

My Brother Grant

"Brother?" I repeated, dumbfounded. That couldn't be right. I was an only child. I was certain.

Then again, I couldn't be sure my father hadn't had any other children with another partner other than my mother.

Colton looked from each of us to the next. "You have a brother?"

"No, I—" I wasn't sure what to say.

The pale boy stepped forward. "We share the same mother," he told me. He looked just as lost as I felt. I guess he'd never thought he'd meet me.

The entire room was silent until Livy spoke up, her eyes moving to my brother. "Grant, perhaps you and Colton would like to show Lux to a tent? I'm sure she's tired."

My brother, Grant, nodded absently. His eyes were still searching my face. His body was tense like he wasn't sure how to anticipate my next move. "Okay."

Grant moved toward me at the same time as Colton.

I threw a look over my shoulder and at the collection of powerful people as I was ushered out of the tent. They had begun whispering back and forth.

The only kind smile I found was from a little boy hanging off Alpha Ebony's hand.

My head cleared a little as we stepped outside and I no longer felt the dominating presence of alpha blood. It was much easier to think when my wolf wasn't on edge or waiting for an order.

"Lux," Colton began slowly. "I was wondering if you'd seen Keegan? Jude said he was going back to get you but he never caught up with us. Is he...?"

I pressed my lips together as I nodded curtly. "He's gone."

Grant, who had been mostly silent, perked up. "Was he your mate?"

"Yes."

His eyes were the same shade as mine, and I realized then that my eyes had never been my father's. They'd belonged to my mother. The thought made me both relieved and a little anxious.

How much about myself was going to change once I spoke with Grant properly?

"I'm sorry," Grant answered swiftly. "Is that why you changed your last name? Was Stone his name?"

I couldn't be angry with his curiosity, despite the fatigue that was creeping into my bones and making me irritable.

Colton's eyes were red. "So, he's gone?" My throat squeezed shut. "I can't believe it."

I cleared my throat. "And Deelia? What about her?"

Colton shied away slightly. "She was killed in the raid."

"I'm so sorry, Colton," I told him sincerely.

I hadn't had the chance to speak with his sister civilly, but I felt sad for Colton and his parents. They were good people who didn't deserve the sharp sting of loss.

"Is your mother all right?" I said. I knew how protective Livy was over her children.

I had pushed just a little too far. "I, uh," Colton cleared his throat. "I have to go." He turned and left us abruptly, disappearing into a tent across the clearing.

With Colton gone, Grant and I settled into silence. I wasn't uncomfortable per se, but it felt as though we were both being trailed by a thousand unanswered questions that we were too nervous to ask.

"Here's where you'll be staying," Grant said as we approached a small tent.

I inclined my head. "Thanks."

He drew in a quick breath. "I'm not particularly good at communicating," Grant said quietly. "But if you'd like, we can talk."

I took a second to look at Grant; to really look at him. There were aspects about him that I couldn't place, ones that belonged to his father.

But in among those features, I found similarities to myself. We shared the same eyes, the same soft nose, the same cheekbones.

"I'd like to talk," I told him. "But tomorrow."

Grant's smile was wispy. "Of course, you must be tired."

I turned to head inside the tent but hesitated at the entrance. "Grant?"

He paused and turned, hair catching the light. "Yes?"

"Our mother," I hedged. "Is she alive?"

Grant nodded and my stomach clenched. "Goodnight, Lux."

I waited until he vanished from sight before I turned and headed inside my tent, looking around at the squat space.

This tent was nothing like the elaborate fixture Keegan had been given by Cole. It was half the size of my old bedroom and had a ceiling that stooped slightly in the middle.

I moved toward the single cot and fell onto it, happy to have a place to rest.

The mattress was thinner than the blankets but I was happy. The space felt safe, comforting.

I rolled onto my side, staring at the wall of the tent as howls echoed off the trees, their harmonies forming a sort of lullaby.

I was too tired to do much thinking, even though my mind was racing between thoughts of Keegan and Grant.

