



## Chapter Seven | Reality Weighs Heavier than a Mystery

---POV Julie---

The minute he stood in front of me, prepared to ght, my whole world froze. The shifts of his body. The subtle mannerisms of his tone. I've felt like this before. I know I have. The words sunk in one at a time and all other thoughts drained from my mind as one word in particular held more weight than the rest.

Did he just say mate? Like the whole werewolf thing, mate? I sighed and shook my head at this man's delusions. "I guess you haven't heard. I may live with wolves, but I am human. Humans don't have mates, your highness and I'm not privy to make a deal with someone of your stature." Human or not, there is just no way. Especially not a mate like him! Not a mate like the man of my memories. The man without a face.

He raised his brow, but his stance did not falter. "It is rare but not unheard of."

"So, you are telling me I'm your mate and you're the father of my twins. Lies are what I hate the most, your highness." There's no way the two are one in the same. There is no way the prince of all people is the one of my memories. The one I wished would love me, but I begged, hoped, prayed would stay away from me.... Assuming I wasn't worth being loved and spoiled by a man like him. Assuming I would taint his life with all my baggage.

That one night was supposed to be enough for me. I was making it okay for me. Calling himself the prince makes it so much worse! The Prince of the Wolves...now I'm sure of it. He has to be lying or this just got a whole lot worse.

"I cannot deny it. They look just like me. You are the woman my spirit and I have been craving for years. The woman who slipped through my ngers." His matter-of-fact tone was starting to make my teeth grind. Or...was it the reality that he actually looked for me?

No...I can't do this to myself. Craving for years? Seriously? Words are nothing but empty promises that get me hurt. "So, you remember me, your highness?" The words slipped off my tongue faster than I could think. I don't know if I'm more overwhelmed that he's my knight in shining armor, or that he is making this encounter seem like the fairytale I didn't even allow myself to have in my dreams. He's making this a whole lot worse.

"Benson."

I blinked twice and leaned back a bit while Duncan clutched to the side of my skirt. "What?"

"My name."

"And?!"

"You may have your doubts about all of this, but one thing is for certain, call me by my name." He growled and I scoffed. Up until this moment, I couldn't even remember his face let alone the fact that he had a name. A name that is apparently Benson White. The

freaking Prince of the Wolves.

"Listen, I barely remember what happened that night. I don't know who you are and...and if you really are the man that took care of me, I'll reject you here and now." I spat back before picking up both my kids and walking away from the scene we had made. It's better this way. I will keep that in my mind. Mates? True love? I don't deserve that. I'm just the w\*\*e who apparently had the prince's kids. I feel like that hurt a lot more than it should. Like a said...a whole lot worse. I will never get to have the man of my one-night stand. The prince will never be allowed to marry a human.

Duncan and Ricky started to wiggle in my arms, and I picked up the pace. "Momma, wait!" Ricky called and I ignored him.

I didn't get very far though. An arm slipped around my waist and spun me to meet the owner of that arm. The prince...again. "Are you running from a little friendly wager? I thought you were just as erce in the ring as you are in the courtroom. Also, let's be clear about one thing. I remember everything from that night. I remember how much I hoped to talk with you that morning. I don't care if you are human, wolf, whatever. I would never intentionally leave my mate. You may be a human, but you know that our law is absolute and abandoning your mate is sacrilegious."

"Oh really? I nd that very hard to believe your highness. Last time I checked, this is the real world. I will not allow myself to get swept up into something I cannot keep. I have my kids and my life to look after. That does not include chasing after dreams that happened almost a decade ago. Sacrilegious or not, you know you are the next king. Unless you want to lose all of that, keep walking...the other direction." I pulled my body away from his, catching my breath.

Ricky and Duncan took this opportunity to pull themselves out of my arms and stand between the two of us. I looked away from him and bit my lip, almost drawing blood. "Momma, please listen!" Ricky called. I inched and looked down at him. He huffed and turned towards the prince. "My mom may be my mom, but sometimes she's a bit stubborn. I'll take you up on that wager. We get to know why you abandoned momma and us!" Duncan shouted.

A-abandoned us?! "N-No. Honey, that isn't what happened. I...." What was I going to say? I got pulled into the bliss of the prince and I don't really remember why I did what I did? He's six for crying out loud. They may have solved a murder case yesterday but Ricky and Duncan are still just little kids.

"Mom, you said it yourself. You don't remember what happened. So, therefore he left you in reality and in your memories." Ricky said with such assurance in his tone, it was close to impossible to deny his claim.

"Sorry kid, but your mom actually disappeared on me." The prince corrected and Ricky huffed irritably.

"Is that true?" Ricky asked, turning to me. "Did you leave him momma?"

I nodded once begrudgingly agreeing to the prince's explanation. It was to the point and at their level. Also, I know I can't lie to my kids, but I denitely felt like I was being reprimanded...by a six-year-old. "She must have had her reasons, Ricky." Duncan said, coming to my rescue.

Ricky waved his hands in the air, and at this point, the prince's guards were back on their feet. One of them was holding the grey jacket the prince disposed of earlier while the rest led behind him. The confused looks on their faces were priceless. We were having a very interesting conversation with children in the middle of it. It's not impossible to see the craziness with that. "Honestly, I don't really care what he or momma did before, but I really want to know why he's here now. This wager may be our only option." Ricky added.

