most needs were supplied by the pack. This money was usually only used for gifts and other little things. Even our cars were provided by the pack.

There was usually enough to live on for a while after retirement. A lot of people invested or started little businesses. There were often inheritances and family money to help ranked families along.

Most packs owned businesses and real estate in the human cities and towns. The ranked members were paid for running those as well. They could end their terms fairly wealthy if they were smart with their money.

In all, we'd be set for the rest of our rather long lives and be able to focus on our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. We'd be able to spend all of our time together and explore the world after he was done with his duties as pack Gamma. It was our reward for giving so much of our lives to our pack.

I put my glass into the sink and stretched. Long drives were terrible. I would've preferred if we could run to Boise, but we had luggage and my wolf was much bigger and faster than Lyd's wolf.

That was one of the most surprising things about my rst shift last year. My dad said Gwyn was as big as an Alpha. He told me not to shift in front of anyone because of how strange my wolf was.

Lyd and I had gone on a camping trip in August and I shifted with her. She only turned seventeen in June, so we hadn't been able to run together until then. I made her swear to not tell anyone about my wolf until after I was marked. Of course, Lyd would never do that.

I went back to the living room and grabbed my bag where I'd dropped it next to the door. Heading to the laundry room, I unloaded all my dirty clothes into the hamper by the washing machine. There was a small stack of books in my bag, which I took out to carry up to my room.

As I headed upstairs, I heard some noise coming from Wendy's room. Her music was really loud and the speakers were practically making the walls shake with the thumping of the bass. She was a freaking werewolf! How loud did she need to have it?

With a grumble, I went to put my books in my room. Something was off when I got in there. My door was closed, like I'd left it, but something wasn't quite right. Then, I realized what it was.

The dress I bought for my birthday dinner with Michael was missing. I hung it on the back of my closet door before I left. He said he was taking me out for a special night and we were going to talk about something really important. I was sure it was about marking each other and our plans for the future. Maybe even a wedding, since I'd be a legal adult in the eyes of human law.

My dress was Michael's favorite shade of blue and I'd bought it just for that night. Wendy was the only one who could've taken it. I was so angry. This was the last freaking straw!

I stormed over to her room. I swear to the goddess, if she ruined my dress, I was going to kick her ass. Mom and Dad be damned. I opened her door, without knocking. It would be pointless to knock. She wouldn't hear me over her music.

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My words stopped in my throat.

It took me longer than I like to admit to fully register what I saw. I'd love to say I shouted or cried or did anything other than stare in total disbelief. In the reaction of ght, ight, or freeze, I never thought I'd freeze.

Wendy's arms were wrapped around Michael. They were naked and... and making love. It made me realize what Michael did with me every week wasn't making love.

Their bodies moved together. He was gazing into her eyes as he moved in a slow and tender way he never did with me. They kissed and, when they pulled back, my heart was ripped out.

Michael looked into Wendy's eyes and smiled.

"I love you, Wendy." He murmured.

I could barely hear it over the music. He never told me he loved me. Only that I was his.

How could he love her? She was vain. She was selsh. She was mean.

She wasn't me.