

Welcome Back to Exton

*** Austin***

I skip down the steps of the main staircase down toward the oor of the atrium, smiling broadly as my eyes focus on her; my beautiful girlfriend Ava.

I have not seen her for the past four weeks as she has been on holiday with her family. She looks very exotic right now with her raven hair against her sunkissed skin; looking more beautiful to me than ever. She returns my smile as she locks her eyes into mine. I stride up to her and pull her into a tight hug, smelling her hair and neck as any Lycan would.

"I hope you had a great birthday," I say by her ear as she pulls back to look at me, her expression a little confused for some reason. She quickly collects herself a little and smiles back at me sweetly.

"Lounging on a yacht on the French Riviera was denitely not how I'd pictured it, but I have my dad's business contact to thank for that. It was brilliant. I doubt any other birthday will quite live up to this one," she replies. I smile at her again and coax her face to mine for a quick kiss. I pull back and frown at her a little. Something...feels a bit off, but I wasn't sure what it was. I guess it had been a few weeks so this could be normal...

"Is everything okay, Aus?" She asks nervously with a ash of her pearly white teeth. She doesn't seem so sure herself, but I nod happily.

"It is now. I missed you. A lot," I tell her warmly as I look into her soft brown eyes.

"I missed you too. Coming off the plane early this morning, hastily packing my stuff and then coming back here straight away, has been more than a bit hectic...but now, I'm here with you and everything feels almost right with the world again," she says, batting her long eyelashes at me.

"Well...this year, I have a car," I tell her happily, and her eyes brighten up at this.

"Amazing, great date nights here we come. Plus as soon as you turn eighteen we can nally go to the pub for a legal drink," she jokes.

"Until then, are you up for a classic Exton Sunday roast?" I ask, taking her hand in mine. This doesn't feel quite right either.

"Oh, of course! Lead the way, Master Landry," she replies teasingly. I squeeze her hand and we walk side by side down to the main hall. I notice a few jealous glances our way from some of the other lads in our year. I was denitely more than lucky. Ava was beautiful, and on top of that she had some of the best grades in school, she was so kind and considerate to everyone she met...she was going to make an excellent Luna in the future and I hoped dearly that she was going to be my Luna.

Why else would the goddess have put her in my orbit otherwise?

We sit down with our food opposite my best friend Ollie and I gleefully stuff a small, crispy roast potato in my mouth. It is so uffy on the inside; no one did roast potatoes quite like our head cook did.

I am about to say something to Ollie when we hear the smashing of glass and crockery mere feet away from the table. I look up past Ollie to see Chase, one of the other alphas in our year. He is staring somewhere next to me as if in absolute shock, and swallow my mouthful and look to him with concern. Was he okay? He has dropped his tray of food at his feet, and he seems completely oblivious to that fact.

"Chase...are you okay, mate?" I ask him. His blazing blue eyes are wide and xed. I hear a sharp intake of breath from beside me and I turn to look at Ava. To my surprise, she is staring back at Chase, a similarly surprised expression across her face too, her own eyes wide, her gaze xed into Chase's.

A sinking feeling begins to develop and grow exponentially in my stomach as Chase begins to purposefully stride around the table. I look around bried and notice at least a hundred people watching what was currently unfolding at our table, the crash of the falling tray had clearly been quite loud to everyone else, too.

My mouth goes dry as Chase steps in front of Ava, who has now turned to face him, looking up at him in awe. He reaches out and cups her face in his hands, his expression one of pure joy...the kind of joy you'd only get from nding the most precious thing...

Austin...my wolf Atlas says to me soothingly... because, he knows.

Ava's hands now go to Chase's face too as she stands up from her chair. I can't see her expression from where I am sat...but I don't need to, and nor do I want to, as a wave of dizziness sweeps over me.

I feel like I have just been socked in the stomach as the truth of this situation winds me entirely.

I have just lost my girlfriend Ava, as casually as anything, over a roast dinner.

It wasn't me she was destined for, it was Chase.

I look up and around at all the curious faces around us. Some are shocked, some look sad and sympathetic, but within the noise of the room I could hear some laughter now too.