Lost love and the potential for a family. Loss and gain.

I closed my eyes to seal off the thoughts.

And soon, I was asleep.

I woke up to the sound of someone clearing their throat outside of my tent. I shot up, my back ramrod straight.

Light filtered in dully through the stretched material of the tent walls, indicating it was late morning.

"Lux?" It was Colton. "Are you awake?"

I mumbled a sleepy response.

"Some of the alphas are interested in speaking with you," Colton informed me. This sent my stomach spiraling to my ankles and forced my eyes wide.

"O-Okay," I stammered, rocketing out of bed. I grabbed my backpack from underneath the cot and rifled through it, grabbing the mouthwash-to-go and swishing a mouthful over my teeth and tongue.

Colton grinned as I exited the tent, looking much better than he had the night before. "Morning." His voice was chipper too.

I rubbed my eyes. "Morning."

"Sorry for my giddiness," Colton apologized. "I was half-convicted I'd never see you again. It's nice to have a familiar face around; some of the other packs are intimidating, never mind the royals."

I smiled genuinely. "It's nice to see you as well, Colton. Truly." I jumped a little when I felt him slide his fingers into mine. After a moment, I found his touch comforting. "Thank you."

"Come on," he urged, giving my hand a quick squeeze. "We'd better go."

Colton led me through the busy camp, not interested in the activity bustling all around us.

The camp was significantly larger than the territory Alpha Cole had held down on his own. Of course, this haven was much more populous as well.

"What is it the alphas want to ask me?" I inquired, trying to smooth over my nerves with a light tone.

Colton shrugged. "Probably about your dad."

"I don't know anything about what he's planning." The thought of my dad stopped me in my tracks and made me feel cold.

Although I didn't regret it, teasing my father with my departure might not have been a good idea.

"It's okay, Lux," Colton assured me. "No one is going to pressure you. You're like us now, they accept that. They'll probably want you to join a pack as well. I hope you chose my dad."

I felt a shiver run through me. I had always thought of Keegan and me as being our own sort of pack.

For so long, I was convinced that all we'd ever need was each other, but in the end, that hope hadn't been enough.

"Is that necessary?" I asked, feeling tenser than I had before.

Colton blinked, not understanding my hesitation. "Well, don't you want to be in a pack? It's in our nature. A pack offers protection, companionship, a sense of belonging.

"Surely, you don't want to go rogue?" The term was unfamiliar to me but I let it slide.

"Okay," I relented. "Let's go."

Colton led me across the territory, bypassing the tent I had met the alphas in the night before.

I was about to inquire about our destination when I saw them, the leaders of the packs, gathered together in a clearing.

Most stood, while a few sat on tree stumps and a fallen log at the back portion of the clearing. They were all there, just as they had been last night.

Most of the conversation died when Colton and I approached.

"Welcome Lux," the short girl I had learned was named Ebony greeted. She smiled at me impishly while the tall boy, Axel, stood stoically at her side. I wondered if he ever smiled.

Holding Ebony's hand was a little boy, Ebony caught me looking and raised his hand. "Jeremy."

I smiled at both of them. "Hi."

Cole demanded my attention next. "I'm sure Alpha has told you what we want to ask of you.

"The first topic to discuss is your father. I know you've separated yourself from him but we must ask you to remember anything you believe might help us with our cause."

I sucked in a breath. This was it, the ultimate betrayal. Once I gave the alphas information, there wouldn't be any way to turn back. I would never be accepted into my father's home again.

I almost didn't do it until I met Grant's steady gaze.

"My father's a maniac," I stated. All around, the wolves laughed and howled. At least I had broken the tension. "And you need to know that the people who follow him are too."

"Aren't all humans?" Alpha Evers asked, his eyes unforgiving.

To my surprise, the queen beat me to the punch. "They aren't, Logan, I promise you."

I sucked in a breath, my nerves creeping back in now that the attention was fixed solely on me. "My dad hates werewolves. It's more than just fear and uncertainty for him though; it's personal."

