

Chapter One

August thirteenth, nineteen twenty

Standing in front of the tattoo shop, Eden felt both a rush of fear and excitement. The rundown building gave her a sense of wrong. Not to mention if her mother found out where she had decided to go on her evening walk tonight, she would surely beat her bloody. Good girls don't deface their bodies like that. You're not some cheap flapper whore, she'd say. She wouldn't even let her cut her long hair. But the fear she had was no match for the need she felt to go inside and get exactly what she wanted. The dusty windows made it hard to tell if it was even open. Not to mention the overhead light was dimming and covered in cobwebs. Peering through the glass she made out a rather large figure standing behind the counter, his back turned towards her. Eden stepped back and grabbed the front door handle, with only a few seconds of hesitation before opening the door and stepping inside. The creek of the door and the small bell overhead made the man turn around, "can I help you?". Eden looked around the shop at the artwork and pictures of other tattooed people. Then to him, "I'd like a tattoo please?", she said in a nervous voice. "Are you sure? That sounded like more of a question". Eden nodded a little too fast. The man smiled and gestured toward a large leather chair behind the counter, "step into my office young lady".

"Will it hurt?" Eden asked as she sat nervously in the leather chair. The big man laughed and tested his needle, letting it buzz for a few seconds. Turning to her he said, "The most painful part of getting a tattoo is paying for it. And for this I charge twenty five flat". Looking around the room at all the designs and how beautiful they all were, Eden made up her mind. Reaching into her pocketbook, she found her cash. She handed the money to him with a shaky hand. "Are you sure you wanna do this?", he asked her, "you seem a bit flustered". "I'm fine", she explains, "I'm just wondering how I'll feel afterward. And if I'll be able to hide it from my mother. But ever since I saw Lady Utah at Coney Island, I've wanted a tattoo of my own". The man sighed, "in my experience, most people feel pretty good about themselves afterward. About your mother, couldn't say. Everyone's different". She watched as he filled a small cup full of pitch black ink, and another with dark red. Finally sliding up to her side, he asks, "final answer, are you sure you want the tattoo? I'd hate for a nice girl like you to get into trouble at my hands". Eden thought for another few seconds, then pulled her arm out of her dress sleeve and pointed to just below her collarbone with a smile, "I'd like it right here please".

Three hours later, Eden's collarbone burned. The feeling was like she'd been stung by a thousand bees all at once. Wiping off the area with a relieving damp cloth the man announced, "you're all done my dear. Sorry it took so long, I'm a bit of a perfectionist. Go over there and check it out", pointing toward the full length mirror on the far wall. She stepped up slowly, not wanting to make the burning worse. When she finally stood in front of the mirror, she smiled. Gazing at the beautiful red rose that now resided on her skin she felt more beautiful than she ever had in her entire life. She turned back toward the large man, "thank you so much", and jogged over and gave him a surprising hug. Startled, he sat her back down smiling, "you're welcome sunshine. Glad I could help. Would you let me take a picture of you with the new ink? It's kind of a tradition in my shop", pointing toward another wall full of pictures of past customers. "I'd love to," she said excitedly. Tucking her sleeve behind her back and holding it with her other hand she turned and smiled. With a quick flash the picture was taken and would soon be framed and placed on the wall with the others. As she was preparing to leave for home after getting bandaged up, the man asked, "So why a rose exactly? If you don't mind me asking". As she opened the door, she turned and answered, "My last name is Rosewood. I just thought it was fitting". He smiled a toothy grin at her, "absolutely".

Walking home briskly on the sidewalk Eden kept touching the bandage on her shoulder. The pure bliss in the knowledge she'd done something so permanent on her own was intoxicating. The streetlamps started to come on one by one up her block. Her mother would be furious with her for being gone for so long, would probably accuse her of being off with some man doing adult things. But no man had ever given her a second glance in any situation. And at nineteen, time was even running out for that. Not that Eden really cared, she didn't believe in love anyway. Almost to her front door she tried to pull her dress sleeve even tighter over her shoulder to try and hide the evidence. But no matter what she did, a small piece of tape was still poking out from underneath.

Her mother, as always, was sitting in her chair in the living room. Cozied up in front of the large fireplace with a book in her lap covered with a blanket, you'd think she was the sweetest person in the whole world. But it was a camouflage to the truth. Eden knew her mother hadn't been the same since her father died last year, leaving only her to remember him by. Now all she seemed to be is bitter. Her hair, tightly wound up in a bun, had almost completely grayed over within the last year. The wrinkles on her face and hands seeming deeper in the dimly lit room. Staring blankly into the fire, she didn't even acknowledge Eden until she said, "hello mother, I'm back from my walk". Startled, she turned in her chair, "oh, it's just you Eden. What took you so long? It's almost eight O'clock". Eden turned toward the

stairs to try and make a quick escape, “I just went a little further into the city tonight. It’s such a nice evening I just couldn’t waste it. But I’m going to bed now mother”, and started up the stairs. “Wait”, her mother commanded in a harsh voice, “Come here now”. Eden froze on the stairs for a few seconds, wondering whether or not to move. “Eden Rosewood, I said come here this instant!”. Eden did as she was told, trembling as she walked herself in front of her mothers gaze. She eyed her for a few moments that seemed to take an eternity. Finally she asked, “What on earth have you done to yourself?”, pointing to her chest. Eden answered in a shaky voice, “It’s nothing mother, just a scratch. I fell on my walk”. Her mother stood, but it was a test, “Then let me see. I wouldn’t want you to get an infection and get sick. And who bandaged you?”. Eden stumbled to find words to give her mother an answer. And just as she starts to open her mouth, her mother slaps her hand across Eden's face, blood dripping from her lip.

Eden's mother grabbed at the bandage, her nails scratching her skin as it came ripping off. She looked at the rose in disgust, “What have you done to yourself! No respectable man is ever going to want you now! Have you no respect for yourself!", she screamed. Eden wanted to defend herself, but she couldn’t bring herself to speak. Tears started to stream down her face as she choked down her cries. Her mother scoffed at her, “Oh stop crying, you did this to yourself. It’s not my fault you want to parade yourself around like a common whore”.

Eden finally slumped to the floor and gave in to her tears, “why are you so horrible to me? It’s been an entire year of this ridicule and anger. I’ve done nothing to you except simply exist in your life”. Her mother walked behind her and stood with her back to the fireplace. Finally with a deep breath she said, “I’m not horrible to you dear, I simply raise you like my mother raised me as a girl. And now that your father isn’t here to provide for us anymore and you’re old enough, you have to assume the responsibility and make sure our family lives on”. Eden was confused, “how am I supposed to do that? It’s not like I can find a woman's job in this neighborhood”. Her mother gave a low chuckle and kneeled beside her, “there’s no need for any of that. All you need to do is behave as a young lady should and I’ll choose you the perfect suitor for you to marry. Then we can both live our lives as we’ve become accustomed to”. Eden looked at her mother in disbelief. She couldn’t really be serious, could she? Eden shot up from the floor, “I’m not going to marry some rich stranger just so YOU can continue to live a life of luxury! I don’t even want to get married at all! I’d sooner die than agree to this insanity!”. Her mother got up from the floor and sat back in her chair. She sighed, “why do you always have to be so difficult Eden? I am too old to find a new husband now, and I refuse to live the life of a lonely spinster. You act as though having a good husband to take care of you and having babies would be the death of you, but to tell

you the truth girl, on your own, the world will chew you up and spit you out without thinking twice. Being alone and growing more and more bitter will destroy you, believe me, I would know better than anyone". Eden started out of the living room, "I'm done with this conversation. Good night mother, hopefully I die in my sleep so I never have to see you again". Just as she reached the top of the stairs, she heard her mother reply, "god willing you do".

Once safely inside her bedroom, Eden cried so hard she couldn't breathe. She had cried so long her eyes burned like fire, bloodshot. She sat on her bed well into the night, not sure what to do. She touched her tattoo as she looked at it in the mirror. Her mother's nails had scratched so deep she actually took some of the ink with her. Raw around the edges, she carefully cleaned it up as best she could before covering it once again. It burned underneath the bandage, but she was glad to feel it. It meant she could still feel something besides anger.

The cold moon shone into her bedroom's large window, illuminating everything as clearly as her lamp would. After hours of thinking about everything that had happened to her in the last year, between her father passing and her mother basically prostituting her out to the richest customer to maintain her lifestyle, she decided she was done. She would no longer live under her mother's iron fist. Grabbing her small travel bag and throwing in a few clothes, Eden opened her window and took a deep breath. Looking out into the night and over the glittering city line, her heart raced. She could feel a sense of relief and happiness, nothing but possibility layed out in front of her. Climbing out onto the small section of roof she could feel the clean air of the evening filling her lungs, the first time she had relaxed in over a year. Suddenly she heard footsteps coming up the staircase. A sudden surge of panic made her throw her bag off the roof. Swinging herself over the edge of the roof and onto the trellis, the thorned rose vines stabbed her palms as she used all her strength to hang on. She heard her bedroom door swing open. Suddenly she locked eyes with her mother, whose eyes went wide with surprise. "What the hell are you doing?", she shouted as she rushed toward Eden. Without thinking Eden let go of the trellis, falling, landing on the balls of her feet and onto her back. She laid there for a moment, stunned from the air being sucked from her chest. Eden's mother shouted from the window, "you can't just run from this girl! I'm calling the police! They will just bring you straight back here to me and you WILL do as you're told!". Finally catching her breath, Eden coughed out, "I will never come back...never", and started to run into the night.

Eden didn't stop running for several blocks before stopping to catch her breath in an empty alleyway. The streetlamps had since turned on, so she squatted down behind a dumpster for cover. She left her home with such haste she had forgotten shoes, and was now paying the price in bloody scraps. Her

chest felt heavy, her lips desperate for water. The sweat pouring from her forehead seemed to never end. Her heart pounded away as she heard sirens start to wail in the distance. She curled up with her bag as tightly as possible, the smell of the dumpster making her gag. But to her relief, her eyes grew heavy and slowly slipped into sleep.

“Miss, are you hurt? Do you need some help?” Eden opened her eyes to find a young policeman staring down at her. She looked around, he was the only one there. He must have been looking for her to take her back to her mother. He knelt down and moved her hair from her face. She started to panic, but then looked into his eyes. His kind eyes made him seem like he genuinely wanted to help her. “Can I take you somewhere safe? Anywhere would be better than in this alley. You never know what might be lurking in this darkness”, he said in a low voice. He extended his hand to help her up, “please let me help you. I wouldn’t want something horrible to happen to a pretty thing like you”. She couldn’t shake a feeling of unease as he spoke the words, but accepted his hand nonetheless. “Thank you”, she said in a weak voice. He helped her up from the ground and noticed her wince from the pain in her hand. The man took a deep breath in, “are you bleeding?”, and looked down at the sticky blood now smeared on his hand. Eden gulped down her unease, “I fell earlier tonight. My hands got scraped up on the pavement. And I don’t have shoes, so my feet are pretty banged up. It’s nothing”. He stared at his hand for a moment, his eyes growing darker, “the aroma...so intoxicating. Like lavender and vanilla”. “Are you okay?”, she asked with fear in her voice. She looked him up and down, not sure what was happening to him. She started to back away towards the road, not taking her eyes off of him. “You may want to slow your heart down, otherwise you’ll bleed out faster”, he said, licking the blood off his fingers. Eden’s eyes went wide in horror as she watched fangs drop down from his gums.

Eden turned to run but was surprised to find he was already behind her. Drool streamed from his lips. She turned toward the other road, but he was there too. He grabbed her shoulders hard, but she managed to lay a fist into his jaw. She tried to scream but he snarled and pinned her to the ground on her stomach, her arms crossed behind her back. Her face seeped into the ground as she coughed against his weight. She screamed and struggled against him, but it was pointless. His muscles were like iron, unbreakable. He was so cold against her skin, like ice was running through his veins. The creature pulled her hair back, exposing her throat. He smelled her skin and licked her neck. “Even at my age, your blood tempts me like I was just turned yesterday. That’s not very nice of you”, he growled. “What do you want?”, Eden cried, “I’ll give you anything you want just- please don’t kill me”. He smiled and exposed his fangs to her neck, “oh, you’re going to give me everything my dear, but not without getting something

in return. You're different then others I had the pleasure of killing. You smell different. I'm not gonna kill you, I'm feeling generous tonight". And plunged his fangs into her neck as she screamed from the pain. She reached toward the sky as her eyesight began to fade. And then, nothing but darkness.

Eden's eyes shot open as her lungs suddenly filled with air once again. She coughed from the dry burn in her throat, blood flying from her mouth. It felt like she had swallowed broken glass. She turned over on her back, looked up at the stars. She wondered how long she had been laying in that alleyway as she struggled to form a full breath. Her chest felt as though someone was crushing her heart in their fist. Each beat felt both slower and more painful then the last. Everything hurt from her head to her toes, as if all her muscles had been frozen solid. Yet she felt like she had a fever, like there was fire under her skin. The streetlamps hurt her eyes like she was being blinded. Eden reached for her neck to find two puncture wounds still bleeding heavily. A full scan of her body revealed several more bite marks and scratches. A emptiness deep inside her started to make her feel sick, with no relief in sight. Rolling over onto her stomach she desperately began to crawl, pain shooting with every inch she moved. Why didn't he just kill me, she wondered, it would be more preferable compared to this.

Right as she finished the thought a woman turned into the alley. She saw Eden on the ground and immediately ran over to help her. Eden's ears began to ring, starting to hear nothing but a heartbeat, but not her own. Her throat started to burn more and more the closer the woman got. The smell on the woman's skin enticed her, reminding her of fresh baked bread. Eden's gums started to hurt, as if something hard was buried inside and desperate to get out. She kneeled down next to her, "Oh my god! What happened to you!". The woman touched Edens back and her skin suddenly felt like it was on fire. The smell that came from the woman was finally too much to handle. Eden grabbed the woman and pulled her down underneath her, pinning her down on the pavement. The woman started to scream but Eden covered her mouth and turned her head to find her neck. "I'm so sorry. I can't help it", Eden cried as fangs broke through her gums. With tears streaming down her face she sank her fangs into the woman's neck as she screamed under her hand. The blood relieved the burning in her throat and the pains in her body. She even felt all of the wounds heal over on their own. She pulled back from the woman's neck, trying to stop, but couldn't. "I'm so sorry", she kept saying over and over. As sick she felt draining the blood from her, everything inside Eden told her to keep going, drain every drop. The crimson elixir made her feel as though she could fly.

By the time she was done, the woman had stopped moving, no life left inside her. Eden, on the other hand, felt more alive then she ever had before. She started to cry, pulling the woman off to the side

of the alley. “You deserved a much more peaceful way to die”, she said, “I’m sorry you died in fear, especially from me”. She stood up, catching a glimpse of herself in a broken window in the trash. Her eyes were brighter than ever, they almost glowed. With her new fangs still exposed and being covered in blood, it almost scared Eden to even keep looking at herself. She concentrated on them, and they retracted back into her gums. Grabbing an old blanket off the dumpster she covered the woman up. “I guess this is goodbye”, she said through her tears, “I probably will never forgive myself for leaving you here like this, but I don’t know what else to do. I’m just- I’m so sorry, but I couldn’t stop. Maybe wherever you are you can forgive me one day”. And with that, Eden grabbed her small bag from the ground, looked around, and wandered into the night.

Chapter Two

Eden wandered in the dark for hours, not really knowing where she was going or where she might end up. Everything seemed to be fuzzy and not quite real. Almost like a dream. She could hear people asking if she was okay, but couldn’t get herself to answer anyone. It was what she imagined it was like to be drunk. She kept her face down from the streetlamps as they kept hurting her eyes. Everything was so vivid it was painful. When she finally came back to her senses, she realized she had made her way back home somehow. If she entered the house after everything that had happened she knew there would be hell to pay. What she didn’t know was who exactly would have to pay.

Eden walked into her home with unease in her gut, leaving bloody footprints along the porch and floor. Quietly shutting the door behind her, she turned and looked around. Not a sound moved through the house. It was silent as the grave. Eden heard a noise through the silence, a heartbeat she thought was hers. But it started to quicken and slowly grew louder and louder. She followed it up the stairs. Suddenly she was face to face with her mother once more. Her eyes looked her up and down in disgust. “Where on god’s green earth have you been? I had the whole city looking for you!”, she yelled. Eden’s eyes started to well up with tears, “I was attacked. And I think I may have done something truly terrible. It all happened so fast”. Her mother didn’t bat an eyelash, “I told you leaving was going to destroy you. Now look what you’ve done”, grabbing her hands, “I mean look at you. you probably let some man have his way with you and now you want to play victim! I don’t think so. We’re going to shower you off, make you presentable, and pretend this awful night never happened”.

Eden couldn’t believe her ears. She snapped her hands away, “you think I LET this happen to me! Noone deserves everything I just went through! What kind of mother are you! You heartless bitch!” Her

mother grabbed her by her shoulders, “how dare you speak that way to your mother! After everything I’ve ever done for you! You ungrateful little brat!”. She slapped Eden across the face, but this time it was her who cried out in pain. Looking down at her hand she realized two of her fingers had broken upon impact with Edens cheek. She looked wildly between them and Eden, “what the hell have you done to me?”. Eden's anger suddenly flooded her veins, “I didn’t do anything”, she replied, “but go ahead and try that again. Because this time I’m ready for you”, and let her fangs drop down once again. Edens mother quickly started to back away from her, “stay away from me! I’ll kill you! I swear to god!”. Eden took a couple steps forward, “unless I kill you first”. Her mother turned sharply to run, but stumbled under her fear. She ran straight into the railing of the balcony, causing it to break. She fell to the entranceway, a pool of blood starting to come from her head.

Eden stood at the broken railing for a moment. She was dead. Her mother was actually dead. And she was the one who caused it. It was almost too much for her to comprehend. The smell of her mothers blood began to fill the room. It was driving Eden's senses wild. Snapping out of the trance the blood had on her, panic made her rush to her room. ‘The cops will think I killed her on purpose’, she thought, ‘I can’t stay here and wait for someone to come looking around or report it. I have to run, make it look like a robbery gone wrong’. She went into her room to gather the last remaining things that she truly cared about. The last thing she grabbed was her mothers jewelry, thinking she could sell it to get by. She walked down the stairs slowly, trying to steady herself. Passing her mother on the floor she proceeded to trash the living room, tipping over furniture. Pulling her only pair of shoes by the front door onto her sore feet she stopped and looked at her mothers dead body, not sure of what to do next. “You deserve to lay here and rot you horrid bitch”, she said. “I can’t believe I ever felt any shred of love for you, but I promise you that it died in that alleyway along with me”, and spit on her mothers body.

