

5 Fears

My heart is beating uncontrollably. From the pull of the bond or fear of rejection, I do not know. Whatever the reason, I am frozen in place, scared to even move.

My entire life is hanging in the balance, and the only one who is aware is him.

What do I do?

Rian's gaze ickered at someone behind me, then a worried expression crossed his handsome face. I reluctantly turned to see my dad approaching me from behind.

"There you are. Are you ready, Rose?" Dad asked.

Ready? Ready for what? Does he know?

I looked back towards Rian, not able to keep my gaze away for long, but when I turned my head back around, he was gone. He's no longer standing where I just saw him moments ago. I don't even feel him in the room any longer.

Is that his answer? Does he not want this? Would he rather disappear than just face me?

Can I blame him?

"Rose?" Dad grabs my shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Did you not hear me?"

"What?" I stared back at him.

"Are you ready?" He repeated. "For me to announce you?"

Oh. I forgot in all the drama going on what the point of this party was on my 18th birthday. It's also the day that I'm being ocially announced as the next Alpha.

Sophia reaches for my hand, giving me a subtle nod before slipping away.

"I'll nd him," she mind links, going in the direction I just saw Rian before he disappeared.

What does she plan on nding him for? What is she going to do? Tickle him to death until he decides to accept me? I doubt he will just hand her his feet like I did.

This feels like a lost cause. It's crushing me, making my insides feel like they are turning and twisting painfully.

He is a prince. One that I have not ever been kind to. Why would he accept me? He only wants to go back to his kingdom; to his realm. Do I have any right to stop him?

I swallow down my agony as best I can and paste on a smile that I do not feel for my dad.

He is a prince, and I am an alpha. I have a duty to my pack, and I can't let my sorrow show today. Today is not about me. It is about the future of my pack. If I can't keep my composure now, I am not the only one who will be worried or feel like their world is ending. I don't need my pack to lose condence in me as I am being announced.

Not today.

"Let him go, Soph. If he doesn't want me, it's better to face a rejection later."

"But.... Rosie. I don't think that's it. He won't reject you. You at least need to talk to him."

"Not now," I groaned painfully. "Please. Just.... Let me get through tonight. I will talk to him after tonight."

Sophia sighs in frustration. "Fine." I can tell she is anything but ne with my decision but is letting it go.

"Thank you."

I just need to focus on this next 10 minutes with dad, then I can slip back into my despair.

Dad pulls me to the center of the foyer, walking with me hand in hand halfway up the grand stairs. We stood and waited a few seconds for everyone to quiet down, all eyes turning towards us.

Mom meets us on the stairs, reaching out to hold my hand. She gives me a strange look, and I know she can tell something is wrong.

I shake my head subtly, hoping she doesn't pull me away to ask what's wrong right now. I can't tell her yet. She might drag Rian over here and force him to accept me whether he wants to or not.

Thankfully, she just narrows her eyes, then turns to look at the crowd of people as my dad starts to speak. She's letting it go. For now.

"On behalf of Crystal Moon, I would like to thank all of you for coming to celebrate my beautiful daughter's 18th birthday with us this evening." Dad smiled brightly, wrapping an arm around my shoulder. His proud stare barely helps to ease the failure I feel inside.

"Rosie Elaine. I remember the day that you were born. It seems like just yesterday your mother was demanding all the pickles in the packhouse, refusing to sit still or rest. I should have known the child she was carrying then would be such a strong warrior now. You went on many missions to defend your pack, even while you were in the womb.

"Now, with your mother's erceness, and my good looks," he grinned, while mom growled and everyone else laughed, "and with all the qualities of a great Alpha, I am proud to nally announce you as my heir. You, my beautiful, ery, tenacious daughter, will make a great Alpha to all of us one day. I know you will only grow and strengthen in your abilities and wisdom as you grow. I am so proud to declare you the next Alpha of the Crystal Moon Pack."

Dad kisses my head, then takes a step back as everyone below us applauds.

Now, it's my turn to give a speech, but my head is in a thousand other places. No. Not a thousand other places. It's only with Rian right now, but seeing as I don't know where he is, I can't say where exactly my head is either.

Mom squeezes my hand, and when I look at her, I see the strength in her eyes. It's the strength she has passed on to me.

"You got this," she whispers in my head.

I take a deep breath, then lift my lips in a smile that feels so wrong compared to what I'm really feeling on the inside.

"Thank you, dad," I turned my smile towards him. "Thank you for always being an example of what an Alpha should be. With you as a father, I learned from the best, and I am eternally grateful for all the lessons you have taught me. Thank you for the trust you are giving me now. I know the pack is the most important thing to an Alpha, putting our members' well-being above all else. Even yourself. I am thankful for your belief in me, and I promise to show the same dedication as Alpha one day as you have shown for the past two decades. You are everything I hope to one day be, and for that, thank you. Thank you for being not only the best dad, but the best Alpha as well."

"Butt kisser," mom whispered softly, so only dad and I could hear as the rest of the crowd clapped once again.

"You're still in trouble for the tattoo," Dad whispers in my ear as he hugs me, but I can tell he is teasing.

I can barely even hold my smile anymore. Even with his and mom's jokes.

My world still feels like it is crashing down.

Then, I feel him. I can feel his eyes on me again. It's burning me. His stare pierces my soul.

When I look back towards the crowd, there he is, right by the door. He holds my eyes in a hypnotic stare for what feels like hours, though it is only seconds, before he turns and leaves, taking my heart and my hope of happiness with him.

It's what I expected. He doesn't want the bitchy girl who treated him like s**t for the last several years.

I need to face the facts. He is going to reject me. It's only a matter of time.

I have no one to blame but myself.

