

Chapter 1

Just over one year later

"Oh my god Molly, I love your outfit." My best friend June exclaimed the moment I walked into the small independent cafe which had turned into our favourite place to have lunch within the first week of college. She swept a stray strand of her long blonde hair behind her ear and uttered her eyelashes as she spoke. If I didn't know better I would have sworn that she was flirting with me but the truth is June always looked like she was flirting.

It was the kind of place that people would term quirky. Nothing in the whole cafe matched and there was a sense that you were walking into someone's home rather than a business. That was the main reason that I like this place, it made me feel comfortable. My friends must have felt the same way because no matter how many other places we tried out, this was the one place that we kept coming back to.

"Thank-you, I put it together myself." I said. I gave my friends an exaggerated twirl before sitting down between Ellie and Dominic.

My dress sense has come a long way in the last nine or ten months since I left the pack. I no longer felt the need to make myself fade into the background and so I enjoyed expressing myself through my clothing. Unfortunately, I didn't have a whole lot of money to spend on clothing after I left the pack. I had a job at one of the local diners where I worked a few afternoons and evenings each week but the money never seemed to stretch quite as far as you think it will.

This meant that I had to get creative. Most of my clothes were things that I had found in thrift shops. Some of them needed a bit of adaptation to make them fit my style but others like the piece I was wearing today were perfect all by themselves.

My outfit today was a short sleeveless dress which was dark green and decorated all over with a cute fox pattern. I had paired this outfit with burgundy leggings and a long black winter coat. Not because I was cold but because this was Alaska and I didn't want to give anyone a reason to think that I wasn't quite human. Humans may seem to be very resistant to the idea of werewolves living among them but I didn't want to test that theory.

"Are you sure that I can't convince you to go shopping with me tomorrow morning rather than meeting your dad?" June asked.

"Stepfather and no he is really adamant about this." I said.

The truth was I wasn't really meeting my stepfather. Tomorrow was my eighteenth birthday, the day I would meet my wolf and shift for the first time. I wanted to spend some time getting to know her and maybe go for a run before having to deal with other people. Saying I was meeting my family was the only way that I could think of to make sure that I could get some time alone.

"You are meeting your stepfather, why didn't I know about this?" Dominic asked.

The concern was evident in his eyes. I didn't like that my necessary white lie was making my friends feel like this. If I had known how it would make them feel I would have thought of another way of getting away for a few hours.

"I didn't want you to worry about me." I replied.

"How can we not worry, we all know how your stepfather treats you." Ellie said.

Of course that wasn't true either. They knew that my half brother bullied me verbally and they knew that my stepfather spent most of the time pretending that I didn't exist. All of his other actions, the ones that hurt me the most, were not really something I could talk about with them.

"It's not like he is going to do anything to hurt me. It is just a few hours for him to wish me a happy birthday." I said.

"Maybe I should come with you." Dominic said.

"What, why?" I said. This conversation was not going how I wanted it to and I was starting to feel a bit panicky. There is no way I could let any of them see me shift, I had to get control of this conversation.

"I don't like the idea of giving him the chance to bring you down again. It took you so long to get your composure back when you came here." Dominic said.

"I know but I have to get used to standing up to him if I am going to have to spend the summer with him." I said.

"Wait just one minute, you are staying there for the summer?" June said. She was clearly upset that I hadn't told her about that sooner because she had lost her usual smile. I nodded my head.

"Why can't you just stay here?" Ellie asked.

"You should do that. I could keep you company." Dominic said while winking at me.

"I have to go, I made a promise." I said.

I also signed a contract which was witnessed by the alpha, breaking a contract like that would have serious repercussions. It wasn't something I wanted to risk but there was also a part of me that still had loyalty to my pack and actually wanted to keep to that contract. I was born to be the pack's beta so loyalty was a part of my blood, neither the bullying or the neglect could change that.

June looked at me as though she couldn't understand the words that I was saying. Her face was scrunched up in a way that I had never seen from her before, even when she was studying calculus. I guess it was very difficult for humans to understand the level of loyalty werewolves have towards their pack. We rely on our pack for so much in our lives, our loyalty is just our way of repaying this.

"At some point you are going to have to learn to stop letting them dictate your life to you." June said, rolling her eyes as she spoke.

"Look sweetheart, I can't stop you from meeting him and I can't make you take me with you but I can ask you to be careful and message me if anything happens that you are not comfortable with." Dominic said.

"I can do that." I replied. I smiled at him as I looked into his green eyes. The contrast between his green eyes and his jet black hair was always striking. Now that those eyes were looking at me with so much concern they were darn right mesmerising.

"Great, I have to go now. Are we still on for tonight?" He asked.

"Of course." I said matching his smile with one of my own.

