

Two Years Gone Novel

Chapter 11

ZANE

I paced my room, this time racking the deep corners of my brain. I had heard what my father said and knew that he meant it. He believed I could be better.

Being with Mariah had turned me into a person I didn't even recognize anymore. She bullied those she looked down on, and I'd gone along with it. When had I become this person?

I wouldn't be taking over the pack at the end of the summer like we had planned. My father had informed me that I had six months to turn myself around, for the pack, for myself, and for my mate.

"My mate..." I whispered while rubbing my head. I had royally messed up. She hated me. She was afraid of me. I had hurt her too many times, emotionally and physically.

"Idiot!" I yelled to my empty bedroom. I could feel my wolf grumble in agreement.

I sat down at my desk and made myself a checklist.

THINGS I NEED TO DO TO BECOME ALPHA:

I looked at the title before shaking my head and crossing out the line I had written. I grabbed a new piece of paper and thought for a moment before writing.

THINGS I NEED TO DO TO BECOME BETTER:

1. Break up with Mariah.
2. Show the pack they can trust me.
3. Learn to control my anger.
4. Be kind to them.
5. Be kind to Ella.
6. Win her trust.

I looked at my list and a small smile spread across my lips.

"Let's do this then."

As if she had known I was going to look for her, Mariah walked in.

“Hey, baby!” She stepped into the room and spread herself on my bed.

“Come play with me,” she said in her most seductive voice.

I had to take a deep breath to keep from taking full advantage of the girl waiting in my bed. I could feel my lust growing as she took off her shirt. I turned around and walked across the room.

“Mariah, put your clothes back on. I don’t have time for that right now.”

She scowled at me before putting her shirt back on.

“You always have time, baby. What’s wrong?”

“I need to talk to you,” I replied, trying to keep my voice cool.

I sat down in a chair, and she hopped up off the bed and sat in my lap.

“What’s up, babe?” she asked, stroking my chest.

I grabbed her hand to stop her.

“We’re done, Mariah.”

Mariah laughed.

“What do you mean, done?”

“I mean we’re over. I’m breaking up with you. I don’t want to see you anymore.”

Mariah looked like she had tasted something sour.

“Zane Davis, don’t you dare break up with me! I’m the best you’ll ever have! You really think you’ll find someone better than me?”

I pushed her off my lap and stood.

“Mariah, it was fun for a while, but I need to focus on my duties as alpha and gaining the trust of this pack.”

“You promised me you’d make me your luna! Everyone loves their luna! How would that not help them trust you?”

“Mariah, this is final!” I was starting to get irritated; she just wouldn’t drop it.

“No, Zane! I’m not letting you do this! You don’t break up with me—I break up with you!”

I was done. I pulled my arm away and towered above her.

“I am your alpha! Mariah, this thing we have is over. Now leave.”

I pointed to the door, and she glared at me, fury in her eyes as she walked out of the room.

“You’ll be sorry, Zane. You’ll come crawling back to me when you realize I’m the best you’ll ever get.”

I let out a huff as she left the room, rolling my eyes at her statement.

I walked over to my desk and crossed the first item off my list before setting the pen down and smiling to myself. I already felt lighter. I made my way downstairs, knowing I had amends to make.

“Sophie?” I had my head slightly lowered and my lips in a tight line.

I looked up to see Sophie staring at me, her distrust and anger still palpable.

“I wanted to apologize to you. I know how hard you work for this pack, and I appreciate everything you do. I know I didn’t show it today, and I’m sorry.”

Sophie’s face softened, and she put a hand on my shoulder.

“Thank you, Zane. It means a lot to me that you said that.”

I smiled at her before pausing.

“Is Ella here?”

Sophie squinted at me, and I could tell she was trying to decide whether she would answer me or not.

“She’s down the hall putting away some extra plates we used this morning.”

“Thanks.” I turned to walk away, but she spoke again.

“Alpha Zane?” She looked at me again but this time with worry.