Standing at the top of the stairs on the front porch, Eden was truly alone. But she never felt more ready to start her own path, even if it wasn’t what she expected. She clutched her bag, took a deep breath, and ran into the night.

Chapter Three

Ninety eight years later

As she opened her eyes to her dark bedroom, Eden looked toward the window through her thin bed canopy. Through the crack in the curtains in the glimmer of the full moonlight she could see snow

gently falling to the ground. First snow, the purest of all. Getting out of her dark sheets, walking to the window and pulling them all the way open she realized it had snowed all night. Everything was covered in a glittering white sheet. The moon shined so bright it was as though the ground was covered in diamonds. The dead trees had been frosted over and were now glittering pillars of winter beauty. She touched the windows glass, leaving no evidence of fingerprints. Frost came off on her hand. Her pale white skin sparkled in unison with it. She pulled the curtains closed, knowing she needed to leave soon.

The house, as always, was so quiet. The empty halls of the old Victorian home echoed with her loneliness. She had been living alone for so long she sometimes wondered if any sound made here might shatter her hearing. The dark hallways are cluttered with so many memories of friends come and gone, some by choice or by death. The curtained windows hiding the dark truth inside. Candles lining the shelves and walls had been burning all night long. The only electricity being used in her home was at night when she was home, and even then it was just for pleasure and sometimes food. The aged home had been condemned once before, but Eden since revived it as much as she could with what she had. But mostly she let it age with her, a weathered antique being held together by the seams, just like her. Walking over the cold tile of the bathroom barely rattled her at all. The elegant black marble counters and sink glistened, cold as she sat her shirt and pajama shorts on it. Same with the hot water as it ran through her hair and down her back. As soon as Eden stepped out it was back to frozen skin. She stared at herself in the fogged mirror. The same pale complexion. The same electric blue eyes. And the same forbidden rose tattoo on her chest. A constant reminder of what had been taken from her so long ago. The scars on the back of her neck an even worse one. The frozen face of a nineteen year old woman.

Back in her room, Eden opens up her large wardrobe. Ever filled with years of clothes, she digs until she finds her work scrubs, slick proof shoes, and an unneeded coat. Working in the prison system of Devilsbrooke Massachusetts they require all the nursing staff to wear black. Something about them needing to stand out from everyone else in case someone needs immediate attention. She thought it made them look more like angels of death, but she really didn't mind all that much. She preferred it. If the inmates didn't know whether they would live or die if they went to the infirmary, the less likely they would do something stupid to get sent there in the first place. It made the night shift so much easier to get through. Except for tonight, when she's at her most starved. She had gone too long without feeding and was now ravenous. Grabbing her bag and keys it was time to leave for work. Down the stairs and out the door, tonight some poor soul would be unfortunately sent to solitary confinement for all the horrible things they had done. And unfortunately for them, they would be coming face to face with Eden.

Stepping into the cold of the night, Eden walked to her car, listening to the crunch of the snow beneath her feet. Gazing up at the night sky she admired the stars, looking like a blanket covered in glitter. Getting into her black 2016 camaro, she reaches into her bag. It was about a twenty minute ride to the prison from her house, so she knew she had enough time to look into her next patient. After pulling out a yellow file and recorder, she presses play and listens to the audio commentary.

“Subject’s name is Anthony Johns, age 57. Subject has had a history of rage accompanied with blackouts. Subject has a history of drug and alcohol abuse. Heroin was found in the subject’s system post arrest along with evidence of multiple injection sites. Subject has also had several arrests and restraining orders, from domestic battery to stalking with intent to harm, all filed by Cristina Johns. The subject was apprehended on highway 32 after the murder of his former wife, Christina Johns, age 52 and their son, Kevin Johns, age 31. After finding out his wife allegedly had an affair, an apparent argument over the paternity of the deceased, Kevin Johns, Anthony became enraged and bludgeoned his wife from behind with a lamp when she tried to leave their home. He repeatedly hit her in the head twenty three times, making it a total of twenty four hits to her skull. The deceased most likely died after four hits. Blood was found at the crime scene on the back of the couch, the left hand wall to the entryway, and on the ceiling. A pool of blood was discovered directly behind the couch, detectives assume it was where the murder actually occurred. Anthony attempted to dispose of the body by bisecting the body, removing the limbs, and putting them into moving boxes then transporting them to their home’s garage. Upon discovering the body four days after the murder through the smell, Kevin called the police. While speaking to police, the subject grabbed Kevin from behind the neck and snapped his neck. Post ligature marks prove both hands were used in the murder. The emergency operator confirmed by a voice line up it was in fact Anthony Johns who murdered Kevin Johns, which gives probable cause in the death of Cristina Johns. Subject is being held in solitary confinement Devilsbrooke Penitentiary for the Criminally Insane until trial date of October 1st, 2018”.

She clicked the recorder off and shoved it back into her bag. It was more than enough to convince her he was the one. There wasn’t anything that could convince her that he didn’t deserve to die. The only question that remained was how to play it out.

Parking her car in its usual spot she headed toward the front gates. She pulled out her badge to get scanned to enter. You either have a badge or an appointment. No exceptions. The gates were being monitored by Jake Oliver, a security guard. He had been here for quite a few years and had known her for two. He looked up and smiled at her through the guard shack window, “Good evening Miss Rosewood.

Cold enough for you?" She half laughed at the comment, "yeah, it's a regular winter wonderland. Can you scan me in so I won't freeze to death?". Handing him her badge through the little slot in the window, he scanned it through. "You know the drill, your badge is verified, now please look into the retina scan". Looking into the scanner it flashed taking a picture. Eden stepped back rubbing her eyes, "I don't think i'll ever get used to that". He handed her badge back and said jokingly, "No one ever does. Have a good night". He pressed the unlock button for the gates, a loud buzzer blaring into night. The great iron gates opened with a loud screech that pierced her ears. Looking up at the gigantic stone building she was always impressed. It had been standing for almost a hundred years, housing every kind of criminal from petty thieves to brutal killers. With the walls almost two feet thick and a cliff dropping down a hundred and fifty feet to rocky waters on one side and miles of forest to the opposite side, even if one managed to escape, they'd meet an unkind end. In a weird way she liked being here more than alone in her own home. At least here there's worse people who have done way more horrible things than she has.

The main lobby was pretty empty this time of night, except for the few brave nurses and guard staff who dared work the night shift. The stark white walls and dingy yellowing lighting really didn't make it all that inviting. Only fifteen heavily armed guards and seven nurses were required to attend this shift, so those who did show up were the only ones who genuinely wanted to. Everyone else did it once and quit the next morning. The head of nursing, Karen Jacson, dressed in red scrubs, sat behind the front desk typing away at the intake computer. Standing up from the computer, she says, "alright people, we received a new prisoner this morning, Anthony Johns. I know most of you have heard the reports on the news, but rest assured, he is under heavy surveillance and won't be hurting anyone on this staff. If you have any problems, lock down and immediately radio to any of the posted guards in your area".

As the rest of the staff scattered to their posts, Karen stops Eden handing her her paperwork for the night, "You'll be monitoring solitary tonight, but luckily there's only four inmates back there now. They let Jarred back into gen-pop". Eden looked up from the sheet, "they let the guy who stabbed one of the kitchen staff with a plastic fork because they ran out of tater tots back into gen-pop?". Karen shrugged, "maybe they found more tater tots", and Eden smiled. Just as she was about to take herself to her station, Karen stops her. "I'd be a little more cautious tonight when you check on anyone. I don't know if you heard, but he hasn't been here a full day and he's already attacked three guards. He was immediately placed into solitary confinement for our own safety". Eden's mouth started to water with anticipation, "I'll be extra careful. It's nothing I haven't dealt with before."

Passing through the different hallways and pods of people was always an experience to behold. Between the mix of hounding, insults, and cat calls, Eden could never tell if these people wanted to fuck her or kill her. Or maybe even both in either order. Men and women of all ages and sizes yelled through the small windows in their doors. They banged on the steel doors to the point that they shook. Some begged to be set free, some just wanting to yell. Some of the women just sat around behind the door and cackled like witches on crack. Some went as far to lick the bullet proof glass, showing just how far gone they were from reality. Something about this place seemed to make them go even more mad then before. All of their heart beats were erratic and insane. It pained Eden's head and made her ears burn. So many emotions at once made her want to scream. One prisoner she passed in the hall was strapped to a transport chair with a spit cover over his face surrounded by four day shift guards. As soon as she made eye contact with him, he started to try and lick through the mesh and thrusting his hips up and down yelling, "Come here sweetheart, I haven't had my dick sucked in a month!". Immediately after getting a nightstick across the face, blood spewing from his mouth all over the mesh. "Sorry about that miss", a guard said. She kept walking, thinking about how easily it would be to snap his neck and just walk away. You're next, she thought.

But solitary was worse. The longer they stay alone with their thoughts, the more they scream. Some of the inmates even fell into hallucinations that lasted for days. One even claimed that he saw the faces of his victims in the darkness. Their bloody faces made him completely insane, and he soon thereafter took his own life from the guilt. They never found out exactly what he saw other than that, but it was enough. Who knows how many tortured souls are trapped inside these old walls.

The solitary confinement station was deserted. The day nurse taking her leave before Eden had shown up to replace her. After setting her things in the empty desk chair, Eden slipped the yellow envelope and recorder back into the filing cabinet. Logging into the computer on the desk, she checked who she would be monitoring for the evening. Terrance, a regular. No surprises there considering he blamed each time he was back on a different personality. Jack, another regular just with more OCD then should be mentioned. He would more than likely just pace all night. Barry, an oddly formal man who was surprisingly polite. Almost made her want to smuggle him out, almost. And last, none other than Anthony Johns. He was already yelling down the hall about how much he was hurting from his withdrawal. Next, she pulled up her nightly to-do list. It turned out to be pretty basic. Pass out everyone's medications, make sure no one brought anything sharp with them to their new cell, and just be very aware of anything sinister. Slipping into the actual nurses office, she prepared her tools. One blood draw needle, a rubber

band, and ten blood sample vials. She had found it was surprisingly easy to smuggle them out in her bag at the end of the night. And last she goes to the medicine cabinet and pulls out Ativan, a common sedative, and putting it into her pocket. Setting everything else on a metal tray and putting it next to the sink, she returned to the desk, and waited.

Eden had been watching the monitors for several hours. The ticking of the lone clock on the wall seemed to take an eternity. Checking the time it was finally three in the morning. Time for med pass. Right on schedule, Rachele came around the corner with the med cart looking exhausted. "I tell you what", she starts, "I can't stand the women's ward. All they do is throw these pills back through the door slot. It makes everything take so much longer than it needs to be. Like, just take the damn pills and shut up". Eden responded, "They're usually worse than the men. I think it's got something to do with them all being synced up". "Dear lord, that's a thing of nightmares", she says as she sets up Eden's tray of little paper cups of medications and water bottles on the desk. "You have the usual menu of antipsychotics and sleeping pills, along with anti anxieties and regular vitamins. Have fun". "Already way ahead of you".

Once Rachele was safely around the corner, Eden dimmed the lights of all the cells until they were almost completely blacked out. Grabbing the tray to pass everyone their pills, with a tap on the slot in the cell doors, she opened and closed the flap with no real issues. Other than having to explain what every single pill is supposed to do for them and what all the possible side effects might be, she slowly made her way to the final cell. But instead of just slipping them through the slot, she pulled out the ativan from her pocket and puts it in the last paper cup. After one deep breath, she pulls the cell keys and unlocks the door.

The iron cell door creaked as she pulls it open. Through the darkness Eden could make out his face. The wrinkles on his face were deep, yet somehow he was so skinny. His body reminded her of the dead trees just outside. Skinny, twisted, and dead inside. His orange shirt and sweatpants seemed to be barely hanging on his frail frame. His blood shot eyes make it painfully obvious he's been awake for days. And the many track marks in both of his arms made it clear as to why. Slumped over his thin metal cot he looks up from the floor, "what the fuck do you want?". Eden stepped into the cell and shut the door behind her without hesitation, "I'm just here to deliver your medication. Are you in a lot of pain tonight?". He weakly laughed, "not at all, detox is a breeze you stupid bitch. What do you think?". "Well Mr. Johns, I'm sorry to hear that. Here", she says handing him the paper cup and water, "These should start to help within about twenty minutes or so". "Whatever", he says, "I'll be fucking dead soon anyway, so it's not like it really matters if I'm in pain. Or if anyone really cares", and swallows the pills. "Truth be told, I

don't really care. I'm just doing my job so I don't get fired. I simply think you're just a sick individual". Anthony laughs at her, "yeah, the courts thought so too", and lays down on his cot. Eden shrugged, "like you said, you'll be dead soon anyway."

Right about then he started to look drowsy. His breaths grew longer and more even, as if he were drifting towards sleep. Eden knelt down beside him and started stroking the back of his neck. "You know why I like working in the prison system?", she asked. "Why's that?", he asked, "not enough assholes in your personal life?". Eden actually laughed at that, "no, I don't have anyone in my personal life, but I absolutely love that fact. I don't need the extra bullshit that comes with humans. Too high maintenance". She suddenly gripped the back of his neck with her fingernails. "Not to mention", she added, "you real assholes keep me fed for weeks at a time". He gasped and tried to move, but couldn't feel anything from the neck down, his muscles numb. "What the- what the fuck did you do to me bitch?", he exclaimed as blood started dripping from his wounds, his heart beginning to pound. "Just paralyzed you from the neck down", she explained, "don't worry though, you won't be able to feel any pain at all in the next thirty seconds. But before you die, do you have anything you'd like to apologize for?". "If you think you can put me down, you better make sure I stay down", he growled, "cause when I get back up you're a fuck'n dead bitch". Eden got eye level with him and slowly revealed her fangs, his eyes going wild with terror. "I'll take that as a no", she said, "goodbye Mr. Johns". And snapped his neck in her hand.

Chapter Four

"I can't believe this happened. Although I can't say I'm entirely surprised either considering the context", Karen said as the coroners wheeled Anthony's body out of his cell on a gurney. She turned to Eden, "you didn't notice anything throughout the night? Not a noise or anything?". She shrugged her shoulders, "no, he never said a word. Not even while I delivered everyone's medications". "Well, I guess there's nothing really to blame except guilt eating away at a monster's mind", said Karen as the medical examiner came up behind them. "What was the cause of death?", asked Eden, acting oblivious. "It was pretty cut and dry", he said, holding up a thin sheet, "hung himself from the above pipe in the cell. The neck injury is consistent with suicide by hanging. What we can't understand is how he reached the pipe at all". "Desperate people with ill intentions are capable of anything", Eden responded, "we see it every day here". "I'm sure you do", he said turning back to Karen, "who do I talk to about getting the release paperwork done?". "That would be me. You can have the body taken to our medical wing for the time being. Eden, would you mind escorting them downstairs?".

Down in the medical wing, Eden finished filling out a few pieces of paperwork for the medical examiner. The medical examiner and EMTs set up the body in a medical slab to be locked in a cooler until further notice. "We'll be back for the body as soon as we know for sure if there's any family to release the body to or if we need to dispose of it ourselves. Although, even if we did, I'm not sure who would want to be associated with this asshole". Eden handed him the paperwork, "I agree. If you don't mind, I'd like to get started with my own exam of the body. It's standard procedure for our own medical records just so we have a clear understanding of what happened". "Sure thing. Would you like any assistance? Just to make sure you cover every track", he asked. Eden smiled at his comment, "oh I'm very good at covering my tracks sir", putting on a pair of latex gloves with a snap. He nervously laughed, "okay then. We'll just leave you to it I guess". Once everyone was out of the room, Eden proceeded to lock the door. Going to the cooler she unlocked Anthony's locker, pulling him out. "Okay", she said to herself, "let's get this shit done and over with".

Walking over to the counter Eden grabbed the tray she had prepared earlier that night. The needle slid effortlessly into his vein. His blood however was not flowing due to him lacking a heartbeat. After attaching the vile to the opposite end of the tube, she started chest compressions. After about two minutes his blood started to flow into the vile. After filling each vile as far as she could get them to, Eden cleaned up. Taking a quick look over the body she scribbled down exactly what she needed to to get her post mortem report signed, sealed, and put away in the prisons files. Pricking her finger with her fang she rubbed a few drops of blood on the needle puncture on his arm, instantly healing it. Leaving no trace of her ever having been there. She carefully wrapped each vile in a paper towel, then into another one all together, and slipped them into her pocket. Just as she was about to push him back into his cold locker, she sighed, "well Anthony, I can't say it was a pleasure knowing you, but I will say it was an outstanding pleasure being the one to rid you from this world. You will not be missed. Rot in hell you son of a bitch", and slammed the locker door shut.

The front lobby was full with everyone trying to clock out for the day. Everyone couldn't stop talking about the apparent suicide of Anthony Johns. He was the fourth suicide within the last several months. Everyone was beginning to think that the solitary wing was cursed or haunted, making the most evil people who got sent there so crazy they just end it all to stop the madness. But Eden knew better. She knew that they would stay evil no matter what and continue their terror unless she brought them to a permanent end. But soon even he would be a forgotten distant memory. No one to mourn him or even care that he existed at all. Eden sometimes wondered if it would ever be the same end for her.

Driving home in her car trying to beat the new morning rays, Eden wished there was a better way. A better way to live, a better way to survive. Hell, even a better way to make herself feel better about how she had no other way to live. She had accepted the fact that she was a kind of beautiful predator long ago, but she never truly had any choice in the matter either. Her driveway, as always, was empty when she finally pulled in. Just as the morning began to rise over the trees, she took one look back, just to catch a glimpse of the sun she used to love so much. She reached up to try and feel the warmth of it through the cold air. The tips of her fingers began to burn in the light as she pulled away, a single tear streaming down her cheek.

Once safely inside the darkness once again, Eden took off her coat and made sure all the curtains were pulled tightly closed. Once she knew she was completely secure she headed for her kitchen, vials in hand. Most of them she stored in the freezer for safe keeping, but she left out two vials to make her dinner. She pulled out a mug from one of the cabinets above the sink, dumped both containers into it, and stuck it in the microwave. Heated up to ninety-eight point six degrees, it was almost like drinking straight from the vein. She sipped the blood at her kitchen table, knowing she wouldn't need more for at least two weeks, maybe three if she didn't get too stressed. But at least she didn't work for the next two nights. She thought she might go to the bar, just to watch people. In all the years she had spent as a vampire, she still found it hard to believe she was ever that clumsy. Let alone so gullible. But for the sake of just not being in her house, it was the best she had to go with.