He leaned forward and kissed me lightly on the lips before standing up and heading towards the exit. On the way out he stopped by the counter. With my supernatural hearing I could hear him ordering me a coffee and a muffin. He paid my bill and left the cafe. I could feel myself grinning like an idiot, he was so sweet sometimes.

"So?" June asked. Maybe I had missed something because I wasn't sure what she was asking me.

"So what?" I said.

"You have a date with him tonight?" June asked. She was smiling at me now, her earlier worries about my family clearly forgotten.

"It's not a date. He is just a friend" I said. It came out a lot more defensively than I had intended. It also wasn't helped by the fact that now was the precise moment that the waitress brought over the coffee and muffin which Dominic had bought me. She set them down in front of me while June and Ellie giggled and exchanged glances.

"Ok, ok. So what are you going to do on this date that is not a date then?" June said in the tone that she only ever seemed to use when she was teasing me.

"We are going to see that new horror film that came out last week and then we will probably grab something to eat." Then we will probably end up back at his place, I finished in my head. There was no need for them to know about that bit.

"Dinner and a movie. Sounds just like a date to me, what do you think Ellie?" June asked.

"It's absolutely a date." Ellie said with faux seriousness.

"It's not, we are just friends." I protested. I had been very clear with Dominic about that. I have a mate out there somewhere waiting for me, it wasn't fair on either of them for me to start a proper relationship with Dominic.

"You have been feeding us this friends with benefits story for months but tell me one thing. How many other men have you dated since you started seeing Dominic?" June asked as though she didn't already know the answer. Dominic was the only man I had ever been with physically and the only person I had even been on anything even resembling a date with.

"You already know I haven't been seeing anyone else." I said.

"So neither you or Dominic have been seeing anyone but each other for the last four months. You go on dates together and you spend most evenings together. Sounds exactly like a relationship to me." Ellie said. June burst out laughing.

"I have had less commitments from guys I have been engaged to before." June said.

June had every right to hate the idea of falling in love or dating in general. When she started the year she had been engaged to her high school sweetheart. They had continued to have a long distance relationship until the winter break when she went home and discovered that he was cheating on her. I would have expected an experience like that to stop her from believing in love but if anything it had the opposite effect. She was determined that she and everyone around her would not find the love of their life.

"It's not like that. We are not dating." I said.

"Why not? He is gorgeous, he is smart and he worships the ground you walk on." Ellie said.

"I think you make a perfect couple but I also think it isn't fair to keep leading him on like this. If you don't want to be in a relationship with him then you need to stop making him think he has a chance with you." June said.

"He knows that we are just friends." I retorted.

I didn't appreciate the accusation that I was leading him on. I had been nothing but honest with him ever since we started sleeping together. I told him then that I didn't want a relationship and I have reminded him of that a few times in the last few months. It didn't make sense that he would think there was more to our relationship.

"Are you absolutely certain he knows that?" June asked.

I told her I was certain and the conversation moved on. June and Ellie started talking about what they would wear to the party that they were throwing for my birthday tomorrow night. June was excited about some new dress that she had bought specifically for the occasion.

I tried to join in with their conversation but I kept finding myself thinking of Dominic. I couldn't quite shake the feeling that they might be right. For all the time that I spent telling him that we couldn't be together, my actions for the last few months had been telling him the complete opposite.

When we started sleeping together I had been very clear about the boundaries of our relationship. We wouldn't go on any dates, we wouldn't stay over at each other's places and we wouldn't do any public displays of affection. For the first month or two we had stuck to this rigidly, we slept together but in every other way we were just friends.

I am not really sure when things started to change but I know why. As my eighteenth birthday has been getting closer I have been getting more nervous. There are so many things happening in the next few weeks which could change my life forever.

Some people in my pack suggested that my father could be a human and as a result I might not have a wolf. I have always ignored this suggestion, a wolf, the heightened senses of a werewolf so there is no reason to think I wouldn't have a wolf. Now that my birthday was approaching, that old taunt was one of the many things that kept me up at night.

I was also worried about going back to my pack over the summer. Not so much because of my stepfather or my brother. Dealing with them was upsetting but it wasn't anything that I wasn't used to. What actually worried me was meeting my mate. I have looked forward to meeting my mate all my life pretty much but that was when my status was desirable.

When I was the future beta any werewolf would have been proud to be matched with me. Now I was an outcast, there was a good chance that I would be rejected and if I wasn't then I would probably have to give up college to be with him. All I could do was hope that my mate was from a different pack to mine and we would meet later when I had already finished my studies.

Dominic didn't know what any of my concerns were but he had easily picked up on my anxiety. He had spent many hours over the last month spending time with me and doing things to take my mind off my worries.

I don't know if he had done all of this as a way of getting around my defences but that is the way it had worked out. Now a month or so later and we have broken every single rule we had laid out. He was kissing me in public and taking me out on dates. The only thing he hasn't done is tell me he loves me.