“Please be kind to her. She’s been through so much.”

“That’s the plan.” I gave her a warm smile before heading to the extra pantry and storage room down the hall. I walked in to see her struggling to get the box of plates on the shelf.

“Oh, wow. Let me help you.” I rushed behind her and set the box on the shelf.

“Thank you, I was about to—” Ella turned around and stopped speaking as she realized who had helped her. She glared at me.

“Zane.”

“Ella, I—”

Ella walked away, clearly not wanting to be near me. But I knew I needed to get this out.

“Ella, wait.”

She suddenly turned around to face me.

“What, Zane? What else could you possibly have to say to me?”

“I’m sorry.”

I met Ella’s eyes and watched her as she stood frozen in disbelief. After a moment, she shook her head.

“It’s a little too late for that.” Ella looked down at the floor, and I could see she was upset.

“Ella, I know I was mean, cruel, even borderline abusive. I messed up, and I’m trying to be better. Believe it or not, my dad smacked some sense into me.

“You don’t have to forgive me, but I’m here to apologize, to tell you I’m sorry.”

Ella met my eyes, and I could feel her searching my face for the truth. After a few moments of silence, she let out a breath.

“Thank you.”

I gave her a warm smile, and I could feel the pull toward her. I wanted to pull her close to me and inhale her scent. I wanted to kiss those lips that looked so soft.

She turned and walked away, shaking me from my thoughts.

I wanted to call after her, but I didn’t know what I would say. Hopefully, I would be able to fix what I had ruined.

Chapter 12

ELLA

To say I was surprised would be an understatement.

“Mom, you wouldn’t believe what just happened,” I said as I walked back into the kitchen.

“Zane?” My mom turned to me, smiling.

“Wait, how did you—”

My mother laughed.

“He came and apologized to me first. Can’t say I remember the last time he ever did that.”

“That’s because he never has,” I replied, laughing as well.

We worked on dinner and were informed there would be a last-minute pack meeting at the end of the day before dinner.

That meant we had to attend, and dinner needed to be ready for whoever wanted to stay afterward. I heard my mother groan, “We won’t have enough food!”

“Go talk to Alpha Daniel about it. We could use the food that we were going to use for dinner tomorrow as well as what we have for tonight. He will have to approve it, though,” I suggested.

Mom nodded.

“You’re getting good at this, hun. You’ll be in charge before you know it,” she said as she left the kitchen and walked to the alpha’s office.

I started on some of the salads as I waited on approval.

Zane walked through, stealing a couple of olives off my board. I rolled my eyes at him, and he gave me a smirk.

Don’t let him in, my wolf whispered. He hurt us before, he’ll do it again.

I sighed and nodded my head in agreement. I know.

Everyone sat in the pack hall as we awaited the alpha. My mom and I sat near the back so we could escape quickly when the meeting was over and get back to the kitchen to start dishing up food.

“What do you think this meeting is about?” I whispered to my mom. Sophie shrugged and the whole room hushed as Alpha Daniel and Zane walked into the room and to the front.

They took their seats next to the Beta and then Alpha Daniel stood and began to speak.

“Good evening, Green Ridge Pack. This won’t take long, we just wanted to update you on a few changes. Our plan was to have Alpha Zane take over as official alpha at the end of the summer.

“Due to unforeseen circumstances, we will be pushing back his promotion until December. He will be taking the next six months to train with me personally to ensure our pack has the very best alpha.”

I could hear the whole pack beginning to whisper, making guesses as to why he was pushing things back. I felt embarrassed as I sat there knowing it was my fault.

I kept my head down and I could feel eyes on me. I didn’t dare to look up, knowing it was probably Zane glaring at me.

As soon as the alpha released us to dinner, I stood and dashed out of the room. I finished dinner and began dishing up food for pack members who made their way to the kitchen.

Finally, Zane and Daniel made their way through the line.