Grant sent me a meaningful look.

"Your mother was a werewolf?" Alpha Cole asked, his curiosity piqued.

I nodded. "I've never met her."

"But you the sibling of Livy's wolf, Grant?"

I frowned at that, not sure how to reply. Livy's wolf? I didn't think Grant was a part of Cole's pack. I would've met him if that had been the case.

"I'm hardly *Livy's wolf* anymore, Alpha Cole," Grant said. "The White Wolves disbanded long ago."

This jogged my memory, back to when Colton was telling me about his family on our way to New Jersey.

Grant continued. "We are siblings, on our mother's side at least."

"Where is your mother, Grant?" Livy asked.

Grant was uncomfortable. "Not far."

"Is there a way to contact her?" Alpha Evers asked. Beside him, his mate was nodding as though she could read his thoughts.

"I don't—" Grant began. Our eyes met and I knew we were both feeling the same thing.

Panic.

Livy's voice was soft. "Your mother is ammunition against our enemy. Perhaps her presence would be enough to throw Stan Freeman off his game."

I shivered slightly. They were planning to use one of my parents to kill the other. Colton threw me an anxious glance.

"I believe I could get her here," Grant said. "But it's no guarantee." His voice and face were stony, all business. Perhaps I was wrong, but his demeanor screamed *warrior* to me.

Alpha Evers smiled. "Fantastic!"

His mate was a tad more subtle. "Thank you, Grant and Lux, this helps."

I was surprised that I was counted in this equation. Grant and I might have shared a mother but I had never met her. I didn't even know her name.

Alpha Cole turned back toward me. "Is there anything else you can tell us, Lux? Anything at all that might help?"

I rolled my lower lip into my mouth, suddenly wishing I had Keegan here with me. He would have glided through this conversation. He always knew what to say, what was important.

My hand felt cold without his.

"He's determined to rid the county of wolves, and once he's accomplished that, he wants to drive them off the planet." I shrugged, knowing they already knew this.

"I don't know what else to say. He never told me any of his plans, and I never asked."

"You're doing well," Alpha Cole said. "Just think."

I frowned. "Well, when he took me from the raid, he said he was going to cure me."

The entire area seemed to explode.

All of the sudden, the alphas started yelling at each other, whipping everyone else into a panic.

Grant had gone as white as a sheet and sunk to the ground, looking like he was going to be sick. Colton tried to talk to his parents, but to no avail.

The king, looking grave, wrapped a careful arm around his queen and their son. Alpha Evers argued with his daughter while her mate tried to come between them.

It seemed that I was the only one with no idea what was happening.

The next person to speak silenced everyone. I swallowed as the king approached me. His eyes were the color of the forest but burned like fire. "Say that again, she-wolf, in case we misheard."

The clearing was silent as I repeated myself. I tucked my shaking hands into my body. "My father said he was going to try to cure me of the werewolf gene."

The king's face contorted. "Impossible." To my surprise, the king rounded on Grant. "What is this? You told me we didn't have to worry. It was destroyed. What is she talking about?"

The queen looked anxious. "Seb, don't get angry."

Grant met the king's hard glare. "I don't know. It was destroyed. This could be unrelated but I don't believe so. Stan Freeman had ties to the Sun Warriors, we already know this."

"What's going on?" I found myself asking. "What am I missing?"

Everyone was silent before Alpha Cole stepped forward. "Do you know how the Feral War started? You would have been very young at the time."

I shrugged. "Werewolves revealed themselves and then everything went to hell, right?"

Alpha Cole was patient. "It's a little more complex than that." His gaze swung to my brother. "Grant, you're at the heart of the story, do you want to explain?"

My heart stopped. My brother had something to do with the Feral War's origins?

Grant blew out a long breath, looking stressed. "Before the Feral War started, before you were even born, I was a part of a pack of elite warriors called the White Wolves, led by Livy."

I looked at the alpha's mate, remembering what Colton had told me. "Okay," I said slowly, following so far.

