

Chapter Four

As ordered, I've scrubbed, shaved and primped every inch of my body. I have no idea why this is even necessary, whoever comes to claim me is ordered by the Goddess herself to desire me, I could look like a yeti and he'd still want to put his mark on me.

Stepping out of the steamy shower room, I walk across the hall into my old bedroom that now has my mother's exercise bike, a treadmill that has clothes hanging over it like a makeshift clothes dryer and some weights placed in a row by the wall that have a distinctly thick level of dust on them.

'Sooo the new home gym looks like it's really paying off' I comment drolly as I stalk toward the vanity that was allowed to stay and drop onto the matching stool. My mother glares at me for a second before she continues to rie through the massive box of bottles and make up she has produced from Goddess knows where. Did she go door to door with the pack members asking for donations to help make her daughter appealing enough for someone to take her?

Bailee breezes in, dragging two chairs, one of which has her straighteners balanced on the seat. 'I can't believe it's tonight!' she squeals, pulling the chairs up beside me and dropping into one, smiling widely.

'Woohoo!' I deadpan, raising my hands feebly to enhance the effect.

'Stop that, this is an important night, 'my mother orders, giving me a pointed look, the one that we all knew means sit down, shut up, and don't embarrass your father.

Clapping my lips together, I straighten up, preparing myself to be poked and prodded for the next four plus hours.

My eleven year old sister, Lauren, appears in the door, raising her eyebrows as she took in the scene. 'What's going on?' she asks curiously.

'I'm being tortured, help me' I reply quickly, earning myself a sharp elbow to the ribs.

'Your sister is getting ready for her Claiming' my mother answers stubbornly, 'tonight she nds her fated mate.'

Lauren wrinkles her nose, 'eww' she mutters, 'boys are gross, why would you even want to do this?' she adds looking at me as if I'm insane.

I want to scream that I agree with her, it is an insane idea but my mother's burning gaze in the side of my head has me smiling weakly. 'It'll be fun' I mumble, trying to force enthusiasm into my voice, 'I'll have a best friend for life.'

Lauren shakes her head, 'yeah, I think I'll just keep Tyler as my best friend, he doesn't want to kiss me' she replies thoughtfully before disappearing again.

'So, what do you say we get this party started' Bailee grins, reaching for a hairbrush and proceeding to tame my bird's nest into something remotely looking like hair.

I stie a groan, shutting my eyes as my mother descends on me with a makeup brush, closing my eyes as it moves perilously close to my eyeball.

'Stop moving' my mother snaps as I squirm, feeling the brush leave my eyelid and slide across my skin toward my ear.

'This is so unnecessary' I grumble but stop my dgeting, I really need to stay still when my sister has a machine that can give me second degree burns pressed millimetres from my head.

Two very long and insufferable hours later and my mother steps back, squealing excitedly as she clasps her hands in front of her chest, tears brimming in her eyes. 'Oh my baby, you look so beautiful' she gushes, wiping under her eyelids as I give my sister a 'what the hell' look. Bailee shrugs, wrapping up the cord for her straighteners, patting her mother's shoulder as she passes her.

'Can we eat now?' I moan, barely glancing at the mirror to see what they've done to me.

'Yes, but nothing that will give you bad breath' my mother replies, grabbing a tissue from the box on the vanity and dabbing gently at her eyes. 'I'll do your lipstick afterward, no point putting it on for you to wear it off again.'

I ght the internal urge to remind the woman in front of me that I couldn't give two hoots about my lipstick, I know better than to come up against Mary-Anne Sparks when she's on a mission.

Instead, I give her a strained smile, 'sounds great' I reply, adding a thumbs up for good measure.

Standing up, I drop the towel that is still around my body uncaringly as my mother gasps and rushes to the back of the door to grab me a dressing gown.

'Jamie-Leel' she scolds, shoving the material up my arms and tying it rmly around my waist.

I shake my head, we're werewolves, we get naked all the time in front of each other to shift, now it's my death sentence night, sorry I mean my uber exciting claiming night, and suddenly I'm supposed to pretend to be shy?

Traipsing down the stairs behind my mom and sister, I step into the kitchen where my dad is reading the paper, a cup of coffee in front of him on the table.