The foundations under me feel like they have utterly shifted, and I can hear my heart beating strongly in my ears as anxiety quickly sets in.

I needed to get away from this situation right now, particularly with so many staring at me. I was used to people staring at me, but this was entirely different than being the heir to the pack that ran this school.

I push my tray away and hastily get up, rushing straight for the patio doors; I desperately need some air.

I run out of the doors and onto the adjoining patio. People wave at me and call my name as I sprint past, but I just needed to breathe and to do that I really needed some space between me and everyone else in that hall; particularly Chase and Ava.

I stop running when I get to the sports eld and I collapse onto the warm grass with my eyes closed. I lay on my back breathing deeply. I need to process what had just happened.

Laying on the ground, I can feel my phone buzzing repeatedly in my back pocket, but I ignore it.

What am I supposed to do now? I ask inwardly to the ancient and oh-so-wise, Atlas.

Ava was wonderful and would've made an excellent Luna, but you need to trust the moon goddess. Clearly she was made for Chase, not us. Our mate is still out there, someone even more suited for the leader you are destined to become. You are still several months away from coming of age. Please do not fret, Atlas says calmly.

I know, you're right, it is still so early, but damn it we were both so sure! I reply sadly.

It was just young love...rest assured Austin, you'll know it's real when it truly happens. There will be no denying it. You will feel it in your very molecules, Atlas says reassuringly, trying his best to console me.

Why do I get the feeling you never thought she was our mate in the rst place? I challenge Atlas, angrily.

Admittedly...no, I didn't. It was never deep. Not once did you feel inexplicably tied to her. There was no solid connection, no real spark, Atlas replies, almost as if he'd wanted to say this for quite some time.

Thanks Atlas. Sounds like you expected this to happen. Where was my warning? I ask bitterly, feeling like I'd give my left arm to erase the memory of what had just happened.

You can benet from my wisdom at the best of times, but when it comes to the heart, one can never truly know. As I always tell you, you need to experience things rst hand to get a proper perspective on situations. I cannot always lead you the whole way. True wisdom and understanding comes from experience, not just education.

Atlas seemed more condent about nding our mate than I was. I was a little peeved he'd once again gone on the 'educational' route with me about something, rather than being direct and helpful.

He often did that.

He had the knowledge to stop me from doing or saying certain things but he allowed them to happen as a way of educating me. I understood it, but I still hated it.

I sit up with my elbows to my knees, looking out across the grounds.

It would be quite a few years before I took over our pack from my father, but I needed to be stronger. We were the third largest pack in the country and strength counted for everything. The Alpha was always his strongest with his destined mate by his side, everyone knew that.

I felt a little lost, now. I didn't want anyone else. I wanted Ava. I always had.

My phone buzzes again and I nally pull it out of my pocket.

Freya. Again.

But...Freya does understand this sort of stuff better than Ollie does...I think. Ollie spent more time hooking up with people than making meaningful connections. I sigh and message her back.

Me: Usual place?

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Freya

I sit on the wooden swing bench behind the pond around the back of the school. It was our bench, ever since we came here to visit as little kids. I looked out across the water at the sun setting in the sky, a mixture of warm pinks and purples above the rolling hills. I love this place. I genuinely feel sad that I'll have to leave in less than two years. I hear familiar, slouchy footsteps approaching.

"I can't believe you missed a roast dinner," I say before looking up as Austin approaches. He lazily believes himself down next to me, sighing wearily.

"Well...I did manage to eat one of Mrs Smith's amazing roast potatoes before my life imploded," he sighs once again, dropping his head down and lacing his ngers behind his neck. I wince a little.

"Oh goddess, it happened during dinner?" I ask, cringing at the idea of it. For someone who never liked to be the centre of attention this must have been extra humiliating for him.

"Yep," he replies bluntly, "in front of everyone in the hall. I knew she was always going to make a great Luna, but I didn't ever think she'd be destined to be one at another pack. I thought she was going to be mine."

"Savage," I reply bluntly, "well...look, I know it probably doesn't feel like it Aus, but you're still only seventeen and you have plenty of time. I mean, some people go years without nding their mate."

