## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

I had already suspected something along these lines from what Lucas had told me but to have it confirmed by my own father makes something hard form in my chest.

So many things are starting to make sense, including how Hunter had not even given me a chance to explain. I have never heard of a pack mate being banished without even a trial. On the spot banishments or for those who have committed terrible crimes.

I stare at my father, my lips moving but nothing coming out. Finally, I manage to say, "But why? What did I do to deserve this?"

The two people who I was closest to, my best friends, plotted together to get rid of me. They planned out my death.

My father's face flickers, "It's – There's something I never told you. I simply didn't think that you needed to know. Hunter's father wanted to join our two families. He wanted you to be one of the Alpha pairs. When both you and Hunter were young, he pushed for the betrothal and later on, he made it a condition for Hunter becoming the Alpha."

My face pales, "What? Hunter didn't love me? I thought-"

My father grips me by my upper arms, guilt written all over his face, "Sweetheart, we both thought that Hunter loved you. He said he did. Both me and his father were sure of it. I never once suspected -"

"So, he did all this to break our engagement?" I stumble back only for Lucas's arm to curl

around my waist. I absorb his silent strength, trying to think past this ball of grief stuck in my throat.

All those whispered promises, those stolen kisses, those romantic walks in the moonlight when everyone was asleep, what were they? Why did he make me fall in love with him if he never wanted to mate with me to begin with?

My heart is hurting and its Lucas who holds me up.

"I don't know," My father confesses. "I have no concrete evidence about the extent of his involvement but I do know that he planned to banish you that day. Everything was too carefully planned. He made sure that I was kept away till everything was done. If I had managed to intervene, I would have exerted my influence to stop it."

I stare at my father who looks weary, "What did he say to you?"

It's difficult to keep it together and the only reason I'm able to is because of Lucas.

"I saw him and Valerie in each other's arms and then Valerie saw me. She looked shocked at first and then she stated crying, telling me how you had attacked her. When I demanded to see you, Hunter said you had been banished. I asked for an explanation and he said that you hadn't shifted and that you had tried to kill Valerie. I asked him if he had seen you physically try to kill Valerie. He didn't have a response but he said he won't take back his decision."

I stare at him, numbly, "So I can't go back then?"

My father lets out a heavy breath, "I'm talking to the pack Elders. It's going to be more problematic because now that you can't shift, they won't want you back and -"

"Dad," I stop him in the middle of his sentence, "If the wolfsbane stopped me from shifting, wasn't that enough reason for Hunter not to mate with me. Why go to the extent of banishing me?"

It's not easy to form my thoughts and speak so clearly.

My father has no answer to that. Instead, he says, "Hunter declared Valerie as his intended mate and he declared you to be dead today. I've been trying to follow your scent for days and I finally – I finally found you."

I swallow, looking up at Lucas and then back at him, and my voice is a broken whisper, "So what happens now?"

My father looks at Lucas and he finally asks, "How sure are you that she's your true mate?"

"My parents were true mates," He replies, tightly. "I know more about them than you think. A normal mating bond only takes place once you mark your mate. True mates don't need that. Their bond snaps into place once they both accept the others presence or they allow the other in, which is what happened in our case."

My father lets out a sigh of relief, "Well, your bond will allow Sarah to survive."

He looks at me, "With a true mate, you don't need an Alpha bond to survive. It also means that even if Hunter knows you're alive, he can't kill you. If you're mated, he can't kill you. And if Lucas is partially attached to the pack, you aren't banished then."

A small sliver of hope springs up in me and then I freeze, "Wait, what if they come up with another way to get rid of me. Also -" My heart sinks, "- the pack won't accept me. Hunter labelled me as a non-shifter and a traitor. They'll shun me. And now that Valerie is going one to one of the Alpha pair, they'll never accept me."

Suddenly the place that I had been yearning for, for the past few days, seems more desolate and empty. Even if I go back, there's no place for me there.

My father's expression changes and I know that he also realizes it.

"Well, then, we have to prove your innocence," Lucas says, firmly. "I'm sure there has to be a cure to wolfsbane poison."

"The pack archives," I say, slowly and I see the realization in my father's eyes. "You need a proper mating mark before you return. And you can't tell him that the two of

you are true mates," My father's voice is grim. "Hunter will see it as Lucas's weakness. And it's no secret that he wants you dead. He'll use your true mate bond against you."