“Sophie, Ella, this all looks awesome. Thank you for putting this together so last minute!” Alpha Daniel sang as he walked up to us.

“It’s no problem, Alpha,” we both said. I looked up to see Zane staring at me, not with anger but with confusion.

“Ella, do you have a moment?” he asked, his eyes searching my face.

“Uh, I’m actually in the middle of serving dinner. Is it important, Alpha?” I replied, hoping he wouldn’t push it.

“It is.” He turned to my mother.

“Sophie, do you mind if I steal her for just a moment?”

My mother nodded with a smile. Traitor, I thought to myself. Zane led me out to the hallway behind the kitchen.

"Is everything okay?"

I lowered my head again.

"I don't know what you mean, Alpha. Everything is fine."

Zane moved toward me, and I involuntarily flinched backward. Frustration flashed across his face.

He took a breath and spoke again.

"Ella, something is obviously bothering you. What is the matter? You've been like this since the..."

I met his eyes to see the realization in his eyes. He knew that I knew he wasn't getting promoted because of me.

"Ella..." Zane looked down at me and his face softened.

I lowered my head again.

"I'm sorry, Alpha. I had no idea Alpha Daniel would do that. I can go talk to him and explain everything." I was eager to keep myself from his wrath.

"Ella, this isn't your fault."

I looked up at him, confusion evident on my face.

"But I—"

"Ella, this is my fault. I messed up. I let my pride get in the way of my duty to my pack. My father is giving me six months to get my head straight, to figure out exactly what kind of alpha I want to be."

He wasn't angry at me. He wasn't going to hurt me or yell at me.

"Oh. I thought you weren't being promoted because of me."

Zane shook his head.

"Don't worry about it. I've got things I need to work on before I can be alpha."

I looked up at him and attempted a warm smile before pulling some wisps of hair away from my face and turning toward the kitchen.

“Well, I have work to do, so..”

“I don’t want to keep you. I just didn’t want you to worry.”

“Thank you,” I replied, surprised at how levelheaded and cool he had been. He had never treated me this way.

Maybe things were changing, but he hadn’t addressed the mate situation. Obviously, he still didn’t want me.

Chapter 13

ELLA

I sat in thought at the kitchen island, taking a break from my work before cleaning up dinner.

“So tonight, I’m thinking we watch some violent movies and binge on cookies.”

I looked up to see Declan. He hopped up on the counter and faced me.

I smiled, still thinking about what Zane had said and how he had treated me.

“Earth to Ella?” Declan knocked on my head, and I snapped my face up.

“Hmm?”

Declan laughed.

“Where’d you go?”

“Oh, I’m just tired.”

“Has Zane been giving you any more trouble since you put him in his place?” Declan teased.

“Nope. He even apologized.”

Declan gave an exaggerated gasp.

“My, my! You garnered an apology from the mighty alpha himself?”

I shoved him and laughed.

“Stop it, he might hear you!”

“So about tonight?” Declan asked.

“Maybe tomorrow. All that extra work today left me exhausted. And I still have to help clean up,” I said as I ran a hand through my hair.

Declan gave me a wink.

“Alright, just cookies then?” He pulled a box of chocolate chip cookies out from behind his back.

“You are literally the best person ever,” I sighed as I took a bite of a cookie.

“Seriously, are you an angel?” I teased.

“Nope, just the best friend ever. You don’t deserve me,” he joked.

I nudged him and we both laughed. I could feel my troubles fading away.

“Here, take a few more and I’ll walk you home.” Declan smiled and wrapped his arm around my shoulder.

“Thank you, Declan.” I smiled at him as we began walking down the hill.

“For what? Gracing you with my rugged good looks?” he teased, making me laugh.

“Thank you for being my friend and always making me laugh.”

“You’re like a little sister to me, Ells Bells. I’ll always be here to take care of you and Sophie. You two were the only ones who accepted me when I first joined the pack.”

“Still, thanks all the same, Dec.”