With her cup finally empty and her nerves finally settled, she wandered up to her room to sleep through the day. She stripped off her clothes and slid into her sheets, hoping her dead like sleep would come easy to her. One funny thing she noticed every time she drank a new person's blood was that sometimes she was able to see their memories, kind of a strange dream-like out of body experience. Most were simple, nothing to really remember. But others were the things of nightmares that she couldn't wake from. She hoped for peace, not wanting to see or feel how those poor people suffered, or how good he felt doing it. Nothing would make her happier if she never had to see any of it. She may have a dead heart, but she wasn't entirely heartless.

Chapter Five

Eden awoke the next evening in a cold sweat and tears running down her face. Her hope for dreamless sleep was not granted, her heart racing from the dark memories. The red and black images swam through her mind like eels all through the night, tormenting her to no end. Watching that man go

from a nice guy, to a drug addict father, and finally a murderer was too much for even her to handle. She climbed out of bed needing fresh air to calm her nerves. She opened her bedroom curtains, threw open the window, and took a deep breath in. Every once in a while she comes across the memories of people who even she should not be forced to remember. But most of the time the memories are so strong they were simply unavoidable. The cold air filled Eden's lungs with each cleansing breath, slowly steadying her mind. Once completely calm she closed her window and decided she needed to get out for a bit. Eden had learned a long time ago that the easiest way to forget horrible memories is to make better ones of her own.

After showering off the remaining sweat and straightening her hair Eden felt almost back to normal. The leftover emotions of Anthony Johns had finally left her body. While getting dressed in her dark clothes and doing her makeup Eden started to feel more at ease. Her smokey eyes looked back at her in the mirror. She smiled, thinking she was actually pretty for the first time in a long time. She ran down her stairs, threw on her leather jacket. With one swift zip of her knee high heels she headed out the front door.

Driving in her car, she decided to turn into Devil's Well, the only bar in town. Even though she couldn't actually take a drink, Eden liked coming here simply for the people watching. The drunk people here had a certain comedic style she'd never seen anywhere else. The karaoke was terrible but the dancing made up for it by being hilarious. The bright neon lights and single flickering parking lot lamp made it hard to miss from the road. Not to mention all the cars and trucks that were typical after eight o'clock. She pulled in at the far end of the lot, far enough out of the way to quickly drive out when necessary. People stood outside the doors catching some fresh air before going back into the chaos. She made sure to have her fake ID on hand to show the doorman, one of many she had had over the years. Walking through the front doors the cigarette smoke hit Eden's nose like a semi truck. The aroma of liquor and beer hung in the air like a storm cloud of bad decisions, and almost everyone there was there for exactly that. She could smell marijuana coming from both bathrooms, not to mention what else might have been being done in there. Some guys stumbled around, mug in hand, like they were on top of the world, others were at the bar to drink away the work day. Skimpy clothes and work boots were all over the dance floor. The music pounded against the walls and made the tables slightly rattle. Eden sat at a small table in the back corner of the bar, ordered a single glass of red wine just for show, and watched.

After being entertained by the bar goers for four hours, everyone seemed to be at peak drunkenness. Several girls seemed to be unable to keep themselves upright on their too high heels, but still laughed as they hit the floor. Eden watched as a couple guys got their keys taken away and told to walk

home or get a ride. And complaining about it. A few new couples seemed to be leaving together. Eden smiled, knowing by morning one or both would do the walk of shame early the next morning. She had never been in that kind of position before. Nore did she ever want to be, not with anyone from this place anyway. Most humans were too small minded to even comprehend the amount of paranormal that resided in their world. Even if she wasn't immortal, Eden highly doubted any man could handle her personality. She decided it was time to go home. After leaving a tip on the table for her unneeded waitress, she got up to leave when a random drunk man blocked her way.

"Heading out so soon sweetie? I noticed you sitting back there alone, wanted you to come over, sip some booze. Wanna get a little crazy with me?", he asked with a slur. Eden looked him up and down, "yes, I'm leaving. And no thank you to the drink. I've seen more than enough drunken escapades for the evening, so I will be going home now, so if you'll excuse me", and tried to push past him. He blocked her path with his arm, beer in hand, "maybe you could give me a ride home? I'll be worth it, I'm super fun". She wrinkled her nose at his horrid smell. Eden gave him a passive smile and moved his arm away, "I bet you are, but I'm gonna have to politely pass", and walked around him towards the door. "I'll be seeing you sweetie", he yelled behind her, "I'm never too far away from a pretty girl". The way he said it made Eden slightly uneasy, but decided he wasn't worth her time. Then she heard another guy tell him to stop harassing the local girls and just sit down, shut up, and wait for his ride. She looked back to find the man sat back down with the same guy who yelled at him, a dark haired guy in a black hoodie drinking a tall glass of water. He locked eyes with her and smiled, as if he knew his buddy was acting like a fool and was apologizing for his behavior. She smiled back, silently thanking him, and went outside.

Eden walked into the parking lot to discover it had started snowing again. The glittery snow made her smile, not bothered that it had covered her car completely along with everyone else's. As she walked over to the edge of the parking lot, she heard the bar's employee side door slam open then shut again, a single heartbeat the only noise breaking through the silent snow. She could smell hard liquor and onions as the beat crept closer. Eden gripped her keys in her pocket, ready to jump in the driver's seat as fast as possible. She quickened her pace to try and outrun whoever it was, but they sped up along with her. Eden made it to her car, barely unlocking the door before getting spun around by drunk guy.

The man burped before saying, "why don't you like me girl? I didn't do anything to you, I didn't put my hands on you. I'm just trying to make a new pretty friend". Eden stared at him, "you have your hands on me right now you dumb ass red neck", and smacked his hands away and shoved him back. He stumbled backward and slid in the snow. The shove made him drop his beer in the snow making it break.

She turned back to her car to get in but he was on her again, this time pinning her against the car. “You need to learn some respect for your elders”, He said. Eden had had enough of this. She slowly let her fangs descend, fully prepared to take him out. Just as she was about to rip open his throat the back door flew open again. She paused when she heard a familiar voice again. “Mark! What the fuck are you doing! Get your hands off her!”, the voice commanded. The drunk guy relaxed his arms and unsteadily backed away. Eden quickly retracted her fangs and turned around.

The same dark haired guy from before came running up to them and slammed Mark into the back door of Eden's car. He punched Mark in the face, knocking him to the side. Eden tried not to get distracted by the blood rapidly starting to flow from Mark's nose. It had a very strong odor from all the alcohol he had drank. The dark haired guy sat him back up again. “Are you actively trying to get arrested again? How stupid are you exactly? You just got out yesterday”, the guy explained. “Don’t call me stupid. This chick is just stuck up”, Mark said, and slid down the side of the car into the snow. The guy picked Mark up off the ground, “Get your drunk ass back inside Mark, I’ll call your sister to come pick you up”. Mark grumbled and staggered back toward the front door, “whatever man, you don’t know anything”.

The dark haired guy turned to talk to Eden. He was at least six feet tall and had a medium type build. She noticed his hair was a dark chocolate brown and shaved on the sides. The top was just barely short enough to stay out of his dark green eyes. “So sorry about him, he’s really harmless. He just can’t hold his liquor to save his life”, he explained. Eden kept her eyes on Mark until he was completely back inside the bar, “yeah, well he needs to learn that no isn’t a tease toward yes”. He half laughed at that, “I never said my brother wasn’t stupid”. Edens eyebrows rose, “your brother? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say that about your brother”. He put up a hand in protest, “it’s fine, really. He did it to himself, and he’ll probably end up doing something else to prove his stupidity again soon enough”.

Eden couldn’t help but notice the amount of heat coming off of this man. It was way more than the average human usually gives off. When the snow hit his skin it instantly melted, sending water streaming down his chiseled jaw. It felt like the sun was standing right in front of her. He smelled like the woods behind her house after a summer rain. Eden smiled at him, “so can I get your name? I mean considering you just saved your buddy's life from being cut short”. He smiled back, “my name’s James. James Norse if the last name matters too”. “I like it, it’s very viking king”, she said. He smiled a full smile then, one she thought was quite attractive, “thanks for the ego boost. Now would you tell me yours so I know the damsel I saved from the distress of a drunken asshat?”. She thought for a moment, not sure if she should give him a fake name. But something deep down told her she could trust him, even though

she'd only known him for a few brief Minutes. She chose, "my name's Eden. Eden Rosewood if it matters to you", and smiled. She could've sworn she felt herself blush in the moment. "Your name sounds like you should be a countess", he said. If only you knew how right you are, she thought smiling. "Well, I'll let you get home. It was nice saving you Miss Rosewood. I hope to see you again some time", and he turned to go back inside. "Wait", Eden said, turning back and scrambling around in her car before he left. She came back out with a sharpie, "maybe you can find me sooner", and scribbled her cell phone number on his hand. He looked at it happily and said, "I'll hunt you down sometime", the way he said it made her feel like he meant it literally.

Eden watched him go back inside the bar, for some reason not wanting him to leave. She climbed into her car and pulled out onto the road, speeding towards her home. A sudden panic took over her when she fully realized what had just happened. What the fuck just happened, she thought, what the fuck did I just do?

Chapter Six

Eden sat on her living room couch and stared at her cell phone on the coffee table. The air was still and quiet, not one sound crept through the house. It hadn't rang or made any noise since she got home two hours ago. The panic she felt however had made a home inside her thoughts. Eden wondered why she did what she did, knowing that if James were to interject himself into her life he would surely die eventually. Or he would just run for the hills if he ever found out what kind of creature she was. Or it could be he only took her number to be nice and he thought she was crazy for giving it to him so easily. Eden felt like someone had taken over her mind for a few moments and completely screwed her whole life up. But, at the same time, something inside her knew she could trust him, and she had never felt that about anyone before in her human life or after. It was like she was a moth being drawn to a flame. She went to her kitchen to grab a vile of blood from the freezer. She put it in the microwave, heated it to ninety eight point six. Eden didn't bother with a cup this time. She just drained it directly into her mouth and down her throat. She took a deep breath after swallowing it down, feeling herself calming down.

After letting her nerves settle back down, Eden finally decided to lay down for the day, let her mind rest. She stripped off her clothes walking down the hall to her room until she was completely naked, feeling herself finally fully relaxed. Eden paused at the window, admiring the snow and last shine of the moon on this surprising night. She felt almost giddy at the thought of possibly seeing him again somehow.

She climbed into her bed and stared out her bedroom window, thinking about James. His eyes, his smell, his voice. Her last thought was of his face before drifting off into dead like sleep.

Eden opened her eyes when she felt a snowflake land on her cheek, a dreamy blue haze around her eyes. She turned her head toward the ceiling only to find she was under the noon day sun. Looking around she found her bed was in the middle of the woods surrounded by roses growing wildly around the bottom and up the bedposts. The smell of the roses filled her nose with a soft, sweet aroma. Eden moved her blanket off, sending snow swirling into the air. When she put her feet to the ground the cold grass felt as soft as silk. This has to be a dream, she thought, but started walking anyway. Every step she took melted the snow under her feet, which Eden thought was strange. Eden's senses were on overload. She could smell the forest, the air, even the snow. She couldn't really hear much but a twinkle in the air, reminding her of wind chimes. The thick trees were frosted over completely, icicles hanging from their branches. Yet the leaves on them were green, as if it were springtime. She noticed fireflies out of the corner of her eye. She walked toward them to find they were dancing just above a large pond. The water was clear with hints of blue sparkle that swirled when she put her hand in it. It was warm, as if it had been under the sun for days. The snow melted as soon as it touched the water with steam being left in its place. Eden thought for a moment, then dived into the warm sanctuary.

Eden dove down deep into the water. She felt as though she was floating through a beautiful void of warmth. She breathed out and smiled at the bubbles floating back up to the surface, following right behind them. As she broke through the water's surface she realized it had suddenly become nightfall, everything completely covered in snow like a blizzard had happened within minutes. The trees had suddenly become dead, skeletal and black. The snowfall had picked up to a point Eden could hardly see beyond the water line. The stars shone brighter than she had ever seen before, like glitter hand painted over a black canvas. The moon shined against the darkness like an illuminated pearl, hypnotizing her. Eden giggled and twirled in the water, arms outstretched, completely blissful.

Suddenly she heard a noise from the treeline. She spun around, not quite sure where or what the noise came from. To her surprise she saw a wolf staring at her, its glowing yellow eyes locking with hers. She froze, not sure what to do. Eden snapped out of the trance and swam back to the edge of the water away from the creature. As soon as she was completely out of the water, she gasped as the wolf was suddenly right in front of her, now with blood dripping from its teeth. Edens heart quickened as she closed her eyes in terror, trying to cover herself as best she could. A low growl came from the beast, Eden feeling it creep closer to her legs. The heat coming from the wolf was like fire. She was trembling as she opened

her eyes again only to find the wolf had disappeared. Only to be replaced with a naked, blood covered James.

Chapter Seven

Eden sat up in bed, feeling what she thought was sweat running down her face and on her sheets and pillows. Upon closer inspection realizing it was blood, the smell of rust heavy in the air. What the hell, she thought. Eden tried to wipe away the blood from her face, but there was so much it just smeared and started to cover her hands. She got out of bed and started pulling the sheets from the mattress, so hard that she accidentally pulled the mattress from the bed frame and smacked it into the wardrobe across the room. “Fuck”, Eden groaned. When she went to grab her mattress to put it back on the frame, she caught a glimpse of herself in the vanity mirror. The blood had not only been coming from her eyes, but also from her ears and nose. It had apparently been so much that it had oozed into her hair, leaving behind thick strands of hair clotted with blood. Eden grabbed a shirt from the floor and tried to wipe it off of her face, but it did nothing but smear it around. She grabbed it and the sheets from the floor after putting the mattress back on the frame, and headed to the basement to the washing machine.

After shoving everything into the washing machine and adding cups upon cups of laundry detergent, Eden set the machine to go for two hours. She knew it wasn't a permanent fix, but it was a start. If anything just to take care of the smell. Eden grabbed a tank top and lace panties out of the laundry basket full of clean clothes and put them on. She went back upstairs to the bathroom to take care of her face and hands. Eden aggressively scrubbed her face and hands with scalding hot water, turning it dark red in the process. She dunked her hair into the sink, the clots coming out in pieces. She rinsed and rang out her hair until the water ran out clear. Eden wiped the fog from the mirror, looking to make sure she got every drop off of her skin. Eden sat on the cool bathroom tiles, feeling weaker and more tired than she had in a long time. Almost human.

After putting her bed back together with the sheets and blankets, Eden flung herself onto her bed. She stared at the ceiling wondering what had caused all that blood. Then she remembered dreaming about the wolf, and then of James. Her mind stayed on him for a few moments. How he had just appeared, naked. Covered in blood, like he was fresh from battle. She strangely found it somewhat attractive. Just the thought of him ripping apart someone or something with his bare hands and his teeth gave her a rare rush of excitement throughout her whole body. Goosebumps raised on her skin as she thought about his

muscular body, the thought of him touching her. What I would do to you if I had the chance, she thought. She let her mind wander there, if only for a moment, at what that might be like.

Eden closed her eyes and imagined herself back in the fantasy. He was still there, as if he had been waiting for her to return. She slowly moved her top up revealing her breasts, caressing them and gently squeezing her already hard nipples. She imagines his hands running over them, covering them with his mouth and nibbling at them. Slipping out of her lace panties she threw them on the floor and reached for her bedside table and into the drawer. She pulled out her little vibrator and traced her thigh, imagining it's him kissing his way down her. She pictured his mouth making his way to the secret between her legs as she discovered how wet she actually was. Wishing he was above her, she moves the vibrator down to her clit, moving it in circles, making her shiver. Eden let out a soft moan, wishing her viking could hear how he makes her feel. She put her left hand on her breast, the other between her legs, she let her head hang back, imagining his tongue taking her even higher than before. "Fuck, James", she moans. She throws the vibrator to the side, slips her two middle fingers inside and goes faster. She bites down on her fingers trying to stay somewhat quiet. Instead the intense pleasure made her bite through her skin, blood running down her hand. She starts to move against her hand, picturing James bending her over the side of her bed and taking her from behind, scratching her back. Faster, faster, until she couldn't take it anymore. With one final thrust and one final yell, Eden comes on her fingers. Still desperate for more.

Chapter Eight

Eden felt a new need. A deep need from the most primal part of her being. The need to hunt. Looking in her mirror her fangs had already descended, her eyes glowing as if something had been awakened inside her. She got out of bed and got dressed, throwing her hair into a high ponytail. She opened her bedroom curtains to find a perfect full moon in the sky. She took a deep breath in, feeling more alive than ever. Craving to have blood on her lips and cascading down her throat she left for town. Simply ravenous.

Eden drove to town and waited in her car across the road as more and more people piled into Devils Well. She didn't want or need to go inside, she just needed to wait. Two hours passed as she continued to be patient in waiting for the perfect victim. She could smell the booze and liquor from where she sat, tinted windows up. So many hearts beating in one place made Eden's mouth water. The laughter coming from inside showed how drunk certain people had already become. Then she heard a fight break out between two women just inside. Apparently one of them tried to hook up with the other's husband,

with no real interest reciprocated from said husband. Guess he told his wife what happened, causing her to confront her like a bad Jerry Springer episode. Only disgust could follow. The rejected woman, who was clearly drunk out of her mind, stumbled out of the front entrance, “you’re a fuckin prick Josh! I hope your dick shrivels and falls off while you fuck her!”, and she started to stumble away pulling at her mini pink mini. Eden then got out of the car to go pretend to care about her feelings, but someone beat her to it. A tall, skinny man stumbled out after her, clearly interested in whatever she was offering. “Forget about him doll, he ain’t no good anyway. We’ll find someone else to satisfy your fantasy”, and promptly started kissing and grabbing on her. “I just want this to go so good”, the woman complained while tossing her blonde hair around, “I mean, I didn’t think it would be this hard to find someone for a three way with us”. “We will babe, just- just bare with me”, he said. And at that moment he locked eyes with Eden across the road. He smiled at her, then motioned the woman to look over too. She smiled with him, and waved over. Eden thought about it, and smiled back. Two for one, why not?