Glancing up, I see him double take as his eyes raise and he spots me, his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows hard.

'Hey' I say, moving toward him and planting a kiss on his cheek.

'Hey JJ' Dad replies, accepting my embrace but still looking at me as if I'm some alien creature.

'You OK dad?' I ask, moving back and taking a seat next to him, sning the air and looking hopefully toward the slow cooker that has the most amazing smell coming from it.

Taking my obvious hint, my mother moves toward the pot, grabbing bowls out of the cupboard and spooning what looks like stew into them, and walking back to place them in front of us.

'Bailee, call your brother and sister please' she asks, as she returns to the pot to get more bowls

'Philip! Lauren! Get your asses in here!' Bailee yells, not even looking up from the phone clasped in her hand as her ngers y over the screen, no doubt messaging her best friend about my torturous night.

'Bailee Erin Sparks, If I wanted a fog horn I would have bought one rather than having you' my mother growls, slamming Bailee's bowl down in front of her a little harder than she placed mine and dads.

Just then, our siblings barrel into the room, sliding into their seats at the table, Bailee raising her eyebrows at our mother as if to say, 'Why are you complaining, they are here.'

'Don't back chat me' our mother huffs, placing food in front of Philip and Lauren.

'I didn't say anything!' Bailee protested.

'Your eyes spoke volumes' our mother retorts, grabbing her own bowl and a chopping board covered in buttered homemade bread.

Spooning stew into my mouth, I glance up to see Philip frowning at me, 'what?' I demand.

'What did you do to your face?' he asks in confusion.

Patting my cheeks, I glance at my mother worriedly, 'why? What's wrong, does it look bad?' I mutter about to push back my chair and go nd a mirror. Maybe my mother wasn't trying to hand me off to a guy, maybe she was sabotaging me by making me look hideous! I was all for that, believe me, but I didn't want to step out of the car at the pack house knowing full well that every warrior in the front of the building would be peeking through their windows at me, I have to face these people tomorrow!

'You look beautiful' my mum interjects with a scowl toward my brother, who sinks back into his chair warily.

'Daddy?' I whisper, knowing he will tell me the truth.

'Baby you look beautiful just like your mum said' my dad replies, dropping his spoon and placing his hand on top of mine. 'In fact you kind of took my breath away when you walked in, my little girl is all grown up, I don't think I really realised that you won't be my baby girl after tonight' he adds, his lips tilting down slightly.

I wrap my arms around him, hugging him to me, 'you'll always be my dad' I reply into his neck before pulling back, 'and you never know, maybe I'll have to do the walk of shame back to the car because no one comes!'

The looks on my family's face tells me that I was way too enthusiastic about that option and I quickly backtrack, 'which would be heartbreaking, I think if that happens I better stay here with you guys, is that OK?'

'You won't be unanswered' my mother replies evenly, 'you are the Beta's daughter, your mate will come for you. Skarla has power to reach nearby packs, just like the rest of us, it's how your dad heard me' she adds, smiling at my father who blows her a kiss.

'No pack barrier was going to keep me from claiming you my love' he gushes as the younger kids made puking noises into their food.

'Quiet you two, your days will come and then you'll know' my mother growls at Philip and Lauren.

'Yeah but no one wants to know about their parents doing it mum, that's just gross' Philip replies in disgust.

Draining the last few drops from my bowl, I ram a slice of bread between my teeth holding it in place as I stand up to place my dish in the sink. 'I'm going upstairs' I mumble through my mouthful before heading toward the stairs, not quite reaching far enough away to miss my mother sigh as she groans, 'I hope her mate can deal with those manners, I swear I taught all of you not to speak with your mouth full.'

'Yeah, I don't think Lee's mate is going to have a problem with her speaking with her mouth full mum,' my brother Philip says with a snigger, 'he's probably going to take that as a bonus . . . ouch!'

'Why did you slap him, what does he mean?' Lauren whines, hating that she was left out of the joke.

'Nothing sweetie, Philip is just trying to excuse bad manners and I won't have that from my children' my mother snaps and I can see in my mind's eye her glaring daggers at my brother right now.

Giggling, I head up the stairs, and back to the room to nish getting ready.