

## Chapter 5

### 4 - Kennedy

Walking into the gym and flipping on the lights I, at least, think to warm-up a little first. I crank some angry rock music, grab a speed rope and start jumping to get my blood flowing and my muscles warm, still letting the rampant negative thoughts run wild. Weak, Orphan, Alone, Replaced, Unwanted. Just a repeating loop every time the rope hit the floor a new word would pop up.

Once I had a decent sweat going. I moved over to the heavy bag, checked my wrapped hands and started running through our usual hitting warm-up then I just started wailing on the bag adding in kicks and full body movements, until I couldn't feel my limbs any more. I stopped when I couldn't push my body any further and leaned my forehead on the bag breathing hard. My weak human self doesn't have the same natural stamina my werewolf friends do. Another wave of irritation washes over me. Not Enough, my internal voice taunts me.

Ben walks up next to me in his own workout gear and hands me a water bottle. "Did you get it all out?" I didn't realize he stayed. He's sweaty too, so at least I didn't keep him from his workout today by being stuck babysitting me, again.

"For now, but that's only because I can't feel my arms." I roll my eyes at him.

"You've been at it for three hours, I would hope so. I don't know if I've ever seen you move like that. You are getting stronger and faster. Apparently your anger is your secret weapon."

He winks at me, but the amusement doesn't last long.

"Well, I guess it's good at least one of you noticed, finally." I scrunch my eyes together and take a deep breath. "I'm sorry, you didn't deserve that. I'm not angry at you, you're just here." I sit down on the bench next to the bag and he follows suit.

I see movement out of the corner of my eye and notice Tommy and Jason coming closer. They stayed too? I'm interrupting their night, now I do feel a little bad. They really should be getting to know their new Luna and hanging out with Jer.

"Is it safe to approach, or am I going to lose the jewels?" Tommy tries for a joke, pointing to his most prized possession.

"Shut up. You'll be fine." I roll my eyes and almost smile, but I'm not there yet.

"But, will you?" Ben asks and all I can do is shrug my shoulders.

"We haven't talked for two days. We've never not talked for two days. What if she tells him he can't see me or talk to me or be friends with me? What if she kicks me out of the pack house?" I take another drink. "I'm not going to make him choose, because he wouldn't choose me. He couldn't choose me, I know that. Mates are special and once in a lifetime." I let the tears fall and I try to keep down the hurt and panic that has been bubbling under the surface since Jason pulled me out of class.

"He didn't even tell her about me. I know that shouldn't be a big deal, but I'm his human, female, best friend living in his house. That's not normal on any level and he didn't even tell her, you could see the surprise on her face. He's never been ashamed of me before, but it's never mattered before either. Maybe her pack isn't as tolerant of humans. And she was pissed I hugged him, pissed I was near him at all. She isn't going to accept me in their lives and I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't get in between them, but I can't just stay there and watch him pull away from me slowly. That will kill me."

Ben wraps his arm around my shoulder and pulls me into him. I rest my head on his shoulder just letting the tears stream now, looking in front of me but not really seeing anything. Jason sits on my other side and holds my hand and Tommy kneels in front of me.

"Ken, we'll figure this out. You are important to him, you know that. A new mate bond can be overwhelming and I'm sure he isn't thinking totally clearly." Tommy squeezes my other hand.

"That much I figured out on my own. What am I supposed to do in the meantime though? I can't wait forever for him to pull his head out of his ass. And you guys will eventually find your mates and do the same thing." A fresh wave of tears starts to fall. I close my eyes and lean my head back on the wall, willing them to stop.

"We would never leave you hanging, you know that." Jason leans into me.

"I knew that about Jeremiah too, and look where that got me." I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, opening my eyes to look at the ceiling. "I just need to train more, keep myself busy until I can get out of here, go to college and do the normal human thing. We all knew this was coming. I just didn't expect it to be so sudden and suck so bad." I move to stand up, but Ben holds me back.

"This isn't forever, just give him some time. And stop trying to run away."

"I'll try, but I'm also not going to stand around being growled at. And I'm not running away, we all needed space."

What I don't say is that I will also be mentally preparing to cut ties with all of them, if that's what make their lives easier.

I just wore my sweaty gym clothes home, wadding up my street clothes. I didn't come prepared so I have no shower stuff with me and the disheveled hot mess look is a good representation of how I feel right now anyway.

The guys insist on walking me back. I try to not let it irritate me, because it still feels like I'm being babysat.

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They leave me at the door though, which is a relief. I walk into the kitchen from the back patio door. I thought I was being smart and would be able to slip in and to my bedroom unnoticed, but I was wrong.

"F\*ck, Kennedy!" I jump and grasp my sweaty tank top like it will slow my racing heart, then take a deep breath and compose myself. "Where have you been? I was worried. You just ran out and left your phone and everything here." Jeremiah jumps up from his seat at the island moving to come to me. Is he angry at me? Why does he look angry? He has no right to be angry at me for putting distance in a stressful situation so everyone could calm down.