It's not like he's the only one. I left for my safety. I don't even want to know what would have happened if he knew I was pregnant. By the way he is acting now, I think I may have been mistaken but I couldn't take that risk then. It would have been deadly.... For all three of us.

"Alright deal. If your momma wins, I'll leave, and I won't be back again. I'll...." He cleared his throat and resituated his collar. "I'll let you know the proper way to reject our bond and leave once it's accepted." Glad to know there is a loophole.

Also, it's not a bad option. I won't lose. "And if you win?" I asked, playing along.

"For a start, we conrm these boys are mine and we have a chat about what happened that night. I feel like there are some things that were left unsaid. Deal?"

Did I really want to know? I've been ne sitting in the dark for all these years. Now...now I'm worried he will tell me something I don't want to remember. I'm worried he'll prove my mother right. It's ne though. If I really don't want to know, I just won't lose. "Fine, but we do this ght on my terms. Follow me." I called before holding out my hands. Duncan and Ricky took my them, turning back to see the prince while I started walking towards the dojo. I had a feeling the prince and his guards were following me. The overwhelming sense of comfort that I cannot forget from that night, even if I wanted to, was consuming me. That was all the conrmation I needed. I've never met another person that makes me feel the way he does, by just being around me.

I guess our wagers were accepted. Let the challenge begin.

Once we got into the dojo, thankfully there were only a few instructors walking around. They were quite confused by the crowd though. I could tell. I cleared my throat and nodded to them. "Jules, are you good?" Cody asked, glaring at the men behind me. Of course, he's all protective now. Where was that energy when that girl was getting picked on last weekend?

The prince walked up next to me and barred his teeth. Unlike the other wolves I've seen channeling their spirits, his eyes weren't all colorful. They were pitch black with a small sliver of red in the middle. "Back off pup!" He warned and instead of being completely mortied, I was mesmerized by his actions.

"Momma!" I jumped and looked down at Ricky, pulling on my arm. "Can Cody and James referee?" He asked and I looked at him with confusion all over my face. I completely forgot why we were here. "The match mom!" He shouted again and I mentally slapped my forehead.

"Y-Yes that would be ne. I'm going to change rst though. You stay with Cody and James, okay?"

"Match? What match?" James asked, jogging up to us. "Hello, my name is James, and I am the owner of this dojo. To what do I owe the pleasure?" He looked between me and the prince and back again, stealing glances at the men behind us.

"Momma is going to ght daddy!" Duncan said happily and my face paled. I know he didn't mean anything by it but the chill in the room just amplified. All because of that one word.

I shook my head and glared at James. "Watch them." I warned before racing off to the locker rooms. This was already awkward enough. I took a deep breath, pulling on my leggings and sports bra. I stared at myself in the mirror, and for once, I was self-conscious. I groaned irritably and threw on a sweatshirt before tying my hair into a ponytail and heading back out of the locker rooms.

"She told me to watch them!" James shouted.

"They are my kids! Who are you to tell me what to do?!" The prince spat back.

Oh no. I looked up to see James and the prince going toe to toe and it was comical. James was around my height, maybe a couple inches taller, but the prince was in league of his own. He towered over him. "Are you going to break this up, or should I?" Cody asked, sliding up next to me.

I giggled and folded my arms. "What, don't you enjoy two grown children ghting over you? They are starting to look like Ricky and Duncan ghting over a brownie." I added.

Cody laughed at that one and pointed his thumb behind him. "Two guys showed up shortly after you ran off. They said they'd watch the twins while those two fought. One of them said he's the second prince. Who would have thought we'd be so popular tonight. I've been with them the whole time. They're pretty cool, but one of them looks like he needs some sunlight." I raised a brow, and he shook his head. "Don't ask." He patted my shoulder and headed over to the arguing children while I went to pry my little angels that got me into this mess.

Duncan was drawing right next to one guy while Ricky was showing another one how to throw a right hook. I could tell which one was the second prince though. He looked a lot like Benson, but his features were softer and more approachable. He was with Duncan and my son looked like he was having a blast. So did Ricky. "Hey kiddos." I called over to them and they perked up and turned to me.

"Momma! Uncle Ken is a real artist like me!" Duncan shouted and raced over to me with a paper and pencil in hand. I squatted down and he plowed into me before showing me the photo. "Look! Look! We drew this one together!" He started pointing at the drawing and my mouth dropped.

It was stunning! It's like what he was drawing yesterday but the shading did everything to make it come to life. "Woah! This is amazing Duncan."

"Yeah, and he did most of it all by himself. That's a pretty cool kid you got there." I looked up to meet the second prince or as Duncan calls him, Uncle Ken.

"I'm guessing you're the uncle?"

"I'm guessing you're the one that got away. Sorry we had to meet you before this wager came to fruition. If you win, we might not be able to say anything to you." He held out his hand and I shook it.

"Well then I'm glad you came by to introduce yourself now." I added and he smirked with a nod.

"How you took out all his bodyguards makes me think your condence isn't unwarranted. Hi, my name is Aaron." I turned to the other man, and I can see what Cody was saying. He's quite pale. "You ready to ght Miss.Bruen?" He asked and bowed once.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"You got spirit. I like it." Ken called before turning to a quite comical scene starring Cody, holding back two alpha males. "Hey! You ready to get this ght over with?!" I got

stakes on your mate, brother!" He called and I cleared my throat.

"I'm rooting for daddy!" Duncan shouted and I froze, turning to look at him. I wasn't the only one. He always roots for me. Well, I guess there is a rst for everything.