~

Rian POV

I couldn't do it. I couldn't face her.

She was looking for me. I could sense it. Some invisible force was pushing me towards her, my heart beating at the sound of her name. "Ros-ie, Ros-ie, Ros-ie." It was hammering her name in my chest.

My entire entity was under her spell.

If I had seen her anger or scorn in her beautiful features, I might have been able to brave talking to her. I wanted to speak with her. I wanted to tell her that I could be every bit of a catch as my nephew.

If it was her temper I was going to face, I would have faced it. I had seen her anger plenty of times before. I didn't recognize the look on her face, though. The sorrow and sadness in her eyes scared me more than her anger ever could.

The only reasons I could think of that she could be sad or mournful were unfavorable to me. I don't want every scenario that comes to my head.

"Hey! Hey, Rian!" A blonde girl chases me as I leave, walking fast towards the car in the parking lot where I planned on calling an Uber. It's the girl I would see with Rosie most often. I don't remember her name, but she seems to know mine. "Where are you going?"

Her shoes click on the concrete as she runs over to me.

"I'm sorry?" I frowned at her. If this is another one of Rosie's friends coming to try and kiss me and make even more of a mess of my chances at convincing Rosie to accept me, I want no part in whatever she wants.

"Where are you going? Rosie..... Rosie was looking for you."

I grimace. Surely she wants to get the rejection over with so she can go back to pining over Taegan. No way am I going to let that happen.

"I'm heading back to the resort. Something came up," I lied.

The blonde girl gave me a disapproving look. "You're running away."

My breath catches. She knows. I almost wish she had been there to try and kiss me like the other girl. That would give me an excuse to walk away from this question.

"Come on," she stomps her foot, whining like she knows me well enough to command me to do what she wants. It would be amusing under normal circumstances. "Don't run away. Talk to her."

"I can't," I managed to say. "Not... not tonight." Not on her birthday.

Shit. I still have her present.

I pull the box out of my pocket, the blonde girl watching me curiously, looking like she still wants to argue.

Before she could, I thrust the wrapped box towards her. "Can.... can you give this to her for me?"

The girl purses her lips to the side of her face. "I think you should give it to her yourself."

I drop my outstretched arm, then look down at the gift. My thumb traces over the tape keeping the wrapping in place. I wanted to see Rosie's expression when she opened it. Even before seeing her tonight, back when I rst picked it out, I wanted to see her reaction to my gift. I was hoping she would treasure it in some way.

Now, I'm not sure if she will even accept it from me.

"Tomorrow," the blonde girl said. "She will be at the cove tomorrow. I'll make sure. Meet us there and you can give it to her then. You two can.... talk. You both need to talk."

I smile weakly. "Okay."

She sighs, placing her hand over her forehead like she has a headache. "Stupid Julia. If it wasn't for her....."

If it wasn't for her, what? What would have happened if that horrible girl from earlier hadn't interrupted?

Would Rosie have rejected me then, in front of everyone?

Or would she have gotten carried away with the bond? Would she have claimed me before she had time to think?

"Just.... Be there tomorrow, Rian. Don't run away from my friend for too long."

The girl gave me a reassuring smile before turning and heading back inside.

It felt like she was telling me that it would be okay with that smile. The only way it would be okay is if Rosie accepted me. Is that what she was saying? Is that what she was hinting at?

The cove? Where could that be?

I will have to ask Callum later.

The present feels heavy in my hands now, even though it was as light as it could be earlier. The weight of the burden of giving it to her myself now, possibly facing the worst situation I could ever face, is heavy. It weighs down on my very soul.

Can I convince Rosie that I'm not inferior to the man she really wanted? Can I show her that I can be equally good for her?

I haven't even been able to convince myself of that very thing. How do I convince her?

~

"Are you sure you don't mind coming with me?" I asked Callum the next day.

When I told him what had happened at the party and why I left in an Uber soon after we got there, he actually was surprised. He had no idea. It seems Taegan was the only one who knew I was Rosie's mate.

I asked Callum about the cove, telling him about Rosie's friend asking me to meet them there. He volunteered to come with me. He seemed really eager to go too.

"I need to go too, bro. I wouldn't miss it."

"Why?" I looked at him weirdly as he sprayed Taegan's cologne on his neck and wrists. He never wears cologne. He looks more eager than me. Even his hair is styled today. He's wearing something other than workout attire too.

He shrugs, but has an anxious face. "I just need to see something."

"What?" I probe. He is usually uninterested in this kind of thing. He normally would rather stay here at the resort or with his aunt when we came to Miami, only tagging along with Taegan and myself when Taegan forces him.

"I think I felt something," he grimaces. "I'd rather conrm it now than let her..... Nevermind. I just need to go."

Hmm. I want to press him for more, but it's his business. If he wanted to tell me, he would.

Taegan and I still aren't talking. I know he doesn't think my situation is his fault, and it might not be. I'm still upset. I still want to hit him whenever I see him.

Who wouldn't be mad in my shoes? The girl that is supposed to be mine has been in love with him for years. Instead of staying away from her, he comes back here every chance he gets to lead her on some more.

Right now, he is out with the Meyers brothers and their twins, doing who knows what, while Callum and I get ready.

The cove is apparently a party boat hub, where all the teenagers from the pack tie off their parents' boats and barges to one another so they can party and have fun with other supernaturals. This isn't the kind of place Taegan would condone us going to.

Screw him. I'm not going to party. I'm going to see Rosie and convince her to give me a chance.

I pocket the present in my swim trunks, then head out of the hotel room with Callum, hoping that somehow I can show her that she needs me, just like I now know I need her as I need oxygen to breathe or water to drink.

I need her. Her name is now ingrained in my very soul.