Eden got the two of them into her car within ten minutes of saying hello. Them being drunk made it way easier then it would’ve normally taken, but she still hooked them regardless. A little hair flipping and some cleavage goes a long way. “So what were you up to just sitting in your car this late at night?”, the woman asked. Eden kept her eyes on the road, “just looking to have some fun I guess”, she replied. The man eyed Eden from the back seat, “You know, you look kinda familiar. Have we met somewhere before?”. “I don’t think so”, she said, “I guess I just have one of those faces. I really don’t get out much”. He scooted even closer to her face, his breath stunk of beer and onion rings. Then his eyes lit up, “I do know you! You work over at the prison right? I’m Robert Pierce! I was there a few months ago!”. Oh shit, she thought, that’s why you smell so familiar. The woman groaned, “do we have to talk about that? It was such a bogus charge. You don’t even hit that hard and there weren’t that many bruises”, she hiccuped, “and I never filed anything anyway. I even tried to bail out cause I love you so much”. *Jesus Christ*, thought Eden, *I hit the fuck up jackpot*. “I don’t really keep track of who comes and goes out of the building”, she said, “I just make sure you don’t die while you’re in there”. The man chuckled at that, “I think more people die in there than out here”.

They finally pulled up to Eden's house after the short drive that felt like ten years. The woman stumbled out of the front seat, then proceeded to sit in the mud, “I don’t feel so good”. The man followed behind her and tried to stand her back up, “don’t pass out, we finally made it here. Now you get to have fun with me and this sexy ass”, he said looking up at Eden grinning. “Exactly”, Eden said smiling, trying to keep her fangs from exposing themselves. The woman sighed in misery, “I’m gonna throw up”, and

started vomiting all over the ground. “You dumb bitch”, the man said, “I told you not to fuckin drink so much”. He looked over at Eden, “can you please help my sloppy fiancé? You’re a nurse and she’s super disgusting right now”. “So much for sickness and health I guess”, Eden said sarcastically and bent down to help her.

She sat her back in the front seat, “are you gonna be okay? You seem pretty out of it”. The woman waved a hand in Eden's face, “I’m good, I’m so good, really. I’m so...”, and proceeded to pass out. Eden tried to tap her face to get her to wake up, but nothing. “What’s happening?”, asked the man. “She passed out. Looks like this isn’t happening tonight”, she explained, “I’ll drive you back to the bar or even home if that’s okay with you”. So much for that, she thought, her throat starting to burn from the craving. “I mean”, the man started, “If you’re into it, we could still have a party all to ourselves”, and started walking towards her smiling. Eden took a step back, “I don’t think so. Your fiancé is right there and I’m not a home wrecker”. Not that there seems to be much of a home to wreck. “Come on sweetness. She’s not waking up anytime soon”, he caressed her neck as her blood started to boil, “besides, if you don’t, I can always make you. I can be very persuasive. Come on honey, I won’t tell if you won’t”. Smiling Eden said, “I’m aware of that”, closing her eyes, having her hand move across the front of his pants, feeling him harden, “that’s what makes this so easy for me”, and ripped his throbbing cock off as he screamed in agony.

“YOU CRAZY BITCH! WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME! WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT TO ME!”, he screamed as he held his hands over the gushing wound. He kept squeaking out in pain and Eden couldn’t help but laugh. “Are you kidding me dude? You literally just tried to rape me in front of your unconscious fiancé when you didn’t get the three way that you wanted. I really wonder why I pulled your little dick off”, she explained as she tossed his dick into the mud next to the treeline. He winced and cried at the sight of it laying there, blood oozing out of it. “Please”, he winced, “just kill me. It hurts so much”, he glanced down, “I can’t live without my manhood”. Eden took a deep breath in, smelled the aroma of his blood pooling on the ground and in the snow, fangs dropping and eyes glowing bright as she turned to him smiling. “What the fuck”, the man cried. “Don’t worry you slime”, she hissed, “you won’t even be here to worry about that”. She grabbed him up, opened her mouth and bit down on his neck before he could form a scream. His blood slid down her throat like a fine wine. She listened to his heart beat as it started to slow every time she took a gulp. Just as she knew he was about to die, she mentioned to him, “I do remember you, Jaxson”, feeling him tense at the admission, “You were one that I didn’t have the pleasure of meeting officially. I know you were put away for raping three women, and your fiancé over

there. She didn't press charges because you threatened and belittled her to the point of submission, unlike the others. But now she can be free", she said gleefully. And drained him completely.

She let his body drop to the ground, blood covering the entire fronts of her clothes and face. She relaxed, feeling completely content. She hadn't gone on a binder like that for a few years. She looked back over at the woman in her car. Guess you're going back to town, she thought, you didn't do anything wrong. She dragged Jaxson's body into the trees for now, planning on burying him as soon as she got back from dropping off the woman in her car. When she turned to go inside the house, she was horrified to find a raccoon had decided to make Jaxson's former appendage his evening meal. She shooed it into the woods, the raccoon taking it with it. Running inside she changed clothes and cleaned her face of all traces of blood. She drove as fast as she could without being too obvious back to the bar, the woman not even flinching when she took the curves too hard. She parked next to the bench outside of the bar, laying the woman down on it and apologizing for leaving her there. She did inform the bartender that some girl was passed out outside and they should call a cab or something for her. Before she left her completely though, she waited in her car and she made sure a car picked her up and took her home safely.

As she drove herself home Eden couldn't help but feel a little guilty. That poor girl is gonna think that prick just ditched her and would never come back. Not that she really needed him to come back, he was nothing but evil. But it wasn't up to her to decide what people want. Even if it was the worst decision of their life. She made it back to her house at almost six in the morning, enough time left to bury the jerk in her woods. She dragged him to the backyard, grabbing a shovel on the way there. She noticed a tattoo on the lower part of his neck, reading 'JILL'. Eden dug at lightning speed and got down to seven feet before she stopped. The further down and closer to Hell the better for you, she thought to herself. It was easier to get into the dirt than she thought it would be, the ground no longer frozen solid. Spring is in the air. As she kicked him into the hole, something fell out of his pants pocket. A cell phone. Eden got an idea. She turned on the screen to see a picture of him and that woman, they seemed happy in it. Getting into his contacts she found what she assumed was the woman's number judging from the picture icon, saved under 'Jilly Bean'. Eden clicked on it, went into text and wrote:

Jill, I'm sorry for everything I put you through. I'm leaving for your own good. You deserve so much better than me. Don't try to call me or come find me. I'm leaving the state. Goodbye forever

Not exactly original or poetic, but it definitely got the point across. She then turned the phone off, pulled the sim card out and broke it in half. After crushing the entire phone in her hands into tiny pieces and sprinkling it into the hole with him, she covered him up, happy to be rid of the asshole. She dragged the shovel behind her as she headed for the back door of her house, scraping across the mud and rocks as it went. Just before stepping inside the threshold, her pocket vibrated. Eden pulled out her cell phone to find she had a text from a random number. She opened it and felt like her heart might stop again:

Hey Eden, this is James. I don't know if you remember me, we met at the bar a couple nights ago. Was wondering if you wanted to have dinner next weekend. Would love to see you again. Let me know :)

Chapter Nine

The next night, Eden got ready for work at a slower pace than usual. The dream happened again, he happened again. She woke up with blood streaming down her face, again. *'Why does this keep happening to me?'* she thought, annoyed. She showered, did her make up, all while thinking about James and how she barely knew this person, yet was so drawn to him, his voice, his body. She had glanced at the text message quite a few times, trying to decide if it was real or a joke. Or if she even wanted to entertain the idea that it could be real. Scrubs on and hair up in a ponytail, she left for work, mind racing.

Eden's night dragged on like a bad song on the radio. Hours and hours passed without a single incident from any of the inmates. Everyone went where they were supposed to, no screaming. It was the strangest thing Eden had experienced in the building in a long time. Solitary was even more quiet, almost like no one was even there. She charted, printed documents, and charted some more. She checked on her inmates through their cell doors, most were sleeping. Others just sat on their beds, doing nothing or simply talking to the walls. She plopped herself back behind her computer, starting to chart even more. Eden started to hear heavy boots coming down the hallway. She could smell Old Spice getting stronger and stronger the closer the footsteps got. She looked up from her computer to see Jake coming down the way, nightstick twirling in hand. "Are you coming to beat my brains in with that? It would be much appreciated because the silence is about to drive me crazy", she said sarcastically. Jake laughed slightly at the joke, "sorry, no can do. I was just doing a round, seeing if absolutely anything was happening anywhere. Guess it's just a quiet night". "I would genuinely rather they act insane. I get enough of this

silence shit at home”, Eden explained, “this is like cruel and unusual torture”. “I don’t think silence is fatal, but let me know if that changes”, he joked, “did you at least have good nights off? Must be nice to have a break from this hell hole every once in a while”. Eden lied, “pretty uneventful, actually. I stayed home, had a couple drinks, and slept. Nice down time”

After Jake left to complete his round, Eden was once again left alone with her thoughts. All of her charting took her no time since she had no interruptions from the inmates. She decided to do a little research on her computer. Eden pulled up google, typed ‘reoccurring dreams’, and hit enter. So many different sites and answers popped up it made her head spin. So she got more specific. Next she tried ‘reoccurring dreams with wolves’, hit enter. So many results still came up. Everything from lycanthropy to the novel series sensation Twilight, it was pretty safe to say Eden wasn’t going to get a straight answer. But she did notice a legend that popped up several times was several stories and articles about a viking village that possessed the ability to shift into wolves to protect their families during raids and attacks in Norway, the main ones to carry the gene being berserkers. The longer hair they had, the more battles they had won in their wolf form. It said they were revered, most of their kings also being the alpha wolf. They also fully believed if you saw a wolf that shifted into a person next to the waters of remembrance in a dream, that person was the other’s soulmate, and they would be drawn together no matter how far away they were from the other. And would remain together until their dying breaths. The waters of remembrance being a way for souls to be reincarnated some that they could reunite with their lost loves. An artist’s depiction of the waters of remembrance was almost spot on with Eden’s dreams. It was almost haunting. The artwork depicting these men shifting from man to wolf was almost graceful, the men tall, muscular and covered with Nordic tattoos. By the end of the article it also said that these particular vikings vanished over time and it was believed that the bloodline ceased to exist. The legends and the nightmares, however, remained to this day.

There’s no way this is real, she thought, and turned the monitor off. I am not apart of some weird soulmate fantasy with a werewolf viking, there’s no way. But then again, no one thinks vampires exist, yet here I sit. Not to mention everything inside her was pushing her to go see him, talk to him, kiss him, and even more than that. Eden thought for a few moments, then decided she needed to see for herself. She pulled her phone out and texted James back:

Would love to have dinner with you! Thought you forgot about me. I'll text you when my nights off are. Hope to hear from you soon. Eden

She sent him the nights a couple hours later when she got her schedule at the end of her shift. And waited. The drive home seemed longer than usual, but also a bit brighter than before. Spring was definitely right around the corner, and with that Eden would have to adjust her hours to avoid the light. Pulling into her driveway she got a beautiful sight of the morning sun through her tinted windows. The oranges and yellows perfectly painting the sky of a new day. Eden rushed to her front door, but still couldn't stop the rays from slightly burning the back of her neck. Once safely inside, it healed within moments. She stripped off her work clothes while going to her room and tossed them in the hamper next to her bedroom door. As she brushed out her hair to get ready to sleep, her phone went off again. She grabbed it up quickly, hoping it was him. Eden smiled and bit her bottom lip.

How's friday night sound???

Chapter Ten

Eden stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Her make-up didn't take her as long as she thought it would. A dark smokey eye and some deep purple lipstick with her straight black hair went together perfectly. Yet she still felt nervous. Her naked body steamed from her shower, hot water on cold, smooth skin. She grabbed both sides of the sink, trying to steady her nerves. Taking a deep breath in and slowly letting it out, she turned and went to her bedroom.

Eden layed out several different outfits on her bed, contemplating how to present herself to this man. The seasons slowly turning into spring made things a little tricky as far as her options went for this date. The two of them had been texting on and off for the last couple of days. The venue of the date had since changed to a simple walk around the nature park across town to get to know each other better without the distraction of food. Eden was okay with this change simply for the fact she wouldn't have to explain why she didn't want to eat. She had never had to even think about this sort of thing before. Pulling on her dark jeans and putting on a black lace bra, she decided she would also need to have a drink for safety's sake. After pulling on her form fitting long sleeve black tee she headed for the kitchen to find her last vile of blood from the freezer.

As Eden sat at her kitchen table, vile in hand, she watched the clock on the wall. She was supposed to meet James at eight, the clock showing it being seven thirty. She pops open the vile and downs the blood quickly, but somehow it tastes different. Almost like it had gone bad. She coughed slightly at the taste but held it down, covering her mouth with her hand. *Maybe it did go bad*, she thought, *maybe I just kept it frozen too long. Have to get more soon.*

Eden walked out onto her porch, the smell of the woods hanging heavy in the air from the melting snow. Everything was wet and dripping in cold water. The renewal of spring made Eden hopeful for her coming evening with James. It wasn't even too cold outside. She climbed into the driver's seat, started the engine, and pointed the car toward the park. The drive would take her about twenty minutes out of town. The edge of the woods had started to turn a beautiful arrangement of greens, trees budding with new life and grass starting to break through the dirt. Even some flowers had started to bloom. With some snow still lingering on the ground, there was a faint sparkle still shining amongst the new greens. As she turned into the parking lot, Eden looked around to see if James had arrived. But he was nowhere to be found that she could see.

Eden climbed out of her car and shut the door. The cold air started to work its way through her hair, blowing it in the wind. The sun had since set behind the trees causing the outdoor lights to kick on. She walked over to the deserted picnic tables, takes a seat, and pulls out her phone. The last text she had gotten from James was from that morning saying that he'd see her at eight. And how he couldn't wait to see her. It was already seven fifty. She clicked the phone screen off, and waited. Suddenly she heard a vehicle turn into the lot behind her. Eden turned to find a pick up truck parking next to her car. When the engine shut off and headlights clicked off, she smiled seeing James hopping out of the driver's seat and grabbing a blanket from the passenger seat. Despite it being only about fifty degrees, all he had on was basketball shorts and a pull over hoodie. He smiled at her and started to jog toward her, feet splashing in the puddles. "And I thought I was early. Hope you weren't waiting too long out here, it's kinda cold tonight", he said when he made it to her. "Not long, like five minutes if that", she told him. "Good", he smiled, "you ready for our walk? There's a surprise at the end if you can stand the cold for that long". She smirked at the comment and smiled, "I've been told I'm more cold hearted then this. I think I can handle it". James laughed too, "okay then, let's go". As she got up from her bench, he also added, "you look beautiful by the way". She smiled but looked down, a little embarrassed, "thank you".

They walked the trail for some time, listening to subtle sounds of the river and small talking about simple things: favorite colors, music, and hobbies. Apparently James liked to just be in the woods, hiking

and camping with his family. When Eden asked what he did for a living, he told her that his family owns a construction company and he mainly does roofing with his best friend Mark. Eden looked at him confused, “that guy from the bar is your best friend? I thought that guy was your brother?”. James explained, “I consider him my brother, but there’s no blood between us. He’s been my best friend for so long he basically became family. Like my spirit brother. Especially after his parents died. He lived with me and my dad permanently after that”. “That’s horrible”, she said, “I guess he’s lucky he had you guys to take care of him though”. “So what about you? What’s your family like?”. Eden hesitated a little before answering, “my family has been dead for a long time now”. James stopped and took her hand, the warmth of his skin surprising her, “I’m sorry. That must be hard, being alone all the time, having no one around if you need help or even talk to. I couldn’t imagine not having my family”. “It’s fine. My mother isn’t anything to be mourned”. He pulled his hoodie off and handed it to her, “your hand is freezing. Figured this might help”. She took it from him, noticing he only had a short sleeve tee shirt on, “you sure? You probably need it more than me, trust me”. “I’ll live”, he smiled at her. As she pulled the hoodie over her head, he asked, “What about your dad then?”, he asked. That thought made her smile, “you would’ve liked him. He was the kindest person I’ve ever known”. James hesitated to ask, “how did they die, if you don’t mind telling me”. Eden looked at him, “mom died of a heart attack after someone broke into our home, and my dad was killed during a hunting accident. A wolf apparently ripped him open”.

When they finally made it to the end of the trail, Eden was in awe. The end of the trail opened up to a waterfall pouring into a small lake. The little beach was lit up by the lamp posts sending light shining off of the waves that hit the shore. The newly greening woods reflected off of the waters edge. A small fire pit had been built near the water, where Eden and James decided to sit and relax on his blanket. While James lit the fire pit, Eden couldn’t stop looking at the waterfall. “This is so beautiful”, she said, “how did I not know this was up here?”. “I don’t think you get out enough to know about it”, he joked. “Maybe you can get me out more”, she smiled. James sat right next to her on the blanket, slowly putting an arm around her back. She scooted closer, but stopped. She could hear his heartbeat in his chest, and smell his blood rushing through his veins. Eden rested her face next to his neck, feeling his pace quicken. Her throat starts to burn at the thought of tasting his blood. She breathes in his smell, the scent of nature and fire on his skin. James turns his head to face her, “I kinda wanna kiss you right now”. The urge to feed fades from her, replaced with a new urge she’d never felt before. “I kinda want you to kiss me right now”, she tells him. Just as she said the words, his feverish lips connected with hers, in the perfect first kiss.

Chapter Eleven

Eden wrapped her arms around James's neck, pulling him close. His tongue danced with hers, sending sparks throughout her entire body. The sounds of the water were so relaxing, the stars so beautiful. Eden felt like she was in a dream. He laid her down on the blanket, caressing her curves and playing with the edge of her shirt. She started to tug at his too, feeling the heat coming from his chest. James sat up and slid his shirt off. Eden couldn't help but run her hands over his stomach and chest, hard as stone. James laid over her and kissed her again, this time harder. His hands started to glide up her shirt, caressing her smooth skin and up to her breasts. Then he stopped, "is this okay?", he asked. Through her heavy breaths she answered, "yes", pulled her shirt off and pulled his lips back to hers. He pulled away long enough to say, "nice rose". She slowly made her way down his neck, smelling his blood rush through his veins, to one area in particular. His scent was completely intoxicating to her. She felt his heartbeat quicken, a musical sound in her ears. She dug her nails into his back out of frustration, smelling a faint scent of rust suddenly in the air. The heat coming off of him was incredible against her body. She came back up to his lips, biting his bottom lip. He groaned at the sensation. He pulled away and grinned at her, "you're driving me wild". Suddenly he pinned her hands behind her head, rubbing his face and kissing her body from her breasts back up to her neck. Eden felt a sharp pain in her chest, her heart actually starting to pound. *What the hell*, she thought. James gripped her wrists harder, breathing in deep and smelling her neck. *I haven't felt that in a long time*, she thought. "You're mine", he growled. Then suddenly she felt his teeth on her neck, gently biting down on her skin.