"Years ago, we were called upon to help a new pack that had settled in Oregon. They were led by Alpha Nathan Thorn and were having trouble with disappearances that eventually became murders.

"It was routine stuff at first; the White Wolves had dealt with the Sun Warriors before. Only, this wasn't the work of the Sun Warriors."

I shook my head. "Sun Warriors? What does that even mean?"

"They were a group of anti-werewolf humans who targeted our species before our existence was made known to the general public," Livy answered.

Grant took over again. "Well, the job got convoluted. There was this she-wolf, a late bloomer, like you, who held the secret to unlocking the genetic material of our kind without even knowing it.

"She was targeted, along with her pack, and eventually, the equation to our genetic code was obtained."

I shivered. "What were the humans going to do with it?"

"Use it to extract the best of our qualities and then give them to humans. Basically, humans wanted our superior senses, healing, and slow aging without having to shift. It was a monstrous idea."

"So, what happened?" I asked. "What went wrong?"

Grant's face was shadowed, heavy with old guilt. "We killed everyone involved. Almost everyone, anyways. The equation was destroyed and the threat was neutralized. The job was done.

"Until we realized our mistake. One teenager had been left unconscious in the woods and when he came back to find his companions dead, he cried. 'Wolf!'"

"Just like that?" I asked. "People believed him?"

"It took years," Grant said. "Years for him to gather enough evidence and support. But eventually, he got the media to listen, and then it wasn't long before humans came looking for us.

"When we couldn't hide anymore, we fought. And that's how the Feral War started."

"Do you understand now, Lux? Do you understand why what your father says scares us?" Alpha Cole asked.

"To the best of our knowledge, no one but that she-wolf's ancestor has been able to understand what sets us apart from humans scientifically. So, if your father is rambling on about a cure..."

"That means the equation could still be around," I answered.

"Which is impossible," Grant retorted. "I was there when it was burned."

"What do we do about it?" I asked, looking at all the closed-off faces.

The king stepped up. "We need to kill your father."

I knew it was coming but that didn't mean I could soften the blow.

I hated him, I truly did, but he was my father. Growing up, he was all I'd had. Our relationship had never been close, but he'd still taken care of me.

And now, I was conspiring to kill him.

I pressed my lips together. "I know."

"Good," the king grunted, ignoring the look his mate was giving him. "We need to know that you will not hesitate if the time comes."

The queen tried to interject. "Seb—"

The king held out a hand. "If the opportunity arises, she needs to be able to do it."

"It won't be a problem." The strength in my voice surprised me. I just hoped I would never have to find out if it was truth or deception.

The king smiled, clapping his hands together. "Great. For the next order of business, you can't remain a rogue, so if you would, please ask an alpha for acceptance into their pack."

"Can I have a day to think about it?" I asked, eyeing the alphas wearily. I didn't know enough about the packs to make a decision.

Which ones were staying north? Which was the smallest? Who had the most forgiving alpha?

"It would be easier if you chose now," the king said. "For everyone."

Jude interjected on my part, speaking for the first time. "If I could, I don't believe Lux has enough knowledge to make an educated guess. Perhaps she should seek council from her brother and me?"

"I don't want to waste more time on this than we have to," the king relented. "She has until sundown to decide."

I blew out a breath, thanking the king verbally, but looking at Jude.

With the meeting officially over, the alphas dispersed.

The small girl with the dark streak in her hair walked over to me, and her silent mate followed.

"You're really brave," Ebony told me. "Axel and I would be happy to have you join our pack."

I smiled at her. "Thank you, I'll keep your offer in mind."

"Good luck," Ebony said, and her mate mumbled the same before shuffling off.

I was going to head back to my tent when I felt a hand on my arm. I turned to see Grant, who had a pained look in his pale eyes.

"I'm sorry about all that," he said quietly. "I wasn't expecting both of your parents to be put on the chopping block."

I tried not to think too hard about it. "Can I ask you some stuff now? About our mother?"

Instead of answering, he started toward the fallen tree at the far end of the clearing. Its previous occupants had scattered, leaving us with the entire log to ourselves.