Declan kissed my forehead and smiled at me.

“Goodnight, Ells.”

“Goodnight,” I smiled, waving at him as he made his way down the road to his own cabin.

I hesitated on my way to my place. It felt like I was being watched. I looked around but didn’t see anything, so I shrugged and opened the door. Suddenly, I heard a low growl.

I turned around to see a figure in the shadows.

"Who is it?" I asked hesitantly.

"It's just me, Ella," the figure said before stepping into the light.

"Zane." I let out a sigh of relief.

"Do you often go around letting people kiss you?"

Not this again. I rolled my eyes and stood up straight.

"Zane, it's been a long day. I'm exhausted."

"Answer me, Ella."

I huffed, frustrated we were having this same conversation.

"No, Zane. I don't just let random wolves kiss me. I'm not some easy girl that lets anyone touch her!"

"Then why did you let him?"

"Who? Declan?" I shook my head.

"Declan is my best friend, more like a brother. There was nothing even remotely romantic about that little peck on the forehead."

I stepped forward, now angry.

"What is it to you, anyway? You seem to keep forgetting that you rejected me. You gave up any claim you had on me two years ago. And I've been doing just fine on my own! So back off, Zane!"

Zane let out a quiet growl before stomping off.

I pushed through the front door and into my bedroom.

"Seriously?" I yelled as I threw myself on the bed.

"So much for Mr. I'm-trying-to-change! The nerve of that guy!"

I took a breath and tried to calm myself. I thought back to our conversation, the look in his eye.

He almost seemed jealous. I shook the thought away. He didn't want me. I was nothing to him.

"I'm nothing....," I whispered as I drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, I woke still exhausted and drained. I dragged myself to the kitchen, took the biggest mug I could find, and filled it to the brim with coffee.

"Rough morning?" Mom asked as she walked in, grabbing her own coffee.

"I'm exhausted," I replied, attempting to rub the sleep from my eyes.

"Well, how about as soon as we get breakfast made you can come back here and take a nice long nap before lunch prep? It's just breakfast, we can manage one service without you."

"I might have to take you up on that, I'm dragging today," I replied, yawning as we made our way up the hill.

"You've been working hard lately. I'm grateful for the lighter workload, but you need to make sure you take time for yourself as well." Mom rubbed my back as we entered the pack house.

We made breakfast and I grabbed myself a muffin before heading back down the hill. I collapsed on the bed and drifted easily back to sleep.

Chapter 14

ZANE

I knew I had to apologize. Again. I kept messing up when it came to Ella. I couldn't just let it be.

Last night, when I was walking back to the pack house, I saw her with Declan, his arm around her. That irritated me, but it made it worse when the guy kissed her.

My wolf wanted to rip the guy's head off. She was so warm with Declan. It was a side of her I had never experienced. I just lost it.

But I shouldn't have made a big deal about it, and now I had to find her and say sorry. Again. This whole change thing was harder than I thought it would be.

I walked down to breakfast and was disappointed to find only Sophie.

"No Ella this morning?" I asked nonchalantly.

"She's feeling a little run down, so I let her head back home to rest after we made breakfast. She'll be back for lunch though."

I nodded and then made my way outside and down the hill. I knocked on the door, but she didn't answer.

The door was unlocked, so I wandered in. I didn't see her, so I made my way into one of the bedrooms.

Immediately, I was overwhelmed by her scent. It was all over the room, and I almost passed out from the sensation. I looked around and saw her cuddled up in the bed.

I walked up, wanting to wake her and get this apology over with, but she looked so peaceful. I took her in, my eyes going over every feature.

She was beautiful, I couldn't deny it. In high school, she was pretty, but she had definitely grown into herself in the last two years while I was gone.

Her long brown hair fell in waves down her back, and her dark lashes seemed to brush her cheeks as they lay closed.

Her soft lips and warm cheeks made me want to kiss her, and her body was lean and shapely.