Austin nods slowly and picks a few long blades of grass from around the leg of the bench.

"I know, I'm just...disappointed. Also pretty heartbroken of course since she was my girlfriend and I love her," he growls in frustration.

"I can't quite relate, but...I'm sorry it's happened and you must be hurting a great deal. I get that. But, your life denitely hasn't imploded, so try not to be too dramatic," I laugh a little, putting my arm around my arm around his back and hugging him toward me.

"Dad rang me a few minutes ago. He is planning some horrendously big, black tie birthday party here at the school. Lots of bucks are going to be invited. I honestly cannot think of anything worse," he groans, burying his head in his hands again. I laugh and roll my eyes.

"Typical Dad. You get your heart broken and his reaction isn't to comfort you, it's to plan something you'd actually hate, as a means to an end for the greater good of the pack. But anyway, I swear. It'll be a blast, and maybe it'll work? OR...here's a thought...and wait for it because it's crazy...maybe you'll actually enjoy yourself for once?" I suggest, with an enthusiastic expression.

Austin turns to me and smiles warmly at my enthusiasm. He did have a truly lovely smile. I may be his sister, but it wasn't hard to see why so many of the girls at the school were interested in him. He was very handsome, I wasn't blind.

Just protective.

"Heads up, though. You, my dear brother, are the new hot topic with literally all the single girls across the school, Lycan, witch or otherwise. Maybe you won't be single for as long as you think," I say very matter-of-factly. He groans loudly and crosses his arms as he leans back into the seat.

"I have no interest in any of them," he says a little petulantly. I scoff and roll my eyes at him once again.

"None of them? Again, Aus, maybe you're being a bit dramatic?" I laugh.

"Trust me, none of them are who I'm looking for. I'd have known it."

"How could you know that yet? Your mate could still be here at the school. But...it wouldn't really hurt for you to just be a little adventurous and have a bit of fun like any other guy your age. Go on a few dates, loosen up a little and be a little more free spirited like Ollie. Just not too much like Ollie. Actually...not Ollie at all. Be more like Dominic, please don't be even remotely like Ollie," I suggest conversationally.

Ollie Woodward had been his best friend for as long as I could remember and was of course his future Beta. He was somewhat of a brother to me too, since he'd spent so much time hanging out at the pack house as we had grown up. He was also now a known lothario as he had hooked up with a lot of the sixth form girls in all sorts of random places around the school since he turned seventeen in January.

Austin picks up a stone and skims it speedily across the surface of the pond.

"Did you get a new roommate?" he asks in response, clearly keen for a subject change. I decide to oblige.

"Yeah I did. She is a nice, normal, garden variety human called Eliana, but she prefers to be called Ella. She smells a tiny bit different from the other humans, probably because she comes from London. But she seems pretty down to earth and just...nice. I only get good vibes from her. I get the impression she didn't have many friends at her last school. She's quite socially awkward but it's actually quite endearing. I'll coax her out though, you'll see. There is an Exton girl in there somewhere, just gotta crack that shell," I say with a mischievous chuckle.

"Hopefully she won't go insane like the last one," he jokes. True, my last roommate was a witch and she went off the deep end a little and ended up getting expelled. The witches and wizards of the school were sometimes a little...turbulent. But we owed a lot to the local magical community as the amount of enchantments they had placed on the school made it an extremely safe place for any supernatural kid to study. Humans were obviously allowed to enrol but one of the enchantments successfully hid the supernatural nature of the school pretty effectively from pure blooded demons. They took care of that aspect of the school for us, and the Lycan community patrolled the grounds to physically protect the school.

We chat a little more about some pack matters within the school, and Austin seems to relax and seem a little more like himself. It would take some time for him to get over it, but I knew he was going to be okay. Eventually.

When I get back to my room, Ella is already fast asleep. It wasn't that late but I guess she had a long day. I watch her for a minute or two and decide to creep a little closer. Her unusual, super long blonde hair is in a long plait across the pillow. I get down next to her bed, quietly sning her sleeping form. There was denitely something different about her. She smelled human but there was a hint of something else, an edge I had never encountered before. Something earthy and natural.