With one quick thrust, Eden pushed him off of her onto the opposite side of the blanket. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?", she demanded, touching the place on her neck he had bared his teeth to. James staggered to an upright position, "nothing. I just thought we were messing around. If I went too far, I apologize. You bit me so I figured it was okay to bite you back". Eden thought about it, "yeah, I guess that was my fault. But maybe ask first next time", she said pulling her shirt back on, "it freaked me out". He put his hands in the air, "no problem. Never again. Maybe we should just pause this for now, considering it is just the first date". Eden took a deep breath in, realizing her chest had stopped hurting, her heart had stopped beating once again. "I think that's probably for the best". James hopped to his feet, grabbed his shirt, and extended a hand to her, "by the way, you're a lot stronger than I would've guessed", and smiled at her. She took his hand happily, "you'd be surprised".

The hike back down to the parking lot seemed to take less time than the hike up to the waterfall. Hand in hand they made their way, making plans to have date two in the near future. James opened her car door for her, bowing and waving a hand for her to enter like some sort of fancy butler. Eden giggled at

him, “you’re ridiculous”. He straightened up, “made you laugh though”. Before she slid into her driver's seat, Eden got close to his face. “Just one more kiss? Just to hold me over until next time?”, she asked. He didn’t even answer her, just pressed his lips to hers. Their tongues colliding in the middle. He pulled away from her, restraining himself. “Until next time my rose”, and shut her door. Eden felt giddy for the first time in almost a hundred years. She reversed the car and headed for the exit, waving to James in his car as she began to drive away. But just as she was about to pass the threshold of trees, she noticed he had exited his truck again and was headed toward the trees. Eden paused, not sure if she should follow or not. *Maybe he forgot the blanket or something*, she thought. *Then why is he not going back up the trail*, logic argued with her. A sudden urge to feed came over her like a ton of bricks. She knew she needed something fast, but still turned the car around anyway.

Eden parked her car back by his truck that hadn’t moved. She touched the hood to find it was ice cold, it hadn’t been turned on in hours. She tried to find any reason for him to just wander into the woods with no result. She smelled the air and found his scent within seconds, along with the faint scent of blood with it. She touched her upper lip to find she had blood dripping from her nose again. She checked her ears for the hell of it and found the same thing. *What in the hell is happening to me?*, she wondered. She headed into the thick trees, darkness engulfing her as she trekked further and further. The ground was muddy from the melting snow, the air filled with the scent of new life. Tiny plants had begun to spring from the ground, making their presence known with their light green color. Eden stepped over a fallen tree when she heard groaning and grunts of pain about fifty feet in front of her. They continued to get louder the closer she got. Then she saw James, on all fours breathing heavily. He slammed his fists into the ground over and over, all while he started to scream in pain, grabbing his head. Blood had started to pour from his ears, then nose, and last from his eyes, which had turned a striking yellow. Eden started toward him until he flipped onto his back. She crouched down behind several bushes and watched in horror as his ribs began to snap and contort, shredding his clothes. Steam began to rise from every inch of his body. Before she made up her mind that he was about to die, he let out a deep, bone chilling howl. His skin began to sluff off, leaving behind a thick black fur covered in blood. The blood in the air was making her salivate, her bloodlust almost making her go into a frenzy. But she held her place behind her hiding spot, not wanting him to know she was present. His tailbone extended, revealing a thick tail. His hands had disappeared, morphing into giant paws with sharp claws, thick as steel. James' face was gone, only the face of a ferocious beast remained.

Eden couldn't bring herself to move. The fear that he might see her and know what had just happened held her in place. The beast stepped around for a few moments, sniffing the air. Eden thought he had found her, but he took off running into the woods in the opposite direction, snarling as he left. She stood, dumbfounded. Taking off running back toward her car, Eden stumbled over the ground like a newborn deer. She jumped into the driver's seat and started to speed toward her home. *It's true*, she thought, *it's all fucking true*. Eden's throat had begun to burn, like she hadn't had a drink in a month. She started coughing, pulling over to the side of the road until she got it under control. She stepped out of her car, breathing in the night air. Eden sat next to her car, trying to stifle the craving she had. Then a small rustle came out of the treeline. She looked over to find a squirrel running across the road near her feet. Eden locked eyes with it, hearing its heartbeat ringing in her ears. She snatched it up, the small thing biting her hand with no results. With one quick squeeze she snapped its neck, silencing it for good. Eden bared her teeth and sank her fangs into its back in a ravenous fit, draining it within seconds. Tossing the body into the trees like an empty pop can, Eden climbed back into her car, wondering what else may be lurking just past the treeline.

Chapter Twelve

Eden sat in the center of her bed, reflecting on everything she had seen in the woods. In the few nights that had come and gone she still couldn't ignore the horrifying memory. The image of James transforming into a wolf had been permanently burned into her memory. The smell of his blood in the dirt was now engraved in her nose. Part of her loved the aroma, the other half was worried if he was hurt in any way from the transformation. A sick tug of war was raging inside her heart. She wanted to drain every drop of blood from his veins, to feel his heartbeat stop under her lips. But the thought of him dying made her want to die all over again. A single drop of blood dripped from Eden's eye onto her leg. She wiped it away, still unsure of what it meant. The sound of her phone buzzing snapped her out of her trance. When she flips it over she sees it's James. Eden nervously opened the message, only to find he just wants to meet up at the bar that night. Another message popped up wanting to know if he had done something wrong because he hadn't heard from her for a while. She tossed the phone into her pillows and flopped down onto her back, struggling with what to do about any of it.

Migrating from her room to the living room, Eden flipped on her TV and layed on the couch. Her channel surfing came to a halt when Van Helsing came on the screen. Watching Hugh Jackman run around battling vampires and werewolves for an hour and a half was oddly hilarious to her. She had no wings, never met Dracula, and certainly couldn't breed. Those vampires were so over the top and dramatic

it was hard to believe how ordinary she actually was in comparison. Almost boring even. Other than the whole thirst for blood on a daily basis, Eden found herself to be a very normal woman.

Eden was pulled out of her movie by the sounds of tires coming up her driveway. She jumped up and made her way to the front door. Gazing through the peephole Eden saw a pick-up truck making its way to park next to her car. *Oh shit*, she thought. Looking up at the clock on the far wall she realized it was seven o'clock in the evening. Even more concerning was the fact that there was still some daylight outside. Eden looked back through the peephole and saw James step out of his truck and look around at the yard and the house. A sudden urge to run outside and jump into his arms came over her entire body. She even unlocked the door and turned the knob with the intention of doing just that before abruptly remembering she would burn up. She reluctantly locked the deadbolt back, and waited.

The closer James got to the front door, the stronger the scent of his blood became. Her throat started to burn from thirst, making her cough. His heavy boots thudded across the porch until they stopped in front of the front door. It took everything in her power not to rip through the weak wood and devour him right then and there. His knock on the door made her jump, her chest starting to hurt again. Clutching the center of her chest Eden could feel the faint thump just below her skin. With each passing second the thuds became harder, making her wince. *What the actual fuck is this*, she thought. Another knock made her finally answer, "who is it?". "It's James. You mind if I come in? I think we need to talk about what happened", he explained. "I'm sorry", she explained, "but how did you find my house?". "If you ask enough people eventually you find the right driveway", he half laughed. She started coughing again. His voice turned to concern, "are you feeling alright? You sound sick". Eden cleared her throat and lied, "yeah, sorry. I've had a bit of a bug the past few days". "Sorry to hear it", he said, "I'm sorry, can I please come in? I really need to talk to you". The desperation in his voice made her want to rip the door open and pull him inside. She took a deep breath trying to stop the racing of her heart that suddenly wouldn't stop. The air filling her chest made her lungs ache. "Can you at least open the door so I can talk to you and not through the door?", he asked. The silence between them seemed to last an eternity. Finally, Eden replied, "can I just meet you at the bar later? Is that still an option?". He hesitated for a few seconds, but gave in. "Yeah, I guess. As long as you're feeling up to it". "Definitely. How's ten?"

The road to town was muddy from the rain that came the hour before. As Eden drove to town she was mentally preparing herself to put an end to all of it. In her head it made sense to just end it with James before any other weird things happened. Or worse. God forbid she did anything to hurt him. Or even accidentally kill him. *'It's for the best'*, she thought as she pulled into the parking lot. *'Besides'*, she

thought, *'we couldn't have a real relationship anyway. Aren't we supposed to be mortal enemies or something?'*. She half chuckled at the thought as she stepped through the front door of the bar. It wasn't packed like the weekend nights. The few people that lined the bar were just making small talk, no shouting or obnoxious behavior. The jukebox played Sex and Candy by Marcy Playground in the corner. Eden glanced around the bar until she found him in a back booth, a candle illuminating his face. James was about to drink his beer when they locked eyes. He smiled at her and waved her over to him.

As she sat down across from him, he said, "you look good, I hope you're feeling better. Do you want something to drink?". She smiled but declined, "I had something before I left, thanks though". They smiled but sat in awkward silence for a few minutes. The smell of his skin reminded her of a wet dog, making her rub her nose to try to deflect the smell. *'How did I not smell that before?'*, she thought. Finally he tried to make small talk, "so how've you been?". Eden shrugged, "fine, I guess". "I'm glad your head cold is gone", he said. "Oh yeah, it was just something that was going around work. No big deal", she answered. A few more moments went by before James took a deep breath in. "So were you really sick or were you actually avoiding me?", he asked. Eden looked at him in confusion, "why would I purposely avoid you?". "I don't know. Maybe I did or said something that threw you off. Or maybe you're just not into this like you made me think you were". A sudden burst of anger came over Eden as he said this. "You've got some fucking nerve calling me a liar James. What about the shit you've been lying about?". He looked at her completely dumbfounded, "what the hell are you talking about Eden? I've been nothing but honest". "Bullshit", she hissed. "What exactly have I lied about? Tell me", he demanded. Eden looked at him, debating on what to say next. "I know exactly what you are", she said, "I saw you in the woods after our date ended. I followed you into the woods and saw you". His eye twitched slightly as she spoke, taking another gulp of his beer. Not even trying to deny anything, he shot back, "Don't talk to me about lying when you've been lying just as hard about who you really are", he said back. Eden was completely thrown by his words, "what exactly are you talking about?", she asked. "Don't play dumb", James insisted, "if you really saw what you think you saw, don't you think I would've smelled the death on you from the the minute I ever laid eyes on you? Because I did".

Eden couldn't tell if he was being serious or not. "You don't know anything about what I am", she protested. "Don't you mean *who* you are?", he tried. But before she could get any more words out, a bunch of shouting came through the front door. They both looked up to see Mark and a couple other guys storm the bar demanding beers. Apparently very proud of some fight they had won. Eden turned back to James, "you know what? I'm not doing this. I'll just see you around James". "You don't wanna know the

other half of the information? There's other shit you don't know", he said. "Don't know, don't care. Goodbye", she hissed. Before he could protest she got up from the booth only to run right into Mark's chest. "Excuse me asshole", she said and pushed him out of her way towards the back door.

Walking out the back door, Eden hadn't realized it had started raining again. "Son of a bitch", she said heading for her car. She heard the back door open again, suddenly getting déjà vu. She kept walking, hearing footsteps pick up pace behind her. When she was finally in front of her driver's door, Eden pretended to fumble with her keys. *'I've had enough of this asshole'*, she thought. She dropped her fangs, letting herself be completely dead inside. Her hunger raged up, unafraid. She waited for the stranger to be right behind her, placing a hand on her shoulder. Eden spun around, grabbing the poor soul's wrist and arm, fangs bared, ready to kill. But as she hissed and went for the throat, she stopped herself. It wasn't Mark who had followed her outside. As the lightning flashed and thunder rolled, the stranger's face came into her view.

James.

Chapter Thirteen

Eden retracted her fangs and dropped her hands, "I am so sorry". James's face turned several shades of white, eyes wide with surprise and terror all rolled into one as he backed away from her, slipping in the mud as he did. She reached a hand towards him, "That wasn't meant for you I swear. I'm not gonna kill you James", she tried explaining. Through the rain she could see his eyes turning a bright yellow, steam starting to rise from his skin as each raindrop connected with him. "But I will if I have to, don't test me", she lied, "I don't care if you think you're stronger than me. I'm happy to go out screaming and covered in someone else's blood". A low growl escaped his lips as he looked into her eyes, "I don't want to hurt you either Eden, but everything inside me is compelling me to rip you apart". Eden gripped the car handle, ready to bolt if he charged at her. The pain in her chest started again, her heart starting to pound like a jackhammer. He slammed his hands on top of the car, almost pinning her to the car. The heat coming from his arms radiated against her own skin. The pain in her chest suddenly ceased, just a low heartbeat replacing it in the center of her chest. She felt her cheeks flush pink for the first time in a hundred years. "But at the same time", he explained, walking right up to her, his face only an inch from hers, "I really just want to rip your clothes off".

Before she could even comprehend what he had just said, James had picked her up against the car, wrapping her legs around his waist. She suddenly felt ravenous, craving his lips on hers. Everything felt so new yet so instinctive. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him in, locking their lips together feverishly. James pulled at the top of her jeans ripping the seam down her hip, placing his hand there. His skin on hers drove her mad. The heat was almost too much for her to bare. The lightning flashed overhead, illuminating his bright yellow eyes, crazed with lust. The thunder that followed only made his growl seem louder to her ears. Rain turned to steam on his hot skin, denying any relief from the heat. He ran his fingernails down her back, sending shivers throughout her body. He pulled her in close, his teeth gliding across her shoulder. "You. Are. Mine", he growled. Eden smiled to herself, "so you claim".

Eden grabbed his chin with one hand and forced him to make total eye contact with her. "Go to my house, wait for me there", she commanded. He smiled that sinister smile at her through the darkness, "as you command", and put her down, licking her neck as he did. She groaned as his tongue made its way back into his mouth. She turned and got into her car and started it up. As the headlights came on she watched James take off into the woods towards her house, faster than any human could ever do. Eden put the car in drive and turned out toward home, trying to control herself long enough to make the drive. But just as she did a flicker of yellow caught her eye in her rearview mirror. Like eyes staring at her as she drove away into the night.

As soon as she pulled into her driveway, she could see him. His shirt had gotten ripped up from the woods, barely hanging together over his chiseled frame. She got out of the car and he was already on her from behind as she shut the door. He kissed down her neck, his hands making their way down her body. She turned and kissed him hard on the mouth, biting his bottom lip. Ripping what was left of his shirt off his chest. This made him scoop her up again, taking her up the porch steps and into the house, his hands caressing her the whole way. She could feel him getting hard through his shorts, right against her secret flower. She couldn't help herself but start grinding against it, making it get even harder. "Ah fuck", he groaned and kissed her. His tongue licked hers as he put her down on the wooden floor. His mouth made its way down her front, kissed above the button of her already ripped jeans, pulling them down so slowly Eden's knees almost gave out. His teeth played with the edge of her panties, making her take his hair into her fists. "How long are you going to torture me?", she whined, "I'm not even sure if we should be doing this". He got back to his feet, staying only inches away from her. "If you want me to stop", he said, "just say something", and softly kissed her. Every part of her body was screaming at her to keep going, to let him take her. Just being so close together was making her want to dive into him, no regrets.

But one thing kept coming to mind that she couldn't ignore. "Before anything else", she whispered, "I have to confess something". "Tell me", he said. Just as she parted her lips to confess her secret, a loud crashing of glass in the kitchen interrupted her thoughts.

James suddenly became defensive, sniffing the air, "someone's in the house. Stay here. Don't move until I come back", and walked towards her kitchen. Eden put herself right behind him, "the hell I'm just gonna stand here. This is my damn house", and pushed past him. "You don't know what you're dealing with, trust me", he said, grabbing her arm. "I'm not afraid of a burglar. He should be afraid of me", she insisted. He tried to stop her before she reached the entrance to the kitchen, but it was too late. As Eden rounded the corner, she suddenly locked eyes with the wolf that had broken through the window standing on her kitchen table. It snarled and snapped at her, ready to pounce. "James", she whispered, "do you know this dog?". "Eden back the fuck out of the way. Right. Now", James demanded. As soon as Eden tried to move an inch the wolf pounced, intent on taking her out. James threw her out of the way down the hall, taking the hit for her in the process. Eden watched in horror as the two fought down the hall and onto the stairs. Everything they came into contact with broke. The wolf snapped and scratched at James who did his best to avoid him as they fell through the stair railing, shattering wood splinters everywhere. Unfortunately for him, the wolf was faster, digging its claws into James's chest. He winced at the pain, blood starting to flow from the wound. James managed to get his arms around the mutt long enough to squeeze and crack one of its ribs. The wolf yelped in pain, struggling before finally getting out of his grasp.

Eden sat so still she could've just disappeared into nothing. The wolf glared back at her and growled. James stepped in between them and growled back, a warning. The wolf admitted defeat by jumping out one of the living room windows, disappearing into the woods.

Chapter Fourteen

Eden sat frozen on the hallway floor. A wolf had tried to kill her in her own home. A home she had worked so hard to keep hidden from the outside world, a safe haven.

James helped her from the floor, “I told you that you didn’t know what you were dealing with”. Eden looked around at her destroyed home. Shattered wood and glass covered the floor and most of the stairs. She started up the stairs, ignoring his words, “so it’s all confirmed. You’re a werewolf, he’s a werewolf, and now they know where I live. Ain’t life grand”, she said sarcastically. He scoffed a little at her, “we prefer the term lycan, but yeah. And we’ve know about you for a minute too, miss vampire”. Eden felt the urge to jump down and punch him, but fought against it. “I’m sorry about your house. I can help you fix it if you’d like”, he said. Eden looked down the stairs at him, “I have to clean up and find something to eat first. My whole body just aches right now”. *Which really shouldn’t hurt.* “I can help with that too”, he said, pointing out his chest, “I’m already ready to go and everything”. “No thanks”, she snapped, “I don’t stop once I start. Plus, I don’t really think you deserve to die. But you do have too much information on me, so don’t push your luck”. And walked to her room.