I settled on it slowly, thinking over what I wanted to ask. "What's her name?" I figured it was best to start with something simple.

"Natalie," Grant answered softly. It was odd, the way he said her name. There was a sort of reluctance in his voice that I couldn't quite understand.

Perhaps he noticed it himself because he filled in the blanks for me. "I haven't been close with our mother for a very long time."

"Why not?" I asked. "Is she not a good person?" I held my breath as I waited for the answer.

I hoped that Natalie was good. What would it say about me if both my parents were rotten to the core?

"She's good," Grant said. "Our relationship is strained for another reason."

"Would it be rude to ask you to elaborate?"

Grant's mouth twitched into a smile. "I suppose not. We are family, after all."

"Well then, what happened?"

"I was born outside of the mating bond, which isn't something that happens very often. My mother didn't think she was going to meet her mate and she fell in love with my father, and he, with her.

"Anyways, not long after I was born, my mother found Stan Freeman and my father found his intended."

I looked down. "I'm sorry, Grant. But for what it's worth, being born within a mating bond never did me much good."

Grant sighed. "I suppose I was always jealous of you," he admitted. "Though, I told myself I never visited you because I was busy with the White Wolves."

"You've known about me for so long?" I asked, a little stung. How could he not have visited me? How different would my life have been if he had?

He shrugged. "I don't visit my other siblings either. The ones on my father's side. I guess I was so wrapped up with my insecurities that I didn't bother."

"And when I finally grew out of it, the war started."

I tried to put aside my hurt. There was no point in ripping apart a relationship that hadn't even started yet. "The White Wolves you were a part of, what was happening to them?"

"We lost the faith of our species.

"For centuries, we were considered handpicked by the Goddess, but few believe in her these days, not since her protection wasn't enough to rip apart everything we knew."

"I'm sorry," I told him. "That must've been hard."

"I've had it no harder than anyone else has," Grant said. A moment passed in silence. I felt Grant's gaze on my face but didn't turn to meet it. "You look just like her," Grant said.

"What?"

"Like Natalie," Grant amended. "The similarity is something."

My face felt hot. "Hopefully, that's a good thing?"

Grant laughed. "My father used to say that she was touched by the moon. You have that same look about you; all silver."

I knocked my shoulder against his. "You're not so bad yourself."

He flashed me a brief smile but then grew serious. "Look, Lux, about you picking a pack. I think you should consider—"

"Lux!"

Grant and I rocketed to our feet, then watched as Colton ran toward us, waving his hands in front of his flushed face. He skidded to a stop a few feet from us, bending over to catch his breath.

"Colton, what's—?"

"Lux," he wheezed, "you need to come." Without another word, he turned and started sprinting again, his movements jerky but quick.

Grant and I exchanged a quick look before running after him.

Colton led us right to the main tent, holding open the fabric for us to duck through. The guards were motionless, giving nothing of Colton's excitement away.

We ducked through the tent's entrance to find the space crammed with people.

Colton moved ahead of us, parting the crowd and pulling Grant and me after him.

"Colton," I tried, "what's going on?"

Colton glanced at me over his shoulder. "Hurry."

I could just hear the static buzz of a television over the excited chatter in the tent. The closer we got to the television, the more my stomach knotted.

I was sure I would see my father on the screen and I wasn't sure if I was ready.

Alpha Cole caught my arm on my way to the front. "Don't panic, Lux, my pack will help you, I promise."

I didn't have time to think about what Alpha Cole had said or thank him for his offer. I just kept moving.

It was then I was able to pick out my father's voice.

"...this is going to be a lesson to all werewolves who still believe they can oppose humans. You can't. We have one of your most prized possessions and we plan to discard it of soon, publicly."

My stomach was a ball of lead, sinking lower. I grabbed Grant's arm. "Is he talking about the equation?"

Grant shrugged helplessly as we pushed further forward, finally breaking through the wall of people.

I locked my eyes on the screen, not