She had become a beautiful woman, and all I wanted was for her to look up at me with those bright hazel eyes with something more than anger in them.

I backed away, deciding I could wait until later; and made my way out of their little cabin and back up the hill.

I walked back into the pack house and up to my room. When I opened the door, I was suddenly hit with another scent. A familiar but unwanted one.

"Mariah, get out of here." I rolled my eyes and made my way to the closet to change for training.

Mariah got up out of the bed, completely naked, and walked over to me.

"I miss you, baby. I know you miss me, stop this nonsense and come back to me."

"Mariah, I don't miss you. Please just leave." I turned away, but she pulled my arm, making me swing backward into her. She rubbed her body against me, and I could smell her arousal.

I let out a breath, and my wolf growled, We are trying to be better for our mate. Don't fall into her trap, Zane. What if she marks you?

My wolf was right, I couldn't risk it. I pushed her off and looked at her sternly.

“Mariah, if I catch you in my room again without my permission, you will face the consequences of disobeying an alpha. Do you understand me?”

Mariah screamed and stomped back over to the bed where her clothes were.

“Zane, you want me. I can smell you. When you decide to stop fighting it, I can’t guarantee I’ll be there waiting!”

“Mariah, I won’t be coming back. I’m focusing on a deeper pull.”

Her eyes widened.

“Wait, you’re choosing that little omega over me?”

I walked out of the room without answering her, and I couldn’t help but chuckle as I heard her scream in frustration.

I walked into the kitchen after spending a few hours at the training grounds, shirtless, sweaty, and high off the endorphins.

I looked up to catch Ella’s gaze, and I smirked, knowing she was staring at me. She blinked her head clear and offered me a plate.

“How much sweet talking do I need to do to get another sandwich?” I joked.

“And to make up for last night?” I spoke quietly so the other pack members wouldn’t hear.

Ella rolled her eyes at me and dropped a second sandwich on my plate.

“Enjoy your lunch, Alpha.”

I knotted my brow before walking to the table. I wasn’t going to give up that easily. I kept an eye on her throughout lunch and finally found my chance to talk to her when she walked toward the pantry.

I jumped up from the table and followed her down the hall.

“I’m serious, Ella. I’m sorry for last night,” I said.

She jumped, my sudden speech giving her a bit of a scare.

Ella turned to me with a glare.

“Zane, I’m tired of doing this. You do something stupid. You apologize. You do something stupid. You apologize. I’m getting dizzy. Just let me be.”

Ella pushed past me and walked back to the kitchen.

I followed her in, neither of us knowing that we had an audience to our little tiff.

Chapter 15

ELLA

I huffed in frustration as I kneaded the dough for the dinner rolls.

“What did that dough ever do to you?” my mom joked, giving me a nudge.

I rolled my eyes with a small smile.

“Just letting out a bit of frustration.” I punched the dough again and continued kneading.

“Want to talk about it?” My mom asked cautiously.

“Not really,” I mumbled. I stood up straight and let out a sigh before leaning on the counter.

“He just won’t leave me alone.”

“Who?” my mother prodded.

“Zane! He is kind, then cold, then kind, then cruel, then kind, then cold again. I’m getting dizzy. I don’t need this crap, Mom.” I let out another huff and began kneading again.

“Sounds like he still wants you.”

I snorted.

“Ha! He doesn’t want me. Nobody does.”

Sophie shook her head before resting her hands on my shoulders.

“Sweetheart, you are wanted. Maybe someday you’ll be blessed with a second-chance mate.”

She shrugged, and I smiled at the small bit of hope my mother had.

I finished kneading and then left it to rise. I wiped my hands on my apron and turned to start on something else when I was interrupted.

“Ella?”

I turned around and bowed my head.

“Alpha! What can I do for you?”

“Can you come to my office? I need a word with you.”

“Yes, sir.” I took off my apron and followed him down the hall, worried about what he needed.

When we entered his office, Zane was already there, sitting in a chair in front of the desk. He looked up at me, genuine surprise on his face.