James started following her upstairs, “I didn’t lead him here. He followed you out of the bar. That’s why I followed you outside first so he didn’t attack”. Eden turned to him, “so you knew he was probably gonna follow me and you decided to come to my house anyway? Real smart”. James was starting to get frustrated with her but followed her to her room anyway, “in all fairness, he’d already been stalking you for a while”. “What the hell are you talking about? I would have smelled his scent all over the place”, she said. “Not if you don’t even know what you’re smelling”, he confirmed. Eden took a deep breath, trying to control her temper, “I guess that is a fair point”. “I don’t know how you couldn’t smell something off though”, he explained, “I smell lycan everywhere in this house. And it’s not from Mark”. Eden turned to him as she slipped into her leggings, dumbfounded, “that damn dog in my kitchen was fucking Mark! The one who literally had his hands all over me the night we met!”. James nodded, “yes, it was Mark. But trust me when I say he’s not getting anywhere near you from now on. I’m going to make sure of that”. “How exactly do you think you’re going to keep him away from me?”, she asked, “why does he even wanna hurt me in the first place? Is his ego really that fragile?”. James half laughed at her comment, “a little bit, yeah. But it’s mostly just instinct. Our pack has been killing vampires all the way back to the viking era. But to be fair, vampires attacked us first”. Eden eyed him from across the room, walking over to him. “So why haven’t you killed me yet?”, she asked. James looked her dead in the eye, “same answer. Instinct”.

Eden and James made their way back downstairs to the living room. Eden fixed some of what had been knocked over from the fight, then sat on her couch. “The sun’s gonna be up pretty soon, so I’ll have to go down for the day. Which means you need to leave”, she said. James just leaned against the entryway

frame, “what part of a lycan wants to kill you do you not understand? I’m not going anywhere”. He sat next to her on the couch, “now I’m gonna sit here with you until you go up to sleep for the day, then I’ll just be around the house until you wake up again”. “What is this sudden obsession with my well being? I’m literally a fucking vampire. Anyone dumb enough to come into my house is a dead man”. “So why am I still breathing?”, he asked. Eden just held her mouth shut, not wanting to argue anymore. “Lets change the subject”, he suggested, “so....how old are you officially? Like physically speaking?”, he asked. Eden ignored him, turning toward the wall. “Well, I’m twenty one if you were ever curious”, he said, “it’s actually a pretty important age in my pack, if you’d like to hear about it”. Eden turned sharply to face him, “since it’s pretty clear you’re not going to leave like I said, go ahead James. Tell me absolutely everything you think I should know”, she said annoyed. “Thank you, I’d love to tell you”, he said grinning. Eden couldn’t it, a smile cracked across her face too.

“I’ll start at the beginning”, he said, “way back in the viking era, Norway to be exact, my family was settled in a small compound of sorts. Not a lot of people. It was quite isolated. Most of the people had been lost at sea traveling on their way back from raids, but there was no official cause to their deaths. Many of them believed it was the sea that had taken them, but they soon realized it was a lie”. Eden layed down on the couch, starting to feel drained, “what happened to them?”. James looked at her, “vampires”.

“The vampires had slowly started taking out the entire community. They took children first, then started draining women next. The weak were easiest to take out first. They gorged themselves on their blood and their fear. My people started to pray to the gods to give them strength. Begged them to give them a fighting chance to survive the plague that had found them before they were lost to memory alone. One night they finally answered them. On the final evening of their suffering, one man stumbled into the woods for one final plea for Odin to save his family. And he appeared to him, Odin himself. The man fell at his feet and begged him for the strength to defeat the demons that cursed them. Odin had placed his hand on the man's head, and told him he would grant him the strength of Fenrir to defeat our enemies and save our people. His body shifted and morphed into a mighty wolf, stronger than anything else on the earth. He ran back into the village as a wolf just as one of the last women was being dragged away. He killed the vampires, ripping into them. The venom we possess is toxic, they wouldn’t heal even if they managed to get away. We were protected, until the last one was finally killed a week later”.

“Now this is where things get fucked”, James continued. “Once the threat was gone, Odin returned to the man. He demanded that he submit the power of Fenrir back to him or he would remain with the curse of the wolf for the rest of time. And, spoiler alert, he didn’t give it back. If you believe this

whole thing, as most of my family does, the strength was the only thing he gave us. But since he didn't give it back, Odin made him suffer every moon cycle by making his body contort into a wolf whether he wanted to or not. Making it impossible to control. What Odin didn't count on was the cursed man fathering children. But they would suffer the curse also, breeding out more and more generations of monsters until the end of time".

"So basically", Eden said, "there's no going back from being a wolf for you. You're just stuck". "Basically, yeah", he said, "but it's not all doom and gloom. There was an unexpected side effect to being a lycan". "Well don't stop now, tell me", she said. "Well there are legends that say lycans can have soulmates, which they can sire to. A siring means that they can't be without each other, no matter what they will find each other and be together. The children that come with that will be amongst the strongest lycans on the planet". Eden just looked at him, slightly laughing, "and how does one find a soulmate these days?". James shrugged, "that's also where this gets weird. Supposedly there's this thing called a remembrance pool? You see it in your dreams and supposedly your soulmate is revealed to you there".

Eden gulped, not sure if she should say anything about her dreams about him. Instead she asked, "so have you seen your soulmate then? Any beautiful girls running wild in that head of yours?". He shook his head, "I'm not sure. I feel like I've seen someone, but it gets so fuzzy and grainy I can't tell who it is really. But she is there" and I'll get to her one day". Eden smiled, "sure you will". She glanced over to the window, noticing a small ray of light coming through. "That's my queue to go to bed. Feel free to stay I guess", and headed for the stairs.

James followed behind her. She stopped him on the stairs, "where do you think you're going?". "I'm gonna sit outside your door. No one will be getting in. I promise". Eden tried to protest, "you don't think that's overkill?" James asked, "do you really wanna find out?". She didn't bother trying to fight it, just continued up the stairs to her room. At the door she turned, "thank you, by the way. For saving me". James crossed his arms, "was that an actual almost complement? Oh my god", he joked. "You're an ass", she said. But before she could say more, his lips found hers again. The kiss was sweet, yet made her feel protected. When he backed away from her, he started to close the door. "Good day my Eden ", he says.

Eden took off her clothes and fell into bed, exhausted. All the information she had learned swirled inside her head so fast it almost made her dizzy. The soulmate concept made her wonder if he was doing all of this because he wanted to or if he's just compelled to out of obligation. *I wonder if he knows he saw me?*, she thought. *I know I saw him. It was all to clear from the start. But why wouldn't he see me? Is it*

just a lycan thing or is it vampires too? Her thoughts started to slow, her body shutting down. *The only thing I know for sure, she thought, is that I'm in love with him.*

Chapter Fifteen

Eden opened her eyes into darkness. Her body still ached from the night before, not being nourished by blood in almost twenty four hours. As she sat up in her bed she could feel her back bones pop. Eden winced from the pain, but got up anyway. She checked herself out in the mirror and was horrified to see blood had started flowing from her ears and eyes again at some point in the day. She tried to wipe it away, but it wouldn't. *Shit*, she thought. As she walked to her bedroom door, she could see a shadow blocking the light from getting through underneath it. She smelled a familiar scent in the air. He was still here, guarding her door like a king's guard to a king. As she slowly opened the door, she almost couldn't contain herself. James was sleeping on the hallway floor, curled on his side, blocking the entrance like a literal guard dog. His snoring was enough to make her quietly giggle to herself. She tiptoed back over to her bed and grabbed the extra blanket at the end of it. She brought it over, draping it over him. *You're pretty cute when you're asleep*, she thought. And stepped lightly to the bathroom.

As Eden turned the shower on she peeked down the hall to see if he was still asleep. With no noise other than the water running, she closed the door over. She climbed inside the shower and started scrubbing her face and ears. The rag she used soon turned a pale pink from the blood. While she started on the rest of her body, her chest started to feel tight. She steadied herself on the shower wall, clutching her chest. She could feel it under her palm. A heartbeat. Slow but steady in its pace. "What the fuck?", she said. *Vampires don't have heartbeats*, she thought, *we are dead. There's no coming back from death*. She sank to the shower floor, the pain intensifying. She let her fangs drop, desperate for relief. She grabbed the rag from the floor and tried sucking her own blood from the fibers of the rag to try to get any relief from the pain. It tasted awful, and her body immediately reacted. She started vomiting up blood, watching it go down the drain as she did.

James cracked open the door, "everything okay in here? I'm hearing some weird shit from the hall". Eden opened up the shower door, "I need your help", she cried. When he opened the door completely, his face went white. Between the blood that had splattered all over her body when she had gotten sick and the blood starting to come from her eyes once more, he was horrified. "Oh my god, Eden! What happened to you?", he exclaimed. "I don't know. I feel like I'm dying all over again", she cried, wiping the blood on her face. She tried reaching for the shower handle to help herself up. But as she did

her hand snapped forward, cracking her wrist. She yelled out in pain as James slid down to his knees in front of her, taking her hand. “That kinda looks like...”, he started. But he didn’t finish the thought, just looked into her eyes. Her back cracked again, making her lean forward, “oh fuck”, making her puke again, getting blood on his clothes. James grabbed a towel, “you’re not gonna die, okay? I’m gonna help you. I’m gonna get you some help”.

James wrapped her in the towel and scooped her into his arms. On the way down the stairs, he asks her, “where are your car keys?”. She points to the jeans on the floor, the ones from the night before. He leans down and rummages through them, getting the keys from the pocket before taking her outside to her car in the cover of darkness. He unlocks it and slides her into the backseat. “Just lay back here”, he said, “I know someone who could help you”. Eden turns her head to face him, “how do you know? I don’t even know what’s happening to me James”, she asked weakly, dry heaving as she did. He stroked her hair, “you’re just gonna have to trust me”, and shut the door. Eden felt exhausted. As James made his way around the car and into the driver's seat, she could feel herself fading back into sleep. As he put the car into gear to leave, she rolled onto her back, staring at the night sky through the window. Looking at the stars and the moon she couldn’t help but think this was the last time she would see them shine so brightly. As her eyes started to close, her body also started to relax. And as the stars passed over her as he drove away from her home, she fell asleep.

Chapter Sixteen

Eden's eyes struggled to open in the dim lighting of the strange room she found herself. It smelled like pine trees, like she had fallen into the middle of the woods. Eden could also smell something familiar, someone familiar. Rolling over away from the wall, she noticed she was in a strange bed under a flannel blanket with a large T-shirt and boxers on. Once her eyes finally adjusted to her surroundings, Eden found herself in a bedroom. A guys bedroom. Her head was pounding and her throat was burning. She hadn’t fed in so long that she felt like she had the flu. ‘*What the hell?*’, she thought. She looked around at the walls, which were covered in viking histories. One poster on the wall had Fenrir smashing through the full moon, along with several band posters including Five Finger Death Punch and Linkin Park. She got up and walked around, the floor creaking as she walked across the room. A wardrobe along the opposite side of the room had clothes falling out of it, right next to a hamper. The top of the dresser had a few pictures on it. Most of them were of James with whom she assumed were friends and family. She looked at herself in the mirror on top of it. The blood was gone, her hair had been washed, and her wrist was now wrapped

up tight in an ace bandage. Eden unwrapped it and rubbed her muscles and bones, trying to see if it was still broken. From what she could tell, it wasn't, just bruised with shades of purple and gray.

A quick glance around the room and she found a familiar bag in the far corner. It was one of her own travel bags. And six plastic bottles filled with a dark liquid sitting next to it. Eden walked over to them and grabbed one of the bottles. Taking the cap off she was hit by a heavy smell of iron, that it was blood. She quickly downed two of the bottles and unzipped the top of the bag to find some of her own clothes inside, along with a toothbrush and hairbrush. Digging further inside she found her phone and charger at the bottom, with several angry voicemails and emails from work. *'This should be good'*, she thought sarcastically, and unlocked her voicemail box. After listening to the voicemails and going through all twelve emails, it was safe to say she had lost her job. But between all the drama that had unfolded within the last few weeks and her calling off most of the time to deal with all of it, she wasn't all that surprised. After deleting all emails and voicemails, she tossed her phone back into the bag. "Great", she said to herself, "guess it's time to move again".

Eden could hear voices outside the walls of the room. She went to the window and peeked past the dark brown curtains. To her relief, it was dark outside. When she opened it a bit further she could see several bonfires scattered throughout the property, along with several other houses. People of all shapes and sizes were roasting hot dogs and making s'mores, laughing and carrying on, not a care in the world. Through some of the skinny trees kids were running and playing. It all seemed so normal.

But it was far from normal. There was a sudden loud roar of excitement from the far end of the road. Several men and women were watching something unfold that was very entertaining. As Eden watched, the crowd parted and two men started brawling all over the ground. Fists were flying left and right as a crowd started to form around the two of them, cheering them on and enjoying the spectacle as it moved all over the ground. Some of them were clearly drinking. But just as quickly as it seemed to have started, the fight was over. One man stood up victorious, throwing his fists in the air and yelling as the crowd cheered and howled in approval, while the other staggered to his feet, sliding around in the mud as he did. Both men were covered in mud and each other's blood, but seemed to come back together as friends, laughing hysterically and head butting each other before heading back to whatever party they had stumbled out of.

Eden suddenly turned her head when a mother came up to one of the fires and yelled, "where's Peter? Has anyone seen my little boy? He climbed out of his window again!". A man stood up, "calm

yourself woman, he's around here somewhere", and yelled out, "PETER! GET YOUR ASS BACK TO YOUR MOTHER NOW!". A few seconds passed, then Eden watched a small wolf appear from the shadows. It slinked its way over to them, its head low and tail between its legs. "What did I say about running off without telling your mother where you're goin'", he asked directly. The little wolf whined. "Answer me boy", the man demanded, his eyes starting to glow bright yellow. Then, right before Eden's eyes, the little wolf shifted into a skinny six year old boy. He meekly looked up at what Eden assumed was his father, "to not to", he answered, twisting his fingers nervously. "Exactly", the man said, eyes turning back to normal and giving him a small hug, "now apologize to your mother and get back to bed before I whoop you". Peter hugged his mothers legs, "I'm sorry momma". She sighed and took his hands, "let's get you back in bed. It's too dangerous for you to be out here shifting where no one can see you", and wandered toward one of the far houses in the trees. *'Where the hell am I?'*, she thought to herself.

Just as she was about to wonder where James was, Eden heard the door knob start to turn. She whipped around, ready to face whatever would come through the door. To her surprise a younger looking girl came through the threshold, carrying several first aid items with her. Along with another bottle of blood. She couldn't have been more than twenty three years old. Between her dark brown hair and kind eyes, she seemed pretty harmless. Almost more motherly than she should be. When they locked eyes, Eden heard her heartbeat from across the room, rapid like hummingbird wings. She seemed very surprised to see Eden standing there at the window. But, instead of terror, she smiled with excitement.

"Oh my god, you're finally awake!", she said excitedly, "thank the gods, I was beginning to wonder if you would wake up at all. I'm April, I'm the healer here". Eden just looked at her, slightly confused. "You look a little confused", April said, as if reading her mind, "James brought you here a few nights ago. You were basically on the brink of death, we weren't sure if you were going to pull through from the amount of blood you had lost. But you went into some sort of coma, nothing we tried would wake you. So I cleaned you up, reset your wrist, and James brought you to his room to wait and hope". "Hope for what?", Eden asked. April shrugged, "for you to wake up. Obviously. James was so worried when you both got here. I did everything I could to keep you alive, but since you don't have a heartbeat, it was hard to tell if anything was actually working". Eden looked at her, "I don't have a heartbeat?". April looked confused now, "no...of course not. You're a vampire". Eden grabbed another bottle of blood and downed it. Her hunger seeming to intensify with every passing minute. "How many nights have I been unconscious?", Eden asked. April thought about it for a minute, "about four nights, give or take a few hours I think". Eden slumped to the floor, suddenly light headed. April came right over to her, handing her

the other bottles of blood. “You need to take it easy, we don’t know exactly what happens when a vampire goes into and comes out of a coma”.

Eden looked at April, feeling slightly uncomfortable. “So”, she starts, “you know I’m a vampire too?”. April nodded, “yeah. Don’t worry though, nobody is dumb enough to come into this house and bother you”. Eden took the other bottle from her. And the rest of them too. When their hands accidentally touch in the exchange, April pulls her hand back quickly. “Wow”, she said, “you’re really cold. I thought James was kidding”. Eden looked at April, “where is James?”, she asked. April smiled to herself, “he’s downstairs”. “Am I able to speak to him? I have to talk to him about what’s happened over the past few nights”, she explained. “Of course”, she answered, and got up. As she was shutting the door behind her, she pointed to the other two bottles of blood, “I’d finish those off before he comes up though”.

Eden did as she was instructed, mostly because she was so hungry. So many emotions were swirling in her head that she couldn’t see straight. After a few moments, the door opened again behind her. Suddenly she felt that familiar heat she had come to crave so much. She turned back to the door, and there he was. James looked as though he had seen a ghost. She tried to say something to him, but before she could, he already had her in his arms. He picked her up and she welded herself to him, feeling a sense of ease against his skin. “I was so fucking scared”, he admitted, “you were so still, like you were actually dead”. “I’m okay, I promise”, she said, “I don’t exactly know how, but I’m still here”. James sat her back down, keeping her close, his body tensing, “I will never let anything happen to you, I promise. Even if it kills me”. She looked into his eyes, “I believe you. I trust you”, her voice shaking, “James...I love you”. James took her face into his hands, “I love you”, and kissed her.

Chapter Seventeen

As James pulled away from the kiss, he saw a drop of blood flow from Eden's eye. She wiped it away as he asked, “what is that?”. Eden shook her head, “I don’t know. It’s been happening for a while now. I just ignored it thinking it might just stop on its own. It comes out of my eyes and ears whenever I’ve had dreams about you or I’ve been near you”. “So that’s my fault, that you’re falling apart?”, he said. “I didn’t say that”, she said, sitting back on the bed, “I said it started when you showed up in my life”. “Sounds the same to me”, he said, sitting next to her.