What are you? I think to myself.

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Austin

I get back to the room I share with my best friend Ollie, thankfully not passing many people on my way there. As my future Beta he would be my closest counsel, my second set of eyes, basically the person I would trust the most aside from my future Luna.

Ollie was one of the most loyal people I'd ever met. He was remarkably intelligent, but at times so much so that he could lack basic common sense. He'd be turning eighteen a fortnight after me but he led his life here at school very differently. If I'd ever felt like I wanted to experience what it was like to sleep around in this place, I could just listen to Ollie's stories and the guy now had a lot of them. He wasn't ashamed to give me the real details either. There wasn't anywhere in the school he hadn't hooked up in. I really hoped he'd nd his mate as soon as he turned eighteen so he'd calm down a bit, so then perhaps I wouldn't walk into some interesting events happening in our room on occasion. The last few months of the previous academic year had become a bit much.

"Well...that was super awkward. I brought the rest of your food up for you, it's on the counter," Ollie greets me from one of the sofas. Our room was a little bigger than most, as alpha heirs naturally got given larger rooms.

It was useful for little meetings and such, but as Ollie and I had gotten taller and older, the room had only gotten smaller and smaller. There is a living area as you come through the door which had two sofas either side. Our bedroom was off the other end of the living area.

"Yeah...cheers for that astute observation," I reply, wandering past him and inging myself onto my bed in our bedroom. Ollie gets off the sofa and follows me into the bedroom.

"I mean I think Ava felt pretty bad about it all after you left. She wanted to go after you but Chase stopped her. He said you'd need space," Ollie said, now exing his growing muscles in the mirror. He had really gotten into going to the gym over the summer and it showed.

"Probably a good decision," I reply quietly, staring at the ceiling, "I honestly don't know what I would've said to her. I just needed to get away from everyone."

"Hopefully you won't have any issues with Chase?" Ollie asks tentatively.

"Nah, probably not, you know me," I reply, closing my eyes now. Ollie chuckles a little at my comment.

"Yep...you're denitely one of if not THE most level headed alphas ever to exist. But it wouldn't hurt you to let Atlas out of his cage a little, once in a while. Have some FUN, especially now that you're single. I know a few she-wolves that would love to take a ride..." Ollie jokes. I sit up and look at him in annoyance.

"I don't keep Atlas 'locked in a cage', Oi. Honestly he's just this really wise, really old wolf spirit. You might nd him strange but I consider myself lucky to have been blended with him. I also happen to like being level headed. I think it's a ne trait to have," I reply, meaning every word. Ollie shrugs.

"Whatever. Freya's new friend is pretty. I saw her sitting with her and Annabelle at dinner. She looked really overwhelmed, though. Wonder if she was homeschooled," Ollie says, picking up one of his new dumbbells from the oor and starting some bicep curls.

"Oh, you mean her new roommate? She's human anyway Ols, so you cannot go there. The last thing a human needs when starting new in a place like this is someone like you," I reply with a short laugh, throwing a tennis ball at the ceiling, "also, Freya would murder you."

Ollie laughs.

"I can handle Freya," he says contently. Now it was my turn to laugh. Freya's wolf spirit Mira was a bit of a force to be reckoned with at times and she had denitely increased Freya's tenacity.

"Besides, we've really not had any natural blondes at this school, she denitely stands out," he said with a wink, switching the dumbbell to the other arm.

"Right, but again, she's human, so she's off limits for me, I'm afraid. Anyway...I guess my schedule has opened right up. Dad wants me to get a bit more involved with things here this year, even though I take six classes and have hardly any free periods," I grumble, "maybe I'll do some of Elon's combat classes or something."

"Gotcha. Well I can't wait for econ again," Ollie laughs. I smile and rolled my eyes. Ollie's love of economics class was purely based on the girls we happened to take the class with. He barely paid attention to the actual learning and yet still aced the exams, somehow.

"I'm sure Candice remembers you too..." I snort.

"Don't forget about Katie," Ollie adds.

I laugh at my friend and close my eyes, still feeling emotionally raw, but I lay on my bed and start to wonder what the next few months were going to bring.