

## Two Years Gone

### Happy Birthday, Babe

I woke up at ve in the morning, just like usual. Then I showered and dressed for the day before meeting my mom in the kitchen of our small cabin for a quick breakfast before work.

“Co ee?” Mom asked as I dragged in.

“Is that even a question?” I chuckled before cupping the warm mug in my hands and taking a sip.

My mother walked around the kitchen and squeezed my shoulders. “Happy birthday, babe.”

I looked up at my mom and smiled. “Thanks, mom.”

Mom looked at me with a tear in her eye. “It’s hard to believe you’re eighteen and about to nd your mate.”

She shook her head, willing her tears away. “So, this morning I’ll do the biscuits if you make the gravy and the eggs,” she stated as we walked out the door toward the main pack house.

“Deal,” I replied, yawning.

My mom, Sophie, was the head cook for the pack. She ran the kitchen in the pack house and planned three meals a day, seven days a week for whoever wanted to come.

She was an amazing chef, and one of the most respected omegas in the pack, mostly because nobody wanted to get on the bad side of the cooks.

I, on the other hand, was a senior in high school and far from respected.

“Don’t forget, after school, I need you to help me start planning for the banquet next week!” my mother shouted as I ran to catch the bus.

I was running late again, having to help clean up the kitchen before school almost always made me miss the bus. But I caught it today, much to my surprise.

I took a seat near the front and let out a sigh. My wolf paced in my head, anxiously awaiting my daily humiliations. I took a deep breath, trying to calm us both down.

*Today is going to suck. But we’re almost done. Two weeks left until graduation.*

When I got o the bus, I made my way into the high school and instantly lowered my head, hoping to pass through the halls unnoticed.

“Well, if it isn’t the birthday girl!” Mariah boomed from behind.

I turned around. “Hi, Mariah.”

“You’re eighteen now. You know what that means,” one of her minions spat.

“Oh, does Little Miss Omega think she’ll be getting a mate?” Mariah sco ed. She was the daughter of the pack’s beta and self-proclaimed queen of the pack.

I gave a smile that wasn’t at all genuine, and the bell rang. “It’s been a pleasure as always, ladies. Thank you for the birthday wishes.”

I turned and walked to my locker. Grabbing my books, I made my way to my rst class, which thankfully nished uneventfully. I made it all the way to lunch without being bothered.

*Happy birthday to me.* I chuckled at the thought.

“Move.”

I closed my eyes and let out a breath before turning, lowering my head in submission as I did. “Mariah....,” I muttered as I stepped out of the way and she pushed past me, wrapping her arms around Zane, future alpha of the pack.

Suddenly, I smelled something absolutely breathtaking. Like cinnamon and pine. The smell was so intoxicating that it made my mouth water, and I could feel my wolf pace, excited.

I shook myself back to my senses, shrugged, and made my way out of the cafeteria, sitting on a bench outside where I was most likely to be left alone.

“You.”

I looked up to see Zane standing above me. “Alpha Zane, I—”

Our eyes met, and I felt my whole body electrify.

*MATE!* my wolf howled in my head.

Zane broke the silence. “Ella, we aren’t mates.”

“So we didn’t just both feel that?” I asked sarcastically.

Zane scowled at me, and I realized my mistake. I lowered my head again. “I’m sorry, Zane.”

He was about to speak again when we were interrupted by Mariah and her gaggle of sidekicks.

“There you are, baby!” She saw me and recoiled. “Why are you talking to that little omega?”

“Leave us alone, Mariah.”

She looked up and down at the two of us and then burst out in laughter. “Wait...*you two*? Oh, Omega, you aim high, don’t you? Zane is *mine*, slut.”

Mariah slapped me, and I inched, my cheek stinging a bit.

“Mariah, leave!” Zane boomed. I looked up at him, and for a second I thought I saw concern on his face.

“But, baby, she is—”

Mariah stopped talking when Zane turned his glare to her. She stomped o , leaving the two of us alone.

“If you’re going to reject me, then do it,” I spoke de antly before looking down again.

But there was nothing. I looked up and Zane was gone.

“Great....,” I mumbled to myself. “Just what I needed today.” Of all the people to be mated to, I had to get Zane Davis. He wasn’t a horrible guy, but he wasn’t exactly amazing either.

When the bell sounded, I made my way to my next class of the day, only to be pushed from behind.

“We aren’t nished here.” Mariah’s voice was low and cold.

“Mariah,” I started as I got up o the ground, “he’s going to reject me, so stop.”

“Yes, he is, because why on earth would an alpha want you?” she snapped. “You are nothing!”

“Exactly. Nobody wants me,” I turned to walk away, trying my hardest to ght the tears that were threatening to fall. I didn’t want to admit that I was hurt by the fact that my mate didn’t seem to want me.

I made it back home to be surprised with a cake and a small present. Even though we were at the bottom of the pecking order, my mom was always bright and kind.

“I love you, sweetheart,” my mom hugged me as she cleaned up before we headed to the pack house to make dinner for everyone.

We worked together in the kitchen, making my favorite meal for the pack dinner as a small celebration between ourselves. We were laughing and enjoying ourselves until Zane walked in. Our eyes met, and he walked toward me. “I need a minute with Ella.”

My mom nodded and he led me to one of the back o ces.