At that point James was curious. “So what kind of dreams are we talking about?”, he asked, half jokingly. Eden grinned, “it’s nothing like that you perv. They're just very dreamy, very vibrant”, she

explained. She looked over at him, his eyes basically asking the question he wanted answered the most without any words. “It was not a sex dream”, she proclaimed, laughing. James flopped onto his back, “damn it. Not gonna lie, I was kinda hoping it was. Now it's just regular”. She got up again, not sure how to completely explain. “there was one other thing about it though”, she said, “you were there, in the dream. You found me while I was swimming in a huge pond”. This made James sit up, “go on”. She almost choked on her next words, “at first....I saw a wolf watching me from across the water, so I swam the other way not really knowing what else to do. But when I got out it was there, waiting on me. And when I turned again to run”, she paused, “you were there instead, covered in blood”.

James got up from the bed, pacing for a few moments. Eden was getting uncomfortable when he finally stopped and looked her directly in the eyes. “Are you positive that that’s what you dreamt? I need you to be absolutely sure”, he said, almost panicked. “Yes, I swear”, she promised, “and usually I can’t dream at all. The only time it really happens is if I drink the blood of someone whose memories are so vivid that they travel through the blood. And I’ve never had anything or anyone like that before”. James went over to the window to see if there were people still outside. To his demise, there was. Another drop of blood came streaming from Eden's eye, the pain in her chest starting to return. Eden went back to the bed and laid back down. “I think I should lie back down for a bit longer”, she said, curling up into herself. James came back over and covered her back up with the blanket. “Just stay here for now”, he said, “I think I know what’s going on, I just need to go talk to someone first”. Eden looked up at him, “Are you coming back?”. He kissed her forehead, “I’ll be back soon. I promise”.

*

Eden's eyes opened into a dream. She was laying next to the pond again, the snow falling all around her as she stared at the water. But it was no longer clear as crystal. The water was murky and steaming, like it was poisonous. But at a closer look around, she could tell something wasn’t quite right. The once green plants were now dead, the trees had started to crumble to the ground. She sat up, looked to the sky that had now become dark, as if a storm was about to unleash its fury at any moment. Her dream had turned into a nightmare. Eden heard crying just beyond some dead bushes across the way. She followed them, not knowing what she would find. As the crying grew louder she could also hear growling, low and guttural, like a beast with its prey in its claws. Then she saw them. James had someone pinned to the ground by the neck. A woman, gasping for air. Upon a closer look she could tell the woman was bleeding from her head, a pool starting to form around her. It seemed the more she struggled, the tighter his grip became. His teeth were bared, ready to rip her throat open. Eden tried to get closer but a dead

stick under her feet cracked, the sound echoing. James's head snapped up, listening and sniffing the air. She froze, fear cementing her to the ground. His head turned around, making full eye contact with her. The rage his eyes held suddenly softened, almost confused. She caught a glimpse of the woman in the mud and couldn't help herself. Eden screamed at the sight of her own face, bloodied and broken beneath his hands.

*

Eden woke up some time later to the door knob turning again. The door creaked open as she watched James once again step inside with another bottle of blood. He knelt down next to the bed, took one of her hands in his. "I need you to come with me", he said. She looked to the window, wondering what time it was. He answered before she could ask, "don't worry, love. It's eleven at night. No sunlight". Eden pulled herself upright, her muscles sore with every move she made. She couldn't ignore the burn in her throat. "I'm thirsty", she said, "nothing is making this thirst go away like it used to", as he handed her the bottle. "This has only been deer blood", he said, "we don't exactly have access to a blood bank, and no one here is willing to give up their own". Eden sipped at it, "it's not a problem yet, but I'll need something else a bit stronger sooner rather than later". James helped her stand up, "Where are we going?", she asked him. James put his arm around her waist to steady her. To Eden it felt more like protection. "We're going to the only person who can give you any answers", he said, "the alpha".

Chapter Eighteen

As they descended the stairs Eden's legs felt like jello. James and the railing were the only things keeping her from completely falling down the stairs. As slow as she had to move she wondered if they would ever actually make it to wherever they were going. Eden leaned into the railing, dizzy. "How far do we have to go?", she asked. James did his best to steady her, "just over to the next house. It's not far at all". "Maybe to you", she said. They got down two more steps before James took matters into his own hands, literally. "This is gonna take too long", he said, and scooped her up into his arms with one swift motion. Eden gasped from suddenly going from walking to the air, her arms going tight around his neck. She tried to get back down. "What do you think you're doing? Put me back down! I can walk myself!", she insisted. James stopped at the bottom of the stairs, looking her deep into her eyes. "I mean this with all the love I have for you", he said, "please, just shut up and let me love you". Eden's mouth dropped open, completely shocked at how rude and loving one sentence could actually be. Eden looked away from his gaze, but gave in to him, "fine".

They passed through the kitchen and onto a screened porch. Looking around Eden could see people outside again, and in the direction of where James had started walking. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, she asked, “do we have to go this way? With all those people?”. He tightened his grip around her, “nobody is gonna bother us, especially since everyone has a pretty good idea of what you are. But they don’t understand why exactly we’re helping you either because of that fact. But they definitely won’t try anything because they’ve been ordered not to”. “By who?”, she asked. James took a deep breath in, “you’ll find out soon enough”.

As soon as they reached the main path through the houses, Eden could tell she wasn’t welcome. The minute they entered the same airspace all the sound seemed to disappear. Even the trees seemed to stop their leaves from blowing in the light breeze. The tension between her and James and the rest of them was so thick she could choke on it. Mothers moved their children back from them, some men glared, others simply looked away disgusted. She even saw one woman in a window close her shades, not wanting to even see them. One older man even growled in her direction. Eden hid her face in James’ face, trying to block them all out. “Why is everyone staring at me?”, she asked. “Not you”, James answered, “they’re looking at us. It’s not natural for us to be this close without killing each other and they are just as curious as to why I haven’t killed you yet”. Eden replied, “the word ‘yet’ in that sentence has me a bit concerned”. James smiled to himself, “don’t worry, you’re not dying today”.

As she turned one final corner of the dirt path Eden could see where they were going. A tall log cabin stood at the edge of the tree line, the front porch illuminated by two small lights. The glow of a fire pit behind the house made it look that much more inviting, but at the same time not. Time had truly taken its time withering away at the logs over the years. Moss and even new trees had started to grow themselves from the lower laying logs. Eden tapped James on the shoulder, “are we going in there?”. “Yeah, that’s where he lives. He says he has answers about what all this is, but that you probably wouldn’t believe it, not without proof”. At the foot of the stairs, James put her back on her own feet. “Why wouldn’t I believe him?”, she asked. “I don’t know, that’s why we’re here”, he said, wiping the rest of the blood from her eyes, “apparently it has something to do with me too”. As they walked up the stairs to the door, Eden turned to him. “I won’t let them hurt you”, she said, “I promise”. She meant it too. For some unknown reason to her she felt like she would fall on any sword to protect him. And kill anyone or anything that got in her way to get to him. She couldn’t deny it, she felt bound to him. James smiled down at her, kissed her cheek. “I know, I love you too”. And knocked on the door.

Chapter Nineteen

Eden and James waited, but no one came to the door. James knocked again, this time with his fist. Hard. Heavy footsteps started toward the door, booming louder and louder as they got closer to the door. When they finally reached them, they listened as several locks were undone and a chain was unhinged. James took a deep breath in, suddenly aware of something Eden couldn't see. He pulled Eden into his side, basically welding her to him. "Son of a bitch", he said, grinding his teeth, "whatever you do, don't leave my side". "What is it?", she asked, but the answer was soon blocking the doorway. Mark.

A low growl escaped James's lips, "what are you doing here? This is none of your business". Mark crossed his arms, completely blocking the door with his chest, "technically, this is all of our business. You brought a leech into our compound, something that could, at the very least, get your ass kicked in the pits for doing it on purpose. Bringing her straight to our alpha, that could get you killed". Mark looked down at Eden, tucked under James's arm. "And you", he said, "you're dead either way you look at it". Eden felt white hot anger creeping up the back of her neck, metallic in her mouth. "Just get out of our way", she said weakly, "this has nothing to do with you and I'm not in the mood for your bullshit". She looked up at him, not holding back, "and you're not going to touch James, ever. I'll kill you first". Mark leaned down, put himself two inches from Eden's face. His breath smelled like dying meat as he smiled at her. "Feisty", he smirked. James's arm tensed around her, like he was about to pounce. "You want me to move, make me little bitch", snarled Mark.

Before James could react, Eden was on Mark, knocking him back inside the house onto the hardwood floor, landing hard on his back. Fangs bared, she pinned him down by the neck, ready to take him out for good. Everything inside her was telling her to protect him, no matter what. Mark's eyes went wide with surprise, then shifted into rage. He grabbed her wrists and pried them away from his neck, her nails leaving scratch marks behind as he did, dripping red. James wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her back into his chest. Eden clawed for Mark, a low growl trying to escape her throat. "Let me go!", she yelled, "he deserves everything I'm about to give him! He tried to kill me, but I won't fail when I rip his fucking throat out!". James wrangled Eden's arms around her chest like a straight jacket, holding her to his chest. "If you do anything to him you're just proving his point", James said harshly, "don't give him that satisfaction". He was right, and she knew it.

Eden started to calm herself as Mark got back to his feet. He touched his neck, smearing the blood as he did. Mark glared at James, "you see what she did? How can you not see the evil you've brought into your life? She'll kill us all if she gets the chance. She is not what you think she is". *Wait, what do they think I am?*, she thought. "Provoking an attack doesn't prove your point Mark", said James,

“and pissing me off by crashing a private meeting with the alpha won’t prove it either”. Mark looked into James’s eyes, “he asked me to be here”. “The fuck he did Mark”, James snapped, “I told him I needed answers, very specific answers. There’s no way he would allow you to intervene on something like this. You’re just here to piss me off”. A creak from the far floorboards interrupted their argument. In the far doorway leading out of the entryway, an old man stood, apparently watching their every move. Leaning on a cane. Standing at six feet tall, long white hair and matching beard, he looked every bit like father time. His glacier blue eyes fell on James and Mark. Both straightened, James even letting go of Eden. “I asked him here James”, he answered, “not to be nosey, but, if anything, to actually answer a question”

Eden tried to straighten up like them, if anything to show respect like them, but couldn’t get all the way up. The pain in her chest was starting again. Eden suddenly felt nauseous. “I don’t feel so good”, she said. Eden reached for James, but missed his arm, falling to the floor. Coughing up blood. James caught her head before it hit the floor, cradling her like a child afraid of a storm. “Bring her into the study. She can lay on the couch for a bit before we talk”, said the old man, standing over them. Eden’s vision started to blur, starting to fade to black. “She felt the pull, no doubt about that. The second he made that half ass threat at you, she pounced. I haven’t seen a look like that since your mother was alive”, he explained. “The pull?”, James said confused, “there’s no way. Are you sure?”. “That’s impossible”, Mark snarled, “she’s a goddamn leech”. “Trust me”, the old man said, kneeling next to her, “she has the pull. And so do you, to her”, looking at James. “It’s nice to meet you dear”, he said looking down at her, “I’m Lucas Norse, alpha of the descendants of Fenrir”.

Chapter Twenty

James took Eden into his arms again, pulling her from the floor. Backing away from Mark. “Leave Mark. Now”, demanded James. Mark scoffed at him, “you don’t give the orders here. I was brought in to make sure our alpha is protected from that....whatever she is”. Lucas turned his attention to Mark, “I believe I can handle this unique situation that I have been presented with Mark. You were called here to just confirm a suspicion I had. Now that it’s done, you can see yourself out”. James smiled to himself as Mark got defensive, “are you fucking kidding me? You used me as bait?”. Lucas brushed him off, “James, please take her to the study to lay down. Mark, thank you very much but your services are no

longer needed. You can see yourself out now”. Then Mark started to rage out, eyes glowing neon yellow, “THAT’S BULLSHIT! I’M NOBODY’S PUPPET!”. Lucas slammed his cane on the floor so hard even James took a few steps back. “Do not question my judgment without being prepared to challenge me completely”, Lucas said calmly, almost growling, “if you disagree, then take me out. If you want to keep your tongue, leave my home NOW”. Mark's eyes faded back to normal, his stance relaxing. Eden and James watched as he backed away, “as you wish alpha”, and made his way out of the house, his tail basically between his legs.

James turned to Lucas, “thank you”. “Don’t worry about it. He still has pup mentality. He will grow up one day, just not any time soon”. He started toward the study, “now, I’d finally like to have a conversation with this young lady”. And walked into the far room. James followed him, and Eden whispered in his ear, “can I trust him?”. James kissed her forehead, “of course. I wouldn’t intentionally put you in danger. He’s been around for a while, I think he can help you, us, figure out what’s happening”. As he laid her down on the dark green sofa that faced a glowing fireplace, Eden had one more question. “He’s your father, isn’t he?”, she asked. At that point, even Lucas turned to her, smiling down at her. “Can’t you see the resemblance?”, he asked. He put a hand on James’s shoulder, “go on now son, I want to speak to her alone”. James went to get up from the floor, but Eden grabbed his hand. “Don’t worry, I’ll be right outside”, he assured her, kissing her hand. And left the room, shutting the door as he left.

Eden sat herself up as Lucas sat in a chair right next to the fireplace. He stared at her for a few long minutes, like he was trying to decide how to proceed with their conversation. Eden cleared her throat, “so, you’re James’s dad. Not exactly what I would’ve expected”. That made him laugh in his throat, “not sure if that’s good or bad, but I’ll take it at face value”. “Am I in trouble?”, she asked, “because it seems like the more issues I get the more tense you all seem to get”. Lucas took a deep breath in, “you’re not in trouble, but you aren’t exactly safe either. Everyone here can smell the blood on you, not to mention the very death that lives within your blood. But what really has them on guard, is the familiarity that’s also there. Don’t take it personally, It’s just scary to them”. Eden leaned forward, “so why aren’t you scared of me?”, she asked. “You don’t scare me”, he said, “your scent is strong enough that I know you’re not a threat. If anything, from my point, one trumps the other”. Eden felt confused, not really sure what he was saying. “How old are you anyway?”, he asked, “sorry to be so blunt, but I can’t help but be curious, with you being a vampire and all. We don’t see your kind very often”. Eden simply answered, “I’m nineteen”. Lucas rephrased his question, “how long have you been nineteen?”. Eden took a deep breath, wondering if she should tell him the truth. Did it really matter? Or was he just toying with her? She made up her mind,

“I was murdered in 1920, by what I thought was a good cop. I’ve been alone since”. “If my math is right, that makes you a hundred and seventeen”, Lucas said, “How did you survive for so long?”. “I figured it all out on my own”.

She was getting frustrated. She didn’t want to go through her entire life story. All she wanted was the answers that he said he could provide. A swelling of anger suddenly overtook her. “Can you just tell me what the fuck is going on? My body and mind feel like they’re both breaking every time I come into contact with your son. My dreams are out of control, and every time I feed it’s like it’s not enough, and never will be. It just gets puked back up or bleeds out of my eyes and ears”, she explained. Just as she said it, blood began to trickle from the corners of her eyes, running down her cheeks. Lucas handed her a tissue from the side table as she tried wiping it away with her hands. “I’m sorry you’ve had to experience all that. It sounds awful”, he said, “I do need to ask you something though”. Eden listened, wiping her eyes. “Has your body begun to contort in any way?”, he asked blatantly. Eden’s eyes went wide with disbelief. *How did he know?*, she thought. “My wrist snapped in the shower a few nights ago, in the shower. I think it was the same night James brought me here”, she said, “it’s better now though. Why?”.

Lucas sat back in his chair, twirling his cane in his hand. “The shifts have begun then. I’ve only heard about this, never actually seen it though. We only hear about the inner battles in myths and legends. I never thought it would ever happen in modern day, but I guess there’s a first time for everything. And that fact that you and James have the pull, that all but confirms everything I’ve been suspecting”. “What is the pull?”, she asked. He smiled again, “it’s what drives you to James. What drives you to protect, fight for, even die for him if you had to. It’s the deepest incarnation of love that exists to the lycan people. He’s your soulmate. And you are his. You’re bound together for life”. In that moment, all the pieces fell into place for Eden. *It can’t be true, can it?*, she thought. *I can’t be both, it’s not possible*. Eden couldn’t tell if he was being serious or just trying to get a rise out of her. “If you’re going to tell me something useful then do it”, she said, feeling the nausea coming back, “I need to get back to my life, and I can’t do that until I get whatever this is under control”.

Lucas got up from his chair, made his way towards a large bookshelf to grab what looked like a very old photo album. When he plopped back into his chair, he started carefully flipping through the pages. “What about your father?”, he asked without looking up from the album. “What about him?”, Eden asked sarcastically. Lucas stopped flipping long enough to ask her, “where was he when all of this happened? You talked about how your mother died, did you kill him too?”. That made Eden shoot up to her feet, “absolutely not! He’d been dead for a long time before then! He was killed in a hunting accident,

torn apart! There was no saving him from what those things did to him!”. Tears formed in the corners of her eyes. She wiped them away, leaving a streak of red on her hand. Lucas stayed calm, not even reacting to her outburst. He handed her a tissue, “I’m sorry. But I had to be sure”, taking out a picture from the album. “When James told me your last name it sparked a memory. A story I had heard when I was young. Our alpha, torn down by vampires when he tried to arrange his and his family’s safe return to the compound. The rest of the pact never found his family. Until now”.

Lucas handed Eden the picture, and she couldn’t believe her eyes. It was a family portrait. A man and woman standing in front of an old cabin, a small baby cradled in the woman’s arms. Eden was looking at her mother for the first time in almost a century. And her father even longer. Between his dark hair and blue eyes, it was like she was looking in a mirror. A hundred emotions ran through her mind at once. Sadness. Anger. Panic. Rage. And lastly, confusion. She looked at Lucas, and he could tell what she wanted to ask without hearing the words. “Eden Rosewood, you are the daughter of Marcus Rosewood. The once alpha of the descendants of Fenrir”.

Eden tossed the photo onto the coffee table in front of her, not wanting to accept it. “That doesn’t prove anything”, she said, “if I had a lycan father, why did I never shift? I saw a kid here do it, couldn’t have been more than eight years old, why didn’t I?”. “You never shifted because you weren’t around any lycans besides your father”, Lucas explained, gently putting the picture back in its place, “the energy was never strong enough to trigger your lycan gene. He took you and your mother away so maybe you wouldn’t have to suffer through the shifts, or anything else for that matter. And before you had a chance to find out the truth, he was killed. And you were turned into a vampire instead”. Eden sat down again, dumbfounded. She took her head into her hands as pain started to overtake her eyesight. Every time she blinked it felt like salt was being sprinkled into them, burning.