I ignore him and walk to the fridge to grab a bottle of water. I open it and take a long pull before I turn to answer him. She's in here with him. I can smell her perfume and I will not have anything that can be misconstrued as a fight with him in front of her. I won't give her any other reason to tell him to stay away from me.

"I was training and I had an entourage of sentinels with me. Did you not think to check in with any of the guys? They could have told you where we were. Or let's be honest, you are my best friend and should be able to guess where I would go to blow off some steam." I let my irritation bleed into my words.

"They all blocked me. I thought something might have happened." He scrubs his hands over his face before looking back at me.

I look at him like he's stupid, because he is right now. Something did happen and he completely iced me out.

"You know them better than that. If something was really wrong they would have linked you. Also, If you really thought something happened, just sitting around waiting wasn't your best move, Alpha. As it was, you put them on babysitting duty before you left and they seem to think that since your brain is one hundred percent preoccupied, that assignment is not over. I needed to workout, that's where I was, the gym. Now I need to shower." And pack a bag, but I don't say that out loud. I told Ben I would call him to come get me so I could stay with him. To his credit he didn't argue.

I try to walk past Jer, but he catches my wrist and stops me. Another low growl from the other side of the island and I press my lips into a line, but keep my face away from both of them until I am sure I can school my features. I can't show irritation or disrespect to the future Luna.

"Kennedy, why are your hands bleeding?" He asks softly, but his own irritation is bubbling under the surface, barely controlled.

I stop trying to pull away and look back at my hand, confused, noticing that my knuckles bled through the wraps I didn't bother taking off. None of the other guys said anything about it and I know they noticed too.

"F\*ckers, they could have warned me." They knew he would ask. That's why they didn't follow me in, they knew he would stop me. "I did some work on the bags. I didn't even notice until now." I shrug it off, showing a calm I am nowhere near feeling. "I really need to go and clean up, I haven't slept well the last couple days and it's starting to hit now. And I have some injuries to bandage too apparently."

I finally look him in the eyes and a moment passes. I try to pull my wrist free. But he holds tighter. "Let me go, Jer." I whisper. There's so much meaning in those four words, that tears fill my eyes again, but I don't look away. He needs to get it. I am making this choice. I have to pull away now, quickly, not slowly and resentfully over time.

His face falls and he pulls me into a tight hug and I wrap my arms around him, grasping his shirt because my hands don't reach around his massive waist, and let the tears fall, soaking his shirt. If this is the last time I'll get to hug him, I'm going to make it count. I can feel my heart breaking and pounding away in my chest. I'm sure he can too.

A menacing growl comes from behind him and I realize for the first time it doesn't scare me like it should. She is his mate and future Luna, her growl should stop me in my tracks and I find it really just brings me back to reality, like someone clearing their throat.

I pack that thought away in the 'figure it out tomorrow' pile in my head and nod into his chest, taking a deep breath of his comforting scent before pulling back. I put my hands on his firm chest and looked him in the eyes.

"Jeremiah. Let. Me. Go." I say it sternly, but not mean. He needs to let this happen, she has laid her claim, I am not wanted here and I'm trespassing. I may not be a werewolf, but I understand being territorial.

"Never." Is all he says. His arms tighten around my waist, making this harder than it needs to be. I clench my jaw, I have to fight these tears, she won't see me cry anymore.

"Well, it's not only your decision to make anymore. You are now a packaged deal and you need to consult your other half before you go making promises." I pat his chest twice, trying for light banter and a smile.

Another growl and this time a huff. It's possible she's agreeing with me, but I've only heard her say about five words all together so I'm not sure.

I push off of him and this time he lets me step away. "I'll see you tomorrow at school, I guess. Unless that's not a thing you do anymore. I don't really know how this works... I guess I'll just see you around." I rub my hand across my forehead. I'm rambling at this point and don't even know why I keep trying to talk. We have never been awkward, and that's all this is right now.

I walk into the common room to grab my bag from where I dropped it earlier. My phone on the floor near it, just dropped haphazardly. No one touched it, another feeling of sadness washed over me. Discarded and overlooked like my phone. Man... I hate this whole thing.

I grab my stuff and make it to my room quickly before another wave of tears hits. I shower in record time. I pull on a sports bra and a pair of my comfy sweats. Out of habit I reach for Jeremiah's t-shirt where it stays on my pillow. I stop halfway through putting it on, take a deep breath and pull it back off. I close my eyes, steel myself, fold it and set it on top of my dresser across the room. I have to start doing this without him.

While I'm there I pack a change of clothes for school tomorrow and a set of workout clothes for training. I will just spend as little time here as possible until we figure this out.

Once I'm set I text Ben to come pick me up.