“Please sit, Ella.” He motioned to the chair beside Zane. I sat down hesitantly and looked up at the alpha.

“What’s going on, dad?” Zane spoke up, curious about what he could possibly need both of us for.

Alpha Daniel sat in silence for a few moments before speaking.

“Ella, I’m requesting that you move into the pack house as soon as possible.”

We both looked at him in shock and at a loss for words.

Zane was the first to speak.

“Dad, what is this about?”

“In this situation, it’s Alpha to you,” Daniel replied, his voice stern.

Zane lowered his head.

“Yes, Alpha.”

I finally woke from my shock.

“Why?”

Alpha Daniel turned to me.

“Why what?”

“Why am I moving into the pack house?”

I searched his face as he paused. For a second, I had a feeling he didn’t have a reason.

“You will be taking over as head cook soon, and I want you in the pack house so that we can train you on the behind-the-scenes work your mother does. Head cook is more than just what you see.”

I lowered my head.

“If I promise to come in early, can I stay at home?”

Zane stood up.

“Yes, Ella, you can stay in your home. Dad, she doesn’t need to live here to—”

Alpha Daniel stood, radiating authority, and cut him off.

“I had hoped this could be done easily. Ella, you will move into the pack house as soon as possible. Tonight, if not tomorrow. Zane, do you wish to argue my wishes again?”

We both lowered our heads.

“No, Alpha,” Zane replied.

Daniel turned to me.

“And?”

“And I’ll move into the pack house as soon as possible,” I added.

Alpha Daniel sat back down in his seat.

“Thank you. You may leave now.”

We both stood and walked out of the alpha’s office.

I stopped in the hall; my face covered in panic. I didn’t want this at all. I began to hyperventilate.

I closed my eyes and was oddly calmed when Zane placed a hand on each shoulder.

“Ella?”

“I... I need a minute.” I ran out of the pack house, sprinting down the hill and into the woods. I hid behind a tree and stripped off my clothes, shifting quickly and running off to clear my mind.

I let my wolf take over as I tried to swallow what had just happened. I can’t do this. I can’t be near him!

I heard my wolf whine. She didn't want this either. We had both been hurt by the rejection, and my wolf hated how Zane had acted since then. She didn't like him acting as though he owned us.

I ran hard and fast through the forest and stopped as the sun began setting. I sat by a creek, and I could feel the worry of my wolf for me. I was falling apart.

It had taken me so long to put myself back together after he left. After he rejected me. I finally straightened myself back up and made my way back home.

I grabbed my clothes from behind the tree where I left them and after getting dressed, I made my way back to the pack house.

It was past dinner time, and I knew I would be busted for just leaving without saying anything. I walked in, a little dirty and looking like a hot mess. But I didn't care, I knew Mom would be worried.

As I entered the kitchen, I was just about knocked over by my mom. She rushed me into a hug and squeezed, "Ella Marie Matthews, where on earth were you?"

I pulled back and gave a sheepish grin.

"Sorry, it was a bit of a day. I went and took a run without even thinking. I didn't mean to worry you."

Mom glared at me.

"Mhm. I'm not the only one you need to apologize to."

She nodded over toward the dining room where I saw Zane stand and make his way over to me.

"He's been sitting there brooding for hours."

I let out a sigh as Zane spoke up.

"Ella, what the hell did you think you were doing just running off like that?"

I glared up at him.

"Don't act like you were worried."

Zane grabbed my arm and rushed out of the dining room into one of the empty pack offices.

“Ella, you know for a fact that I was worried. What possessed you to just run off into the woods like that?”

“I needed to clear my mind. I didn’t really think about it, I just ran.”

Zane shook his head and stepped closer, speaking in almost a whisper.

“Ella...”

I turned away.

“I, uh, need to go help clean up dinner. I already missed too much work.”

I rushed out of the room, not wanting to be any closer to him than I already was.