“I know it’s a lot to take in”, Lucas sympathized, “but you’re here now. And you could be happy if you want. James already loves you completely, I can see it in his eyes, and yours too. You can stay here if you wish, or go as you please. But I can’t promise that he won’t follow you to the ends of the earth. It’s how it’s meant to be”. Eden looked up through the pain. She had to know, “do you know why I was turned?”. Lucas looked into the fireplace, watched the flames dance. “It’s anyone’s guess love. Mine is that the vampires thought if they killed both of you then maybe they could stop the bloodline altogether. But I guess whoever was sent for you made a mistake, giving you immortality instead of death as planned”. *‘So much for my horrific death’*, she thought, *‘I’ll be here long after everyone here is dead and gone. Including James’*.

She stood up, getting ready to leave. Eden steadied herself against the arm of the couch, “thanks for all the information, both good and bad. I’m not sure what I’ll really be able to do with it, but at least I know now”. As she turned to leave, Lucas interjects, “I hope you choose to stay with us. You don’t seem like a back person, just a person that’s done bad things to survive a life she didn’t choose”. Eden turned to look at him, “no one that didn’t already deserve what I gave them”. And shut the door behind her.

Chapter Twenty One

Eden walked out onto the porch, head still spinning from the conversation that had just taken place. James was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. “What happened?”, he asked. She shrugged, “I’m still a little unsure, it was a lot to take in. But your father seems nice, if not a bit strange. He knew more about me and my family more than I ever did”. James put his arm around her waist, started walking the winding path back to his home. “Am I allowed to ask what you guys talked about?”. “It’s kind of unbelievable”, she said, but told him everything regardless.

By the time she finished telling not only everything Lucas had told her, but everything about herself as well, several hours had passed. They walked the path back to James’s house, only to continue to walk through the woods behind his place for several miles. By the time they noticed where and how far they had walked, James decided they needed to turn back. “It’ll be full morning by the time we get back to my place, you can sleep in my room again if you want. I’ll ride the couch downstairs”, he said. Eden agreed, “I’ll stay with you”. As they turned to head back towards the path something caught Eden's eye. “What’s that building over there?”, she said pointing. James turned to see what she was looking at. It was a large, very tall wooden building, almost a mile up. A room full of windows sat on top of the many stairs that lead up to it. And by the looks of it, it hadn’t been used regularly in a long time. “Oh”, he said, “that’s an observatory, for wildlife and stuff like that. It’s been abandoned for a while though, so nobody really uses it. We do on occasion if some of the pups decide they want to wander a little too far from home. Or if you just need to escape the noise of everyday life”. Eden gazed up at the windows, still shaded from the trees that surrounded them, “must be nice to have a hiding place”.

James looked up, then back at Eden. Suddenly excited, he grabbed her hand. “I have an idea”, and started pulling her towards the stairs. Eden protested, “no way, I’m not going up there. What part of sunlight is bad for me did you not get from our conversation?”. “You won’t be exposed I promise”, he said, “the windows are tinted up there, so UV rays can’t get in. You’re safe”. He took both of her hands in his, “please? It’ll be worth your while. The view of the sunrise is amazing”. Eden looked up again, then

back at James, “as long as we leave before the sun gets too high”. James smiled, “thank you. Lets get climbing”.

The walk up to the observatory seemed to take forever. Eden started to fade faster and faster the further they went. “Need me to carry you?”, James asked. Eden sat on a step, “the hour is just starting to get to me. I’m meant to be dead during the day, not hiking a wooden mountain”. “We’re almost there love. Let me help you”, he said, taking her hands and helping her up again. James carried Eden up the remaining steps, setting her down at the last steps before the platform. “How long has it been since you’ve seen a sunrise?”, he asked. “Too long”, she said. James opened the door and let them in. The room wasn’t exactly big, but it was big enough. James had told the truth, the windows were tinted. No light was coming through them. After shutting the door behind them he placed her right in front of the far window, and placed himself behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and resting his chin on her shoulder. “Look straight that way”, he said pointing, “and wait for it”.

Eden watched as the dark sky slowly started to brighten, lighter and lighter as the minutes ticked by. The brighter the sky got, the more of the vast landscape she could see. So many trees, so many hills. Fog hung in the air like a shadow above it all. The leftover snow still sitting on the mountain side was slowly melting into a river below, glittering on its way down into springtime. Eden was in awe. She hadn’t seen anything so beautiful in a very long time. As the sun finally broke past the hillsides, Eden felt like she was in a trance. The light hit her eyes but didn’t burn them for the first time in decades. She gripped James’ hands, “it’s beautiful”. James kissed her cheek, “not as beautiful as you though”, and started kissing down her neck. “I can’t James”, she said. He stopped, turning her to face him, “tell me why we shouldn’t. Everything is telling me to just make you mine, claim you as my mate. And I know you’ve felt it too”. “I have”, she admitted, “but I just can’t. Physically, it’s not possible”. James was confused, and his face showed it perfectly. Eden looked into his eyes, “James, I’m a virgin”.

Chapter Twenty Two

The walk back to the house was long and quiet. Even safely concealed from the morning sun with a blanket Eden felt more frozen than ever. She thought being honest about that one last thing would somehow make her and James closer. But it hadn’t. He was more distant, like he might break her if he made the wrong move. Understandable, of course, if she were human. But she wasn’t. In fact, she was more unbreakable than he was.

But one unfortunate fact remained. She was a virgin, and a vampire. And everything heals when you're a vampire.

*

As they finally made their way into the house Eden could feel the tension fill the room, almost suffocating her. James quickly shut the door, blocking the sun. Eden tossed the blanket on the back of the couch and turned to face him. "Are we ever gonna really talk about this?", she asked. He walked past her, sitting on the couch and staring into nothing. "I don't really know what to say. My whole life I saw myself finding my mate, building a life with her, having kids", he said turning to her. "But you, you can't even have sex without it reversing. You're lycan by birth, I can feel it every time we're together. But vampire blood poisoned you, literally stops your life from doing what comes naturally to us. I love you, I know in my bones you're my other half, my soulmate. But how do we do this if we can't even truly move forward?". Eden could feel his heart breaking, could feel his agony. His words cut deep, but they were true. She wouldn't be able to give him the life he deserved, let alone the family he deserved. Her life ended a long time ago, and she couldn't allow herself to have his life end too. Eden swallowed her tears, and knew what she had to do. "You're right. No matter what or how I feel you're fucking right. I can't hold you back with me for the rest of your life. Even though it's killing me to even think about it, we need to stop this. So when the sun goes down, it's done. We're done". And started to walk away.

James got up to block her way, trying to stop her. Eden pushed his hands away, not wanting to be touched. "So you don't even want to try? Have you ever tried to save anything that you cared about? Or do you just prefer to be alone?", James questioned her. The pain in his voice almost broke her down, but she stood firm. "This is why I stayed alone for all these years. I won't let your life be taken away from you like mine was from me. What I am can't be undone, so there's no use fighting it. I love you James, but I won't let you waste your life to be with me". She kissed his cheek, knowing it was the last time. "Live your life, and be happy", she said, "it's the only chance you have". As she walked past him, he took her hand. "I love you too, Eden. And I'll never stop", he said, "you're the only one meant for me, the gods made sure of that. Just know, if you're ever in danger, I'll feel it. And run to you". She let go of his hand, holding every instinct she had to leap back into him inside her as she walked away. As soon as she started up the stairs, she heard him snarl, punching through part of the wall. He seemed to start thrashing around the living room, crashing into everything as he did. Some silence followed, but the opening and slamming of the front door let her know he was gone.

Eden took herself upstairs to the room, began gathering up her things. She angrily started to put her clothes into her duffel bag, stopping when she found a bottle of blood. She pulled the cap off and started to drink, but it tasted like battery acid in her mouth. Eden spit it out into the wastebasket next to the dresser, holding her stomach as she started throwing up. Shaking, she got back to her feet. She was about to go to the bathroom when suddenly Mark was blocking the doorway. The scent of alcohol was strong on him. Whether or not it was from the night before or if he had started early that morning, she couldn't tell. "Hey leech", he said sarcastically, "shouldn't you be in your coffin for the day? Or perhaps you'd like to go outside for a morning tan". His grin sent pure disgust over her skin.

A sudden burst of rage began to run through her veins. This was the last person she wanted to see or even deal with. "Just leave me alone asshole. Don't you have some other woman to harass until she punches you in the dick?", she snapped. He pushed past her, strutting around the room like a sick peacock. "So I heard what happened downstairs. Super sad, but probably for the best. I mean considering the possibility of death on a regular basis, you two would have killed each other in the end anyway". Eden shut the door behind her, closing them in the room together. Eden started thinking about all the different ways she could take him out within moments. How she could drain him without making a sound, and not have to put up with him constantly poking at her ever again.

She decided to try to be right to the point. "What do you want, Mark? I'm leaving as soon as it's dark and you'll never see me again", she said, "there's no point in this harassment anymore". Mark disagreed, "you think it's as simple as walking away? No no, little bitch. You have them fooled, but not me. Every vamp that has ever crossed our land has ended up six feet under, and you'll be no different. I promise you that". He made his way back to the bedroom door, stepped back into the hallway. "Even if I have to make sure of it myself", he said, grabbing the doorknob, "so enjoy your last day alive, cause as soon as you leave here, you're dead", and slammed the door behind him.

Chapter Twenty Three

As the moon rose over the treetops Eden knew she had to leave. She put her hair up, grabbed her bag. If she could get away while James was gone it would be best. Although she hadn't seen or heard him anywhere in the house since he stormed off. Eden didn't blame him for being upset with her, but it wasn't easy for her either. Ever since they had come together she had finally felt like she totally and completely had someone. Her heart was in his hands as much as his was in hers. She couldn't help but see his face in

her thoughts as she pulled her things together. The sooner she left him to his own life the better off he would be. The better off she would be too.

Eden threw her duffle bag over her shoulder and opened the bedroom door. A quick glance down the hallway confirmed she was alone, not even a faint noise downstairs. The creak of each stair would have given her away to anyone if they had been there. Eden almost wished James was back, if anything just to yell at her for being so selfish. The living room looked like a bull had run through it. The couch was tipped over, same with the coffee table. The lamp that once sat on a side table was now shattered on the hardwood floor. '*He was really upset*', she thought. Before she made her way through the front door she looked out the window to see if there was anyone else that could be lurking in the dark. But nothing. Not a single person. Compared to the last few nights the compound seemed to have turned into a ghost town in a day. '*Guess this is my one chance to run*', she thought. And she did. Eden threw open the front door and started to sprint to the property's edge. Eden didn't bother trying to find the road out. She knew it would be too easy to track her that way. And with Mark's promise of finding her in the back of her mind, she couldn't help but feel scared. She pushed herself through the line of bushes along the wood's edge, and she was off. Feeling like she really was running for her life. Eden may be dead, but she didn't want to die again.

The woods seemed to have melted into itself with all the snow deciding it was done for the year. The ground felt like it would swallow her feet whole. And since she didn't have shoes, it felt like a real possibility. Although everything seemed to be calm, Eden was on high alert. Every noise she heard made her stop in her tracks, wondering if Mark was keeping to his promise. Eden's throat had started to burn, her thirst rising with each step she took away from the property. The further away she got from the lycan energy, the more aggressive her vampire blood seemed to race through her veins. She needed blood, and she needed a lot of it.

Eden sat next to a bush and waited. She could hear animals roaming around through the trees, big and small. She knew if she could find some big game, she could tame her thirst for the first time in weeks. As she waited, Eden finally heard something big coming in her direction. It sounded like a large buck strutting through the trees. Her mouth literally started to water at the thought of completely taking down a strong animal, ripping it open and draining it dry. The very thought of a good hunt made her fangs drop. She braced herself, knew she would have to pounce at just the right time. Adrenaline shot through her entire body. Just when she thought it was a good time to attack, a familiar odor overtook the air around

her. The scent of fresh dirt and new growth were suddenly drowned out by the overwhelming scent of rotting onions. Eden froze, knowing exactly what she was about to deal with.

Within seconds he was on her, and there was nothing she could do to stop him. Marks paws had her pinned in the mud, and without feeding completely for what felt like a lifetime, she was too weak to fight him off. Eden struggled under his weight to no avail, his claws starting to dig into her forearms. His wolf form was even stronger than she realized. His fur was matted and stunk. Drool slipped from his mouth as he growled down at her, his breath hot and stinking on her skin. He licked the small lines of blood that had started to run from the punctures in her arms, taking delight in the fear now dancing in her eyes. He bared all of his teeth, getting ready to rip her wide open. His glowing yellow eyes told her everything she needed to know. He was going to kill her, and it would not be quick. Eden closed her eyes, grimly accepting her fate.

Chapter Twenty Four

Just as she thought she was done for, something big knocked into Mark. Something huge. And strong. Eden opened her eyes just in time to see James slam Mark into the trunk of a large tree, making him yelp out in pain. “I told you to fuck’n let her leave! God dammit Mark! She hasn’t done a fucking thing to you accept be a vampire!”, yelled James. Mark crawled behind the now bloodied tree, deep into some half dead bushes, out of sight. His whimpers quieted as he did. James pulled Eden into his arms, pulling her close. “I’m so sorry Eden. I shouldn’t have left you alone like that”, he said, “It’ll never happen again, I swear to Odin above it’ll never happen again”.

Mark crawled back out into view, laughing at them both. “You really think everything he told her and you is true? You’re as delusional as your father. She’s not fuck’n lycan! She’s a manipulative fucking vampire! She is nothing to you! Or any of us! We kill their kind! No acceptations!”, he screamed, spitting blood. James pulled away from Eden, “back away from me, don’t try to help. Hide yourself as best you can. Do you understand me?”. Eden didn’t even think about what he had said, just nodded. She knew she could trust him, almost like instinct. She got to her feet, started backing away from him. James turned toward Mark, his eyes going yellow as the rage boiled inside him. “Eden is mine”, he said, “she is my mate. You are not to lay a hand on her, I don’t give a shit what your reasoning is to try. She and I have the pull, we’re linked. Lycans are the only ones who experience it, therefore she’s fuck’n lycan”. “She ain’t shit to me”, Mark snapped, holding his ribs where he hit the tree, “vampires are our natural enemies, I could give a fuck about how you feel about her. You can’t change what she is, and neither can you”.

“My father found the way”, James growled, “she can go back if she wishes”. That statement made Eden tense up. Could she really go back to being human? Did he have a way? If it was possible, she had to know right then. “How?”, she asked him, almost in a begging tone. James kept his eyes on Mark, not trusting he wouldn’t attack. “My father told me he found an instance where we could possibly drain the vampirism from your veins. It hasn’t been attempted for centuries, but it could bring you back to a mortal state. You could have the choice you didn’t have all those years ago”, James explained. “Or you could bleed out on the altar like every other vampire before you”, Mark added coldly.

James had had enough of Mark. He ran and slammed himself into Mark, cracking some ribs as his body once again landed against the tree. Mark yelled out in pain, but laughed at James as he growled at him. “Keep your fucking mouth shut, or I’ll rip your damn vocal cords out”, threatened James as he closed his fist tighter and tighter around his neck. He could feel his throat closing, but stopped, just barely letting him breath. Mark laughed again, blood slipping from his lips as he did. His muscles welded down under James’ weight. Eden locked eyes with Mark, feeling every bit of fear that he wanted her to. His eyes continued to keep her cemented in place until he opened his mouth. “You’ll never have a life with her. She’s going to die, whether you love her or not”, Mark grumbled.

James threw Mark into the dirt. He was done with Mark’s insults and promises of death. He got on top of him and started to choke him. There were no doubts in Eden’s mind that he was about to die, that James was about to kill him. “I’m sorry brother”, he said. Eden stepped forward as he started to gasp for air and claw at James face, wanting to watch the life leave his eyes. She looked down at him as she knelt next to them. The blood on his head had started to clot. The scent was driving her senses crazy. She wanted to feed, needed to take a life. She gently snatched one of his wrists from scratching James’s face, licked the blood from his skin. She felt her heart start to race again, only this time it didn’t feel like she was being ripped open. It was pure adrenaline mainlined into her soul. “What are you doing?”, James asked her. “Giving him exactly what he deserves”, she said.

As she bit down on Mark’s wrist Eden felt herself come alive. With each drop that entered her mouth she felt herself get stronger, more vicious. She bit down again, even harder than before, breaking more skin. Mark couldn’t help but yell out under James’s grip. Within seconds Eden threw James off of Mark and had pinned him down herself. His blood dripped from her mouth onto his face. Watching him struggling under her strength gave her such a rush of power. She dug her nails into his wrists, blood starting to rush out into the mud. “You’re done making promises you can’t keep”, she said, and dug her fangs into his neck, shredding him open. She pulled back long enough to look back into his eyes, now

practically lifeless. She put her lips to his ear and whispered, “so much for promises”, and then watched as his life disappeared.

Eden stood up, turned to James who was staring at her. She couldn’t make out what emotions were dancing on his face. Surprise? Guilt? Relief even? Maybe a mixture of all of the above. But as she stepped toward him one emotion was not there: fear. He still took her into his arms, still pulled her close. Still seemed to love her. “I’m sorry James. I know you loved him like a brother”, she said. “I did”, he said, “but that doesn’t mean I’d let him kill the woman I love just because of some fucked up tradition”. He pressed her forehead to his, “I love you, I want you forever”, and kissed her. She kissed him back, feverishly slipping her tongue along his. She pulled away long enough to whisper, “take me, I’m yours”.

James swiftly pushed her against the trunk of a tree. Kissed her again, down her neck. He paused when his lips traced to her shoulder. Looked into her eyes one last time before asking, “do you accept my mark?”. Eden pressed her lips to his ear, “yes my love”. Just as quickly as she said the words, James’s teeth were in her shoulder. His venom burned, searing his mark into her skin. It felt painful and blissful all rolled into one. James pulled her back into his kiss as she kept burning. It felt like an eternity was falling away with each passing second. The sting of loneliness melting away as his lips kissed her skin. They were connected, forevermore. When the burning finally subsided, James looked into Eden’s eyes, his own glowing that familiar yellow she had come to know. He smiled a crooked smile at her, leaning down to her ear, lightly kissing it. His next words made her tremble to her core: